

Dialogues with Agriculture:
**A Review of Processes Engaging Farm Groups in Protecting
the Environment by Protecting Farmland**

**A Report Prepared for the Washington Farming and the Environment Project
by the American Farmland Trust.**

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Executive Summary

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Washington Agriculture faces significant challenges as it prepares to face growing pressure over environmental issues like Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act compliance. The apparent absence of public funding to underwrite incentive programs increases concern that addressing these issues may involve regulatory measures. The stakes are high and it is critical for both agriculture and for the community that agriculture be effectively involved in public processes dealing with these matters.

American Farmland Trust was asked to do a national and local review of processes and programs that sought to engage broad segments of the agriculture community in dialogues over environmental issues with particular regard to those situations involving farmland protection. We did not find examples of such dialogues that were closely similar to the effort of the Farming and the Environment Project itself, but we did develop numerous examples of models that suggest useful principles that may help guide the work of this Project. These include:

Full National Case Studies:

- ✓ New York City Watershed Project
- ✓ Proposed Little Darby National Wildlife Refuge, Ohio
- ✓ New Jersey Pinelands
- ✓ California Coastal Conservancy
- ✓ Florida Green Swamp Land Authority

Shorter National Summaries:

- ✓ Maryland's Rural Legacy Program
- ✓ Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge, Connecticut River area
- ✓ Wisconsin Farming And Conservation Together
- ✓ Oregon CREP Program
- ✓ California Safe Harbor Project

Recent Washington Case Studies:

- ✓ Ag, Fish, Water Process
- ✓ Washington CREP Program
- ✓ Washington Dairy Nutrient Management Act and Task Force

These 13 case studies are supplemented by summaries of an additional 21 potentially instructive programs and policies reviewed by a public policy group with Class XX of the Washington Ag-Forestry Program. This group produced its report entitled "A Proposal for an Agriculture Environmental Coalition, which proposed creation of a formal group to discuss and formulate

policy on ag-environmental issues. The full report of this group is attached to our Report at Appendix 4 and AFT's review is attached at Appendix 3.

Our review of these materials highlights the importance of seeking a fuller understanding about how best to initiate, manage, and participate in such dialogues. The stakes are high and the matters involved are complex. Those managing or involved in such processes need a clearer view of how to make them work. Our review also brought to light a good many insights into how such processes work. Many individually critical issues affect the success or failure of specific dialogues with agriculture over environmental matters, but there seem to be 6 major factors that are generally at play. Those are:

- ✓ The clarity and specificity of the purpose participants understand for the process and their participation in it

The extent to which the group had clear, specific, and well-understood purposes and the degree to which participants appreciated their reasons for participating had a good deal to do with the success of the process. Groups that took on larger and more complex issues found it more difficult to focus discussion and come to concrete results.

- ✓ The strength of the motivation to participate felt by private groups, citizens, and government representatives participating in the process

There are a host of incidents of meaningful participation in a dialogue for which strong motivation is critical. If that motivation is absent, the group cannot function effectively nor come to meaningful outcomes.

- ✓ The promise of funding for incentives to implement the new laws, policies, and agreements that might be the product of the discussions without the need to resort to regulation.

Participation by a regulated (or potentially regulated) community in a meetings process holds substantial risk as well as potential benefit. So it is not only the strength of the motivation to participate, but it is also whether that motivation is driven by the potential for a positive outcome or by the fear of a negative one. The presence of a clear commitment for incentive funding to implement outcomes of a discussion and the absence of a regulatory threat greatly enhances the chances of success.

- ✓ The credibility seen to be invested in the process by government and other decision makers and the resulting likelihood that agreements reached in the process will actually effect changes in law and policy

No one wants to invest time and effort nor place their group at risk in a discussion process if there is no clear likelihood that the outcomes will be acted on and implemented by all those who participate. Thus the credibility vested in a process and the probability perceived by all that there will be decisive outcomes is a key factor for success. Related to this issue is also the extent to which local participants see a process driven by national priorities as "grass roots" or as "top down" management.

- ✓ The authority with which each of the participants speaks on behalf of their caucus and the likelihood that agreements they make will be substantially accepted by their agencies, groups, or constituents

Perhaps the most difficult factor for success to achieve is the authority of the participants to speak for their caucuses. This is especially hard to accomplish with large diverse private groups like the agriculture community or the environmental community. The extent to which this can be achieved is key to the extent to which the process can succeed.

- ✓ The adequacy, stability, and certainty that funding will be available for the costs of running the process, how it is staffed, participants' expenses of operation, and the availability of technical and scientific support

Such processes need to be adequately funded for the costs of operations, for the expenses of participation, and for scientific and technical support to the policy people who are involved in the discussions. If any of these elements of funding are inadequate, it undermines and threatens success. If the funding is there, it sends the important message that this is a continuing effort that will remain in place till an outcome is achieved.

In formulating its recommendations for Washington, AFT was cognizant of the fact that success or failure of the Ag, Fish, Water process will critically affect the future of such dialogues in our State. Since AFW is the most comprehensive effort of this kind thus far, our recommendations focus on AFW as a model and suggest what can be done to strengthen that process and improve its chances for success. Among our suggestions for AFW:

1. Clarity of Purpose: Strengthen the current effort in the discussions to focus on specific practices and achieve some early, specific results.
2. Strength of Motivation: Extend the time deadlines for regulatory solutions with a more realistic but meaningful schedule for implementation of voluntary measures linked to substantial incentive funding.
3. Funding for Incentives: Seek public clarification from Washington's governmental salmon leadership of their non-regulatory preferences along with a good-faith effort by them to secure substantial funding for incentives. These incentives should be linked to a realistic but meaningful schedule of implementation leading to salmon and water quality recovery.
4. Credibility of Process: Along with reaching early agreement on specific elements of the Field Office Technical Guide practices, also reach some added clarity on the extent of certainty offered when the process is complete. Obtain assurances that federal agencies will assist with seeking funding for incentives. Demonstrate respect for the importance of and limitations on the grass roots participation by private groups like the agriculture and the environmental communities. Seek to extend participation more fully to the Tribal and Environmental communities. Recommit to the process.
5. Authority of Caucuses: Provide adequate time and opportunity for the private caucuses to complete internal communication processes and financially support their efforts to do this.
6. Process Funding: Stabilize and add to process funding so that the meetings and facilitation for the process is assured. Also add funding for meeting expenses of non-governmental participants as well as for technical assistance to participants in understanding the effect and the effectiveness of the measures which may be proposed.

While successfully engaging agriculture in dialogue over environmental issues is difficult to accomplish, there are clearly steps that can be taken to increase the chances of success. Given the critical importance for our agriculture industry, for both rural and urban communities, for our cultural and natural environments, and for the future of our nation, understanding and taking those steps is clearly a worthwhile investment.