

Agricultural Viability Interviews (10/2 Meeting, Survey Results)

Objective: Understand agricultural and market conditions in Kittitas County and regionally to provide context for the agricultural viability section.

Interview Questions

What type of agricultural operations do you run?
Hay for export market and domestic market
Hay for export market and domestic market
Hay for export market and domestic market, Row crops for seed
Cattle ranching
Livestock Production (food and fiber) for direct to consumer market
Dryland
Hay for Domestic Market and Livestock Products (cattle, sheep, swine, poultry, goats) for Direct to Consumer Sales
Hay for International Market
Hay for international market and hay for domestic market
Hay for international market and hay for domestic market
Hay for international market and hay for domestic market, Row Crops
Hay for international market and hay for domestic market
Growing crops for sale domestic and export. Hay, beans, corn, sudan grass
From your perspective, what do you see in terms of trends for agricultural viability in Kittitas County, or the region (e.g., market trends, practices, regulations or programs)?
Majority of hay crops are exported overseas (Pacific Rim, Middle East, China), resulting in reliance on longshoreman’s union, exchange rate, trade policies.
There is a constant evolution in practices, for example precision farming practices like cell phone activated pump systems, drone technology, real time infrared photos, etc.
Labor costs and availability result in a trend toward more mechanization, especially with tree fruit.
Conversion of traditional crops to tree crops is putting pressure on traditional producers in some areas (particularly south of Fourth Parallel Rd) by driving up land prices.
The trend towards reduced tillage helps economically because it reduces trips across the field.
Seeing farms that don’t have to be farms. Purchased as nice place to live, not as a place that needs to be an economically viable farm. May still look like farms, but really “fake farms”. Especially prevalent in northern Kittitas county. Land prices are high. Ownership pattern changing.
Reliability of water is threatened by weather conditions and other things.
Strong market for small production but huge amount of work is required.
Hard for young farmers to break into agriculture due to high land prices high.
Trend towards bigger and faster equipment which have higher and higher costs.
PNW regional market for hay (feed stores or direct to consumer)

Do to growth and economic strength of Washington it seems to me that agricultural, be it small market direct or export, would continue to be strong. The limiting factors would be development trends and the regulatory zeal of the states political industry.

new rotation crops such as beans, sunflowers, canola, less tillage, continuing change to sprinkler irrigation

We can be viable if we are not over regulated. We have a product that has worldwide demand as long as we can keep our costs at a reasonable level.

We see local farmers trying to minimize labor and overall farm cost by using overhead sprinkler systems and many are using GPS guidance when doing field work as well as irrigation application.

It will continue to be a viable industry

Pressure from solar farms and housing make it harder all the time for agriculture in this county

It's getting more difficult in a place like Kittitas county with pressure being put on what used to be a niche market for Timothy hay. Larger producers can create an over supply in a short amount of time. A shorter growing season limits our options for certain crops that might otherwise be attractive. But as long as we have good dirt, ample water supply and a willingness to work, we should be able to get by.

Do you see the international market affecting agricultural viability? If so, how?

International export of hay drives the economy of the valley so trade policy, shipping (longshoreman), and exchange rate (strength of the dollar) all impact agricultural viability.

with globalization becoming more prominent every day, the international market will always be a concern. We must compete on quality and diversity if we are to stay competitive

Seems there will always be strong demand as populations grow world wide

Yes, currently the international market offers the best return

The international market is what makes our valley viable. Without it ag in this valley cannot survive.

The exporting of Kittitas valley hay has been a big driving force for area farmers expanding their operations and trying new varieties of hay. The long shoreman strike was very damaging, affecting the actual exporting of our farm products for years after the strike ended.

Yes. More demand for product.

Port slow downs and strikes for sure

Regarding the local agriculture market or practices, what do you see are some strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT)?

Strengths

Export options to international markets

Smart, talented producers trying new approaches

Land owned mostly by family farms

Intergenerational producers with understanding of the land and resources of the County

Excellent climate for quality timothy hay production

Proximity to ports and existing transportation infrastructure (interstates, etc.)

