



## Philosophical Ponderings of a Farmer

### Farms vs Housing (c) 2018

On a trip to Sequim this past weekend, Will and I were driving through the Dungeness and commenting about how beautiful it is out there - fields with views of the Olympic Mountains abound.

Then we rounded a corner and saw a farm for sale - but rather than advertising it for its food production potential, the sign read "220 house sites possible!" I get it - the current owners will get way (way!) more money if they sell to a developer. But it made us wonder how it came to be that the zoning laws allowed for this type of construction on some of our region's best soils. (And if you really want to get into it, how our society came to value housing developments over food.)

Here in Jefferson County, we have relatively little prime agricultural land, and even less that is currently zoned ag. I'm glad that, for the most part, we haven't gone the route of Sequim (at least not yet). Our lack of ag-zoned land also makes me glad that we are a "Right to Farm" county. This means that agricultural activities are permitted on residentially zoned parcels. And while there are some drawbacks (there are no protections for "nuisance" claims from neighbors), several of our farmers are taking advantage of this rule. (Note: I'm talking about the County, not the City of Port Townsend.) The County also offered a pilot program about 10 years ago that allowed landowners of parcels less than 20 acres to apply for agricultural zoning, and several of our farmers took advantage of that opportunity as well.

I also think that models like the one I'm using at Hopscotch can play an important role. This system increases our food production capacity while supporting housing at the same time. I would like to see the County (and the City!) adopt regulations that make it even easier to grow food commercially in residential areas. While there are some obvious drawbacks (particularly in terms of scalability), the model could function well with multiple farmers growing on a small scale. I've had to turn down multiple offers of available land, which makes me think the potential is there. I wonder how much food Jefferson County could actually produce for itself if we incorporated more innovative solutions to land use and a better support network for small scale growers.