

**David Madore**

January 30 · Edited ·



CP16 #0689

**Clark County farms shrinking:**

The Tri-Mountain Golf Course meeting room was filled this evening with our farming neighbors to discuss state and local issues affecting their future.

Clark Cowlitz Farm Bureau president Bill Zimmerman of Bi-Zi Farms invited our State Department of Agriculture Director Bud Hover to address farming issues for the state and invited me for the county. Mr. Hover did a fine job, yet acknowledged that some of the critical problems have no solution on the horizon.

<http://bizifarms.com/history/bi-zi-farms-1970-present/>  
[http://agr.wa.gov/About/Leadership\\_bios.aspx](http://agr.wa.gov/About/Leadership_bios.aspx)

Most farmers in our state are or will soon be senior citizens. And most have no successor willing to continue their full time farming operations. The common problem is their inability to earn sufficient income to support their families.

All but a few farm land owners hold a full time job working in a different trade off-site. Land lies fallow (un-farmed) if the parcel size is larger than they can manage on a part time basis (typically less than 5 acres). Our county requires 20 acre minimums. Smaller parcel sizes would allow more owners to make more productive use of their land.

Water Rights are being progressively transferred from farms to Public Utilities such as Clark Public Utilities. It is nearly impossible to drill a well and obtain the water rights needed to sustain a farm. Water in most aquifers is already over allocated in most areas if it is to be used for the intense needs of agriculture.

Our Department of Ecology has stripped landowners of the ability to farm or disturb the soil, vegetation, or trees within 200 to 300 feet on each side of any stream which are plentiful throughout our area.

A shortage of affordable labor is the biggest problem. Washington has the highest minimum wage in the nation and liberal politicians appear intent on pushing it higher. The higher farming costs result in a continual loss of Washington farms to more competitive states with lower labor costs.

Only a few full time farms are left in Clark County. The owner of one of the largest, the Lagler farm, (nearly 400 acres) has submitted an application to convert his land from agriculture to light industrial property.<http://www.clark.wa.gov/planning/landbank/>

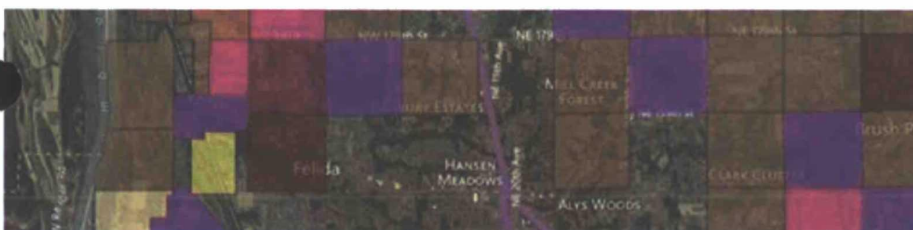
Governor Inslee has nevertheless announced his agenda to add 100,000 acres of new farm land in our state. Since we are not making any new land, I am left wondering how that is possible in Clark County. Taking residential property away from citizens or cutting and clearing timberland for new farms would not be feasible without first obtaining new virtually impossible to obtain water rights. It seems to be wishful thinking uninformed by reality.

For a rough map of the farming areas in our state, see the following map:

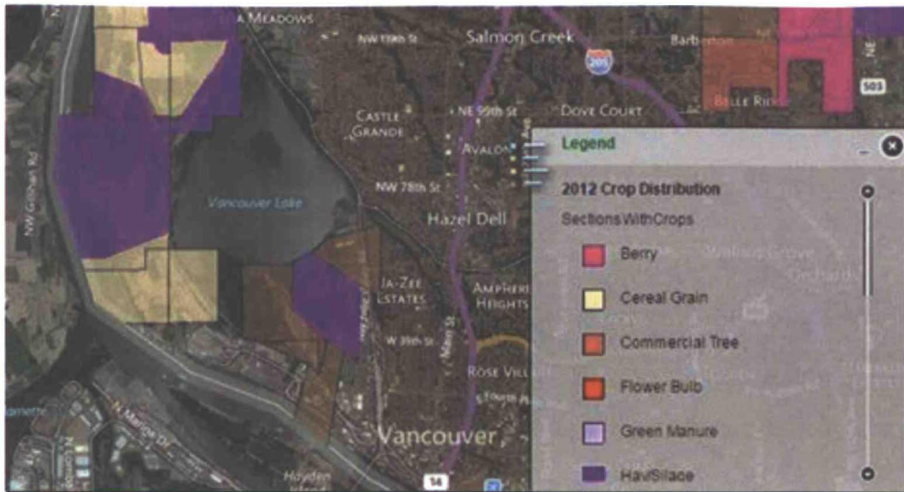
<https://fortress.wa.gov/agr/gis/nras/nrascrops2012/>

Here is a list of the small farms in Clark County:

[http://smallfarms.wsu.edu/farms/map\\_result.asp...](http://smallfarms.wsu.edu/farms/map_result.asp...)







