

SECTION 3: EVALUATION PROCESS

Choosing Proposals to Fund

A formal evaluation of each project is a key step in the funding process. The evaluation questions, or criteria, are adopted by the RCFB. The questions are based on statutory and other criteria. Evaluation questions begin on page 2.

The Farmland Preservation Program advisory committee will use the RCFB adopted criteria to score each project. Scores are based on each applicant's oral response to evaluation questions, graphic presentation, and summary application material.

While evaluation meetings are open to anyone, they are not public hearings. Only the applicant or their invited partners may address the evaluation team. Scoring is by confidential ballot. Following the meeting, all scores are tabulated, resulting in a ranked list of proposals, which serves as the foundation for staff's funding recommendation to RCFB

Farmland Preservation Program Evaluation Criteria Summary Table

Criteria	Points
<p>Agricultural Values</p> <p>Importance: Soil types; suitability for producing agricultural products; size; economic productivity; fit of the project to local priorities</p> <p>Viability: On-site production and support facilities; farm to market access; proximity to roads and utilities (croplands only); carrying capacity (rangelands only); water availability; drainage; presence of other features that could hinder or restrict use for agriculture; zoning; likelihood that the farm will remain in agriculture; immediacy of threat to conversion to non-agricultural uses; likelihood that the region will continue to support agriculture</p>	68
<p>Environmental Values (Acquisition only projects)</p> <p>Recommended as part of a plan or strategy; quality of habitat and benefits to fish and wildlife; integration with recovery efforts for endangered, threatened, or sensitive species; existing or proposed environmental management/stewardship plan</p>	22
OR	
<p>Environmental Values (Combination acquisition and restoration projects)</p> <p>Enhancement or restoration projects must further ecological functions: Consider the current habitat values of the property; benefits to fish and wildlife species, especially endangered, threatened or sensitive species; benefits to habitat forming processes</p> <p>Consider the likelihood that the anticipated benefits will be realized: Project is based on accepted methods; project is likely to achieve the anticipated benefits</p> <p>Recommended as part of a plan or strategy</p>	22
<p>Community Values and Priorities</p> <p>Community support for the project; consistency with a local land use or a regional or statewide recreational or resource plan</p> <p>Other community values: Viewshed; aquifer recharge; occasional or periodic collector for storm water runoff; floods; agricultural sector job creation; educational and curriculum potential; historic value; buffer to public lands, demonstration</p>	12
<p>Other</p> <p>Cost benefit; local match; sponsor's ability to acquire, manage, monitor, and enforce conservation easements, term</p>	31
Total points available	133

Farmland Preservation Program Evaluation Criteria

A. Agricultural values. Preservation of farmlands in order to maintain the opportunity for agricultural activity.

1. **Importance.** How important is this farmland to the region and state?
 - a. Soil types; percent of property with important soil types. Consider presence of prime and unique soils; soils important or appropriate for the anticipated crops, and/or livestock forage, and local climatic conditions; soils important to the region *(maximum 5 points)*
 - b. Suitability for producing the current or anticipated agricultural products *(maximum 5 points)*
 - c. Size. Consider whether the size of the commercially productive portion of the property is adequate for the intended agricultural use. Give preference to larger parcels, especially as compared to other parcels with the same type of agricultural activity in the same area *(maximum 5 points)*
 - d. Economic productivity. Give preference for farms with greater incomes or potential incomes. Compare rangeland to other ranches, rather than to cropland. *(maximum 5 points)*
 - e. Fit of the project to local priorities. If the sponsor has a land preservation program that includes farmland and/or has developed a strategy for farmland preservation, consider the extent that the project addresses priorities in that program and/or strategy *(maximum 5 points)*

2. **Viability.** The viability of the site for continued agricultural production and the likelihood it will remain in production:
 - a. On-site production and support facilities such as barns, irrigation systems, crop processing and storage facilities, wells, housing, livestock watering, rangeland fencing, livestock sheds, and other farming or ranching infrastructure *(maximum 3 points for cropland projects, maximum 2 points for rangeland projects)*
 - b. Farm-to-market access *(maximum 3 points)*
 - c. Cropland projects only: Proximity to roads and utilities *(maximum 3 points)*
 - d. Rangeland projects only: Carrying capacity *(maximum 4 points)*
 - e. Water availability. Does the property have legitimate water rights and adequate water to support intended or likely agriculture activities? *(maximum 4 points)*
 - f. Drainage *(maximum 3 points)*
 - g. Presence of other features that could hinder or restrict use for agriculture (access, presence of frost pockets, chronic flooding, invasive species, nearby land uses or activities that could constrain agricultural activities) *(maximum deduction up to -5 points. No such features would result in zero points)*

- h. Zoning. Consider whether the property is in an Agricultural Protection District or other type of protected zone (ex. “Agricultural Natural Resource Lands” zoning in Skagit) *(maximum 4 points)*
- i. Likelihood that the farm will remain in agriculture if protected. What is the likelihood that acquiring the development rights on this property will make a difference in keeping the property in agricultural production? Consider whether there is an increased likelihood that the property will be converted to nonagricultural uses if it is not protected. What and how imminent are the threats to ongoing agricultural use? Are these new or ongoing threats? This item applies to factors that could affect long-term viability, such as landowner motivation, potential for rezoning, history of farmland conversion in the area, and anticipated development patterns. *(maximum 16 points)*
- j. Likelihood that the region will continue to support agriculture. Consider the condition of local farming infrastructure; proximity to other protected agricultural lands; other farmland protection and conservation efforts; land use designations *(maximum 7 points)*