Local presence of buyers and processors for hay market

Proximity to urban markets for direct sell of products

County Right to Farm ordinance in place

Available public land leases for livestock producers
We sell domestic hay and grass fed bovine on a small scale. I feel that with the wealth of the west side and the continued search for local grown and farm raised products should continue to be strong. I think the most difficult limiting factor to be government intrusion on all levels. USDA rules have severely limited a market that I once had. Paper work and restrictions due to the competing aggressiveness between state regulators and their basic ignorance of production principles will continue to be a drag on all business regardless of sector.
special demand for valley hay to the export market
We have several long time hay brokers in the valley to work with and they have well established customers to export to.
A long history of quality forage production.
Climate, location
Long standing international market for quality hay products
good dirt, moderate climate, central hub for hay market, infrastructure
Weaknesses
Electricity expense and availability
Lack of water storage, pro-rateable water for large portion of producers
Volatility of access to ports (longshoreman union)
Access to meat processors (must go to Rochester or Chewelah) for retail meat sales
Few viable rotation crops
Not enough diversity of crops due to short growing season
Access by west side residents
Public lands grazing leases
We need an ability to use the land to the fullest. An example is solar farms placement and low density zoning (3 acre minimum to 20 acre). The ability to have a diverse income stream equates to economic strength and health of the producer. Every roadblock and burden placed in front of a producer is a step toward suburbanization of Kittitas County. . toward and
uncertainty in the market place
The removal of ag lands for housing, solar farms and other industrial uses.
Our local ag land has been invaded by new residents that don't understand farming making it difficult during harvest and general farming practices.
Climate, no room for growth
Shorter growing season than some areas and high land power and water prices
reliance on a union to get our containers onto ships. Small producers have a hard competing with larger operations. Young people have no interest in farming
Opportunities
Yakima Basin Integrated Plan – collaborative effort with partners addressing all (ag, fish, municipal water)
First county east of King County
County Ag advisory commission
New technologies such as precision agriculture
New crops for dryland farms

Grazing opportunities on public lands for habitat improvement
Ag tourism to supplement production agriculture
Most producers use large 3 twine bales. Most people who want domestic want small manageable bales. Small market direct have better control over the final product and can concentrate on quality where larger producers have to spread their time.
developing new profitable rotation crops
Increased efficiency
We have some great local vendors offering superior service and great products so close to home. This helps especially during harvest as well as throughout the year.
Expanding international markets
Technology, Irrigation Upgrades
Threats
Land conversion and rising land prices
Excessive regulations related to direct sell of ag products
High wages and housing costs
People moving in from I-5 Corridor
Re-introduction of wildlife species (wolves, grizzly bears)
Depredation of crops and livestock by elk, cougars, wolves, etc.
Endangered Species Act and Clean Water Act
Urban sprawl
Centralization of land regulations so that regulations don't fit specific local conditions
See "weaknesses" above
continuing conversion of ag land to housing
We live in a state where the majority of voters have no idea what it takes to have a viable farming operation.
Growing population and government regulations are our biggest threat/challenge
Regulations
Solar farms and housing
Do agricultural producers have the flexibility to respond to fluctuating market conditions that is needed? Are there opportunities to increase flexibility?
Market trends are really hard to predict and are not the only fluctuating conditions to which producers are responding
It is costly to change crops because of equipment and infrastructure changes needed
What starts out looking like a bad year in terms of prices or other conditions, can really turn out to be a good year and vice versa
For many, limited alternative crop options if markets or other conditions change for traditional crops
It seems market trends are much faster and shorter lived than growing seasons. I have always felt that there is a lag and that the trend may be over by the time the producer is up and running 2 years later. Some way to anticipate the coming trends is the trick.
maybe not with our short growing season
The flexibility is here the opportunities are not.

There is not much flexibility for the ag producer pertaining to the market. We are limited on crop rotation and equipment to harvest.

Sometimes

I'm not sure

Are there programs at the regional level that you would like to see that would support a more resilient local agriculture market (i.e. infrastructure and services, support for best practices, education or training, a welcoming business environment)?

Yakima Basin Integrated Plan – collaborative effort to improve water availability for fish and farms

Cut government regulations at all levels

More flexibility in regulations

The mix of housing developments and farming is toxic. The practices of ag and the wants of the new residents are often in conflict (irrigation water, clogging of roads with commuters, spraying etc.) I have always thought TDR's are the way to go. Make the developer pay the farmer not to convert farmland. This protects the land and pushes the development into areas that are not prime leaving ag the uninhibited ability to keep farming.

A welcome business environment and help with infrastructure.

We would like to see less government regulations. Farmers find it harder and harder to farm and maintain their land especially around and along water ways.

Increasing limits on programs that help farmers update irrigation efficiency to reflect current cost of projects

At a farm level, what would help agricultural producers remain viable (i.e. reducing input costs, maintain/enhance land productivity, increased incentives)?

Allow farmers to maintain creeks and water ways

Improve farm to market roads

Reduction of or protection/exemption from regulations that hamper operations and/or add expensive and time-consuming compliance.

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Help with irrigation system updates would increase production and decrease labor costs.

Consistent farm labor and less regulations from government agencies

Becoming more efficient

Conservation district efforts to help enhance ag activities in our area are critical. Funding is key to help producers remain competitive.

Any other related thoughts you would like to share?

As much as farmers hate government (for the most part) our government needs to take an active role in making sure our products can make it to market. Good roads, ports stay open at all times, taxes remain as low as possible to keeps things running.