

# Growing a Sustainable Portland Metropolitan Foodshed

Shelia Martin (Research & Education Grant Program)

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**Title:** Growing a Sustainable Portland Metropolitan Foodshed

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The poster photos feature production at Thompson Farms, located in Damascus. -- Photos by Ron Daines

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**Situation:**

Farms located in or near metropolitan areas face many challenges that have resulted in rapid conversion to other uses.

Despite Oregon's progressive land-use laws designed to protect farmland, the state and metropolitan Portland have not been immune.

In 2006, a Green Ribbon Committee study in Clackamas County found that:

- The long-term viability of county farms is under economic and regulatory threat from urban development
- A comprehensive program is needed to address challenges and promote opportunities for urban-influenced agriculture

Many individual programs and initiatives are in place, but no regional assessment or strategy exists for a sustainable food economy in the Portland metropolitan region.



**Objectives:**

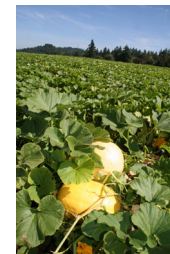
- Define the Portland Metropolitan Foodshed
- Identify related agricultural and economic trends and develop a needs assessment based on input from producers and other stakeholders
- Assemble a regional toolkit of strategies to support evolution of a sustainable Portland Metropolitan Foodshed
- Work with the City of Damascus to test the toolkit at a local level
- Develop a research and education program that supports these goals and small- and medium-size farmers in the region

**Materials and Methods:**

To define the Foodshed, the project team conducted an extensive literature review covering approaches to food system analysis, case studies of regional food systems, issues facing farmers in urban areas and other studies of the foodshed.

To identify barriers, challenges and opportunities, 81 farmers and aspiring farmers were surveyed and five farmers interviewed in person. In addition, case studies of three Portland metropolitan farms were conducted.

With the information collected from the literature review and surveys, draft tool kits were developed for producers and for policymakers and planners. The draft toolkit was then evaluated by nearly 40 producers as well as other stakeholders.



**Results:**

This wide-ranging study provided an equally wide range of information on opportunities for overcoming gaps, barriers and challenges in the Portland metropolitan food economy as well as potential tools and strategies to strengthen it.

Here are a few of the selected opportunities and strategies identified:

Value-Added Processing

Stimulate a regional infrastructure of small-scale food-processing facilities for small- and medium-size growers to increase food value produced in the region and export potential.

Distribution

Develop a distribution cooperative that helps growers access markets more systematically and efficiently, focusing on improving energy and time efficiency of producer distribution processes; provide information on product supply and demand; share pick-up and drop-off sites.

Food System Labor

Develop tools to provide a more stable, educated and trained workforce by providing training packages for existing workers, expanding the guest worker program and supporting safe and sanitary housing on farms and in agricultural communities.

Transportation

Design a cooperative transportation system that would reduce producer cost as well as reduce greenhouse gas production.

Energy

Encourage Cooperative Extension and Soil Conservation Districts to promote on-farm conservation and renewable resource production strategies.

Marketing

Develop a low-cost marketing education and peer-to-peer service for growers to build capacities in websites, advertising, marketing and farm membership systems.

Two area farms participated in a case study to review the tools from the toolkit in relation to their farm operations (Thompson Farms, which produces pesticide-free fruits and vegetables, and Siri & Son Farms, which produces organic vegetables). Key findings from the case studies include:

- Land use tools administered by land use regulatory agencies need to be revised or updated to reflect integrated land use patterns
- Tools to conserve agricultural land may be feasible, but the costs and benefits to the public, landowners and jurisdiction must be clear
- Tools that require high expenditures by producers will not likely be introduced on a farm unless there is affordable financing or a demonstration project.

**Impacts of Results/Outcomes:**

The primary output of this project is a set of 23 tools that producers and policy makers can use to overcome the barriers and take advantage of opportunities for creating a more sustainable Portland metropolitan Foodshed.

Tools determined to have the broadest applicability for regional and statewide capacity-building are those that:

- Increase access to healthy food
- Improve farm worker housing options
- Support farmers markets
- Encourage food cluster development
- Increase agency and institutional food procurement
- Increase exports
- Increase import substitution
- Enhance market development & regional food distribution



The tools can be found at <http://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/pdx-foodshed>