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Eric Cordova, Scott Atkinson, Vicki Caldwell Kraft and 20 others like this.

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**Paul Bardzik** Sounds like end game for the farmers in Clark County. These the same folks who built Clark County, along with the homesteaders & loggers & dairymen. We are losing our heritage and roots to our community.

Like · Reply · 4 · January 30 at 2:29am



**John Ley** Wonderful discussion of this issue. Thank you, David Madore! I had no idea it was "almost impossible" to obtain rights to drill wells for farmers. We must do better, to allow smaller farms to flourish.

Like · Reply · 3 · January 30 at 5:47am



**Jonathan Johnson** There's a simple solution! Just require landowners to "farm" whether or not they have the resources or will to do so. It worked for the Soviet Union, didn't it?

Like · Reply · January 30 at 7:54am



**Peter Van Nortwick** Our biggest challenge is our farmers can't retire, because as soon as they quit farming, I have to impose back taxes, high interest and usually a 20% penalty all due in 30 days. I have joined with Assessor Cook, Yakima County, in the past to ask the legislator to eliminate the penalty and lower the interest rate. All the high interest rate and penalty accomplish is pushing farm land into development. The water rights issue is significant, because most citizens don't understand all the rights that go with the land and which have been stripped. A water right is typically much more valuable than the actual value of the land in farming communities.

Like · Reply · 2 · January 30 at 9:14am



**Thomas Higdon** David Madore—it has long been understood that Liberal politicians shrink from reality the way cockroaches in slums scurry under appliances when someone turns on the lights. "Uninformed by reality" is a necessity for those whose views are, by nature, unrealistic.

Like · Reply · January 30 at 9:38am

1 Reply



**Anna Miller** David Madore. After working a full day at the County, you wrapped up your day by attending this event. A Councilors day is often long, but because you love serving our citizens, the burden is light. Every time I read your Posts, it's like going to school. I learned a great deal from this one also. Thank you.

Like · Reply · 4 · January 30 at 12:21pm



**Jan Roxburgh** The farms in Clark county need to be protected somehow so that they keep operating successfully... Much of the USA vegetable produce comes from CA right now, where they are fracking like crazy and some aquifers used for agriculture have been contaminated by fracking fluids. Not good! These days I like to buy vegetables from Clark county when there is a choice between this and CA. WA doesn't have the severe water shortages that CA is plagued with. It could be that in the future, farming will become vitally important to the WA region and elsewhere in

the country..

Like · Reply · January 30 at 1:10pm

2 Replies



**Josef Pfister** I always suspected that our farm lands are dwindling and we have some of the best farm land in the country. Our 8 acre farm on 88th street is now light industrial, it had sandy loam 3 feet deep then clay below that. We knew where the area was heading so, there goes some great farm land. If we pave it all over how shall we do? Great job David. I am very impressed with your initiatives.

Like · Reply · 2 · January 30 at 2:10pm



**Shirley Rudberg Graybill Mozena** Sad to see the farms disappear.

Like · Reply · January 30 at 4:18pm



**Sheryl Wagner** Retiring farmers should use landlink and other programs to transition their land to new farmers. I am in the market for this type of situation and there are no land listings in clark county

Like · Reply · 2 · January 30 at 5:54pm



**Vicki Caldwell Kraft** Thank you for standing for the needs of farmers. They are an important part of our community and economy. Government has slowly been eroding their ability to do business and compete. Appreciate all your efforts to make a difference, and to be an advocate for the farming community!

Like · Reply · 1 · January 31 at 1:07am



**Thomas Higdon Barker**,What did you do with the money your mother gave you for comedy school?

Like · Reply · February 10 at 8:21pm



**Scott Atkinson** The 9 acre farm I grew up on in Newberg used to provide beef for the family and some of our friends. Now it is a housing development with a church on it...Just have to love the developer that put in a project behind our farm with a sewer assessment for a system we could not hook up to. That was what caused my folks to sell it...yes...to the developer on his own contract.

Like · Reply · February 10 at 9:59pm