

Planning Commission and Council Members

Thank you for the opportunity to speak

*Diane Dempster  
3800 NE 55th ST  
Vancouver WA 98661  
dianedempster36@gmail.com*

My name is Diane Dempster. For 35 years I bought and sold produce from growers of all sizes, throughout Washington, and acted as the marketing agent for many. I have seen firsthand how loss of farmland can deplete a region's food supply. I moved here 7 years ago and was shocked by the lack of infrastructure in the agricultural community. Producers need cooling facilities, processors and support businesses to be successful.

I am involved in getting healthy food to our most vulnerable populations who are least likely to have fresh produce available.

Most of the produce consumed today travels from CA, AZ and Mexico to get to our tables. Climate change and lack of water causes California growers to move to other States and Countries, increasing the distance traveled. Produce is harvested early to survive the long journey and the 2 to 3 weeks it takes gets to our tables. Consolidation of the grocery industry means less choices for consumers and poorer quality food.

The alternative is to support local agriculture. It is not too late, but we can't lose any more ag land. Our local farms are very productive. One farmer I talked to produces over 80,000 lbs of fruits and vegetables on 7 acres. There are many other successful farms in the County and near Ridgefield, but uncertainty and urban encroachment make farming difficult. Producers are resilient, but they need land in contiguous parcels and protection from conversion to development. Land near urban areas can be farmed successfully when right to farm laws are enforced and the community supports its producers. Schools, childcare centers, grocery stores, restaurants, processors and you and I are all customers. Without agricultural land, we don't have farmers or fresh food.

Constant development pressure increases the cost of land so that those who want to farm cannot afford it. The Hinton development group's agreement to buy the Jones land for Single Family Residence development if it is included in

Ridgefield's UGA is a prime example. The landowners sell to the developers, and the cost of land goes up.

Farmers produce a wonderful array of food and flowers, but they also employ people, buy goods and services and pay taxes. This helps to keep many businesses afloat thereby enhancing the local economy.

All evidence in the record shows that the County has been feverishly converting agricultural lands for non-agricultural purposes for the past 35 years. Many promise to protect and conserve farmland until they vote on a Comprehensive Plan update, agreeing to allow its conversion.

We cannot afford to lose any more Ag land for our food security our health and our community.

Thank you