

Bethel and Liberty

Public Workshop Summary

Role and Importance of Agriculture

(number reflects # of priority stickers that item received from participants)

- Is important to tourism and economic development (7)
- Adds to the quality of life (5)
- Price of energy will limit distance food can come in the future (5)
- Local produce is fresher and safer (4)
- Agriculture adds to open space (3)
- It is important so people know where food comes from (1)
- Provides rural character (1)
- Provides food security (1)
- Provides work ethic towards land (1)
- Supports local businesses (1)
- Is a foundation for the county
- Provides balance between ag and other economic development activities
- Has a historic role
- Attracts visitors
- Farmers markets bring people in
- Gives satisfaction of knowing farms are there and seeing animals
- Is a major economic driver with high multipliers

Issues and Concerns Related to Farming

- Taxes too high (5)
- Farm policy needs to be changed to support farmer and not farm-industrial complex. Needs a more holistic approach (4)
- Cuts in funding (4)
- There is lack of action plan that covers the whole food system (4)
- Local IDA, other economic partnerships need more involvement in ag (3)
- Needs more year-round availability of produce (3)
- People are ignorant and uninformed about agriculture (2)
- Profitability of farmers is low (2)
- Not enough information or education of people/children to connect farms and schools (2)
- No local processing facility (food must go out of the area) (2)
- People are not connected to the ag industry (1)
- We have lots of local retail ag opportunities but it could be more supported (1)
- We are in a strategic location (positive issue) (1)
- Much food is imported and not safe

- There are high expenses of starting a new farm
- Towns don't realize contribution of agriculture to town, especially related to cost of services
- People can't afford to buy local
- Eastern part of county is where decisions are made but they do not understand the western part of town where ag is
- Not enough information for public to know where the farms are
- Lack of appreciation and ag is taken for granted
- Smaller farms are the trend (but this was seen as positive too)
- Development pressure
- Bad economy may mean some farms will stay farming (seen as a positive)
- Increase educational opportunities
- There is a disconnect and lack of understanding of ag in county
- Younger generation is moving away
- Need to change public's expectation about what can be available seasonally
- Farmers should spend winter doing value added work
- Farmers are isolated and need an organization to bring them together
- There is opportunity for aquaculture
- Need to get new people into farming with more "how to" education
- Needs marketing and distribution help – that is a full time job and farmers can't do it all
- Where does money come from to do all these initiatives
- Apathy among farmers
- Farmers need more business savvy approach
- Industry needs new blood
- There is a disconnect between farmer and buyers
- Liberty farmer abusing the right to farm law
- Farmers are on the defensive (people telling them what to do)
- Public has low level of knowledge of local ag and doesn't understand economic impact
- Existing farmers need to be sustained or our food source can be compromised.

Vision

In the future, agriculture and the towns of Bethel and Liberty will:

- Have more farms
- Be the pride of the County
- Have more protected farmland
- Be viable and part of who we are
- Be have a diversified agricultural base
- Have profitable farms
- Process foods locally
- Have improved distribution for local foods
- Have Ag businesses tied to Bed and Breakfasts/overnight stays
- Have more positive media coverage

- Be outside the villages with more dense development directed to the villages
- Be the core pillar of local economy
- More fully capitalize on tourism and have more connection between ag and tourism
- Have zoning and local policies that facilitate ag businesses
- Have more industries are based on local ag
- Have farmers with a greater knowledge of land preservation opportunities
- Be sufficient facilities to educate everyone and this is an important factor in the community. Education about food and agriculture should be entrenched in school and connected to local farmers
- Have school choice will be built around ag community such as gardens tied to schools and applied learning
- Encourage individuals to have vegetable gardens
- Work to attract business people that do sustainable agricultural supports such as community kitchens
- Become part of everyone's ultimate everyday existence
- Think strategically about the politics and policy making and mesh economy and policy making.