B. Environmental values (for evaluating acquisition-only projects)

1. Is the type and quality of habitat found on this property specifically recommended for preservation as part of a limiting factors or critical pathways analysis, a watershed plan or habitat conservation plan, the Washington State Natural Heritage Plan, or a coordinated region wide prioritization effort? Does the property contribute to recovery efforts for endangered, threatened, or sensitive species? What specific role does the habitat play in supporting this/these species? *(maximum 9 points)*
2. Describe the ecological and biological quality of the habitat and its benefits to fish and wildlife. What species/communities benefit from habitat on this property? How is this habitat important in providing food, water, cover, connectivity, and resting areas? Are other protected lands near or adjoining this farm managed in a manner that is complementary or compatible for these species? Is the farm property part of the larger ownership? If so, describe management of the larger ownership. *(maximum 9 points)*
3. Is there an existing or proposed environmental management/stewardship plan or conservation plan for the farm/ranch? Is the farm/ranch certified under some sort of sound environmental practices or sustainability program? Describe any stewardship activities undertaken by the landowner in the past and the results of those efforts. *(maximum 4 points)*

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B. Environmental values (for evaluating acquisition + restoration/enhancement projects)

1. Enhancement or restoration projects must further the ecological functions of the farmlands.

- a. Consider the current habitat values of the property. How is this habitat important in providing food, water, cover, connectivity, and resting areas? Has the landowner already undertaken successful stewardship activities on the farm/ranch? *(maximum 2 points)*
 - b. Consider the benefits to fish and wildlife species, especially endangered, threatened or sensitive species, including benefits to plant and animal communities and the habitat on which they depend *(maximum 3 points)*
 - c. Benefits to habitat forming processes, for example restoring the ability of a river or stream to transport gravel and fine sediment or restoring native riparian vegetation to provide for a future source of shade, detritus and woody debris *(maximum 4 points)*
2. Consider the likelihood that the anticipated benefits will be realized. This would be based on the use of accepted methods, sound project design and siting, etc.
 - a. The project is based on accepted methods of achieving beneficial enhancement or restoration results *(maximum 3 points)*
 - b. The project is likely to achieve the anticipated benefits. Consider siting, project type, management/stewardship plan, proposed monitoring and evaluation *(maximum 6 points)*
 3. Does the proposed restoration or enhancement address needs or priorities identified in a limiting factors or critical pathways analysis, a watershed plan or habitat conservation plan, a listed species recovery plan, the Washington State Natural Heritage Plan, or a coordinated region wide prioritization effort? *(maximum 4 points)*

C. Community values and priorities

1. Community support for the project *(maximum 6 points)*
2. Consistency with a local land use plan, or a regional or statewide recreational or resource plan. The projects that assist in the implementation of local shoreline master plans updated according to RCW 90.58.080 or local comprehensive plans updated according to RCW 36.70A.130 must be highly considered in the process *(maximum 2 points)*
3. Other community values provided by the property when used as agricultural land, including, but not limited to:
 - ▶ Viewshed
 - ▶ Aquifer recharge
 - ▶ Occasional or periodic collector for storm water runoff and/or providing flood capacity
 - ▶ Agricultural sector job creation
 - ▶ Educational potential
 - ▶ Historic value
 - ▶ Buffer to public lands

- ▶ Demonstration project

(maximum 4 points)

D. Other

1. **Cost benefit.** Consider the percentage of total acreage that is in agricultural production or set aside to preserve ecological values (versus the percentage of the property that is taken up by structures, roads, etc.; allow for acreage that is not in agricultural production for the purpose of preserving ecological values, such as protected riparian buffers, CREP leases). Consider cost per acre? Consider contributions by the landowner, for example a bargain sale? *(maximum 5 points)*
2. **Local match.** Consider the amount of local (non-state, non-federal) match to be provided by the grant recipient. Includes contribution of land, labor, and materials *(maximum 2 points)*
3. **Sponsor’s ability to acquire, manage, monitor and enforce conservation easements.** Consider the history of project sponsor in acquiring, managing and enforcing easements. Consider whether the applicant has an established farmland PDR (purchase of development rights) or conservation easement program and staff devoted to farmland protection. Consider the ability and experience of any organizations or entities assisting or partnering with the sponsor. For counties and cities without an established farmland PDR or conservation easement program, consider whether the award of a grant will provide the impetus for establishing a continuing program. Consider the presence of an endowment or other dedicated funding sources for management, monitoring, and enforcement. *(maximum 4 points)*
4. **Term.** The following formula will be used to determine points for duration of lease or easement:

Duration of Conveyance	Point Value
Perpetual Easement	20
Easement or Lease of 60 plus years	10
Easement or Lease of 40 plus years	5
Easement or Lease of less than 40 years	0