Idaho Code §67-6508 (n) requires the following for the Agriculture component:

"An analysis of the agricultural base of the area including agricultural lands, farming activities, farming-related businesses and the role of agriculture and agricultural uses in the community."
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INTRODUCTION

Agriculture's impact on a community is vast and can be felt in many important areas including: economic development; job creation; food system infrastructure; and land use regulation. All are important components of a healthy community. While Bonner County's agriculture sector is relatively small when compared to its neighbors regionally, its impact cannot be ignored locally. The size of the agriculture sector makes protecting the valuable resources that allow it to function all the more important. In order to maximize potential contributions from the agricultural sector, it must be planned for in a comprehensive manner that makes both long and short term considerations.

BONNER COUNTY’S AGRICULTURE HISTORY AND TRENDS

The 2007 Census of Agriculture indicates that 94,380 acres (National Agricultural Statistics Service 1987-2007) of Bonner County's 1,112,109 acres of total land (U.S. Census 2000) are dedicated to agriculture. The County contains about 65,565 acres of what the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) classifies as prime agriculture land (Natural Resources Conservation Service n.d.). This acreage is scattered throughout Bonner County, but most of it is in the southwestern and north-central portions of the county (Bonner County 2003). Bonner County's agriculture is primarily dominated by forestry. However, economic factors such as the burst of the housing bubble have been especially impactful to the steadily declining timber industry. Other factors that have negatively affected forestry include, technological advancements, price of lumber, and environmental issues (Metts 2012).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crop</th>
<th>Value of Sales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nursery, greenhouse, floriculture, and sod</td>
<td>$3,395,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut Christmas trees and short rotation woody crops</td>
<td>$1,586,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other crops and hay</td>
<td>$1,393,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other animals and other animal products</td>
<td>$863,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk and other dairy products from cows</td>
<td>$387,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Agriculture Component Goal:

“Bonner County seeks to promote the retention of agriculture lands by implementing planning strategies that complement and support agriculture and farm-related, non-agricultural activities.”
The natural resources component of the Bonner County Comprehensive plan details the tree species that cover the County. Additionally, soil survey data as to the different soil qualities in the County can be found in the Natural Resources component.

Bonner County's livestock inventory significantly contributes to the County's agricultural base. Figure 2 illustrates relatively steady inventories of chickens, sheep and lambs, horses and ponies, and hogs and pigs over the previous 15 years. A sharp decrease in cattle occurred countywide beginning in 1992. Since the early 1990s the number of cattle and calves has dropped 66% (National Agricultural Statistics Service 1987-2007).

Despite a vast inventory of timber, Bonner County is not completely void of traditional harvested cropland as well as livestock. The County lacks traditional large-scale commercial agriculture operations. However, it is home to several profitable agriculture endeavors. For the purposes of this document, the term “agribusiness” refers to these operations which conduct agriculture-related business, regardless of size.

The main crops grown are spring wheat, oats, barley, and grass-legume hay (Bonner County 2003). As Figure 1 illustrates, the County has a successful ornamental tree industry. Bonner County ranks first in the state in ornamental tree sales (National Agricultural Statistics Service 1987-2007). The County's most productive agriculture endeavor, by sales, is the nursery business. Many agriculture endeavors at the turn of the century consisted primarily of cultivating lands that had been cleared of forests. This practice was, in part, responsible for the creation of the Sandpoint Branch Experiment Station.
The site, now known as the Sandpoint Branch Experiment Station, began with a land donation of 177 acres north of Sandpoint by the Humbird Lumber Company in 1913. The land donation transferred the property to the State Board of Education and Board of Regents of the University of Idaho. The station's initial purpose was to research a productive method of increasing the value of cutover lands. Initial crops at the station included varieties of clovers, alfalfa, cereals, field peas and root crops. Eventually, considerable interest grew in developing a more comprehensive agricultural industry. Since 1981, The Experiment Station focused research in the areas of small fruit, nursery and Christmas trees. North Idaho's fledgling small-fruit industry supported research on raspberries and strawberries in the late 1980s. In the 1990s and 2000s, extensive work has been completed on nursery and huckleberry varietal selections. The Sandpoint Research and Extension Center closed its doors June 30, 2010 in response to state budget cuts to the University of Idaho College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (University of Idaho n.d.).

In 2010, the Experiment Station operated with a $120,000 annual budget. At the time of the closing there was little support from the agriculture community to continue operations. Currently, there are several proposals being considered for programs at the station. For example, biofuel feedstock crops and hothouse vegetable operations, as well as non-agricultural uses such as a problem-based technology training center, are all being considered. Without financial support from the agriculture community or other private resources, the station will not operate as it did before it closed. The station holds an enormous potential as a research and education center that could serve as a valuable tool to prevent the loss of farmland.

Some parts of Bonner County have experienced the loss of prime farmland to other uses. Figure 3 and Figure 4 highlight a noticeable shift in land uses in the County over the past 10 years. This shift is due to landowners increasingly discontinuing production on traditional harvested cropland and converting them into permanent pastureland. The loss of prime farmland to other uses puts pressure on marginal lands, which generally are more erodible or poorly drained, more difficult to cultivate, and are generally less productive (American Farmland Trust 1997). Residential development can also interfere with agricultural practices because new residents may object to operations such as mowing, cultivation, harvest and application of fertilizers and herbicides. Also, smaller acreage farming

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**Figure 3** Bonner County Land in Farms by Type of Land

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Land</th>
<th>2002 Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cropland</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodland</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Pasture</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Uses</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: United States Department of Agriculture

**Figure 4** Bonner County Land in Farms by Type of Land

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Land</th>
<th>2007 Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cropland</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodland</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Pasture</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Uses</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: United States Department of Agriculture
operations need to have active vegetative management procedures in place because unmanaged roadside corridors serve as distribution corridors for introduced, exotic weeds that threaten economically important native species and increase production costs for farmers.

**BONNER COUNTY’S AGRICULTURE EMPLOYMENT**

The previously discussed shift away from harvested cropland mirrors the trends in agriculture-related employment. Pastureland requires less labor than harvested cropland. Therefore, when pastureland increases and cropland decreases, employment in the agriculture sector decreases. Bonner County has experienced some loss of larger scale commercial operations which contributes to the loss of harvested cropland, but perhaps the most relevant phenomenon to affect traditional farming has been the decline of the family-owned farm (Breimyer 1982). Farms are defined as any place from which $1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold. This includes timber sales and many of the family-owned farms in Bonner County are comprised of timber.

Employment data indicates a steady decline in forestry related employment beginning in about...
2004. In the seven year-period between 2004 and 2011 Bonner County lost 157 logging jobs. 62% of those working in logging in 2004 lost their jobs by 2011. Traditional cropland agriculture jobs saw a peak during a period between 1999 and 2001 but have leveled off in the years since. Figure 5 illustrates the trends in agriculture-related employment since 1991 (Idaho Department of Labor 1991-2012). Figure 6 characterizes the nature of total employment in Bonner County in order to provide perspective on the agriculture sector.

Most indicators of agriculture activity in Bonner County point to a declining industry. Statistics point to a steady decline in traditional agriculture (National Agricultural Statistics Service 1987-2007). However, the number of farms in the County indicates the contrary. Figure 7 illustrates a five-year period between 1997 and 2002 when the number of farms increased by 44%. Much of this increase can likely be attributed to an increase in the trend of landowners taking advantage of a tax law that allows land holdings, which meets certain criteria, from being exempt from taxation (Kurtz 2012). The increase in agriculture land tax exemption in combination with other recent trends in agriculture is responsible for the considerable increase in farms across Bonner County. (See Ag Exemption map in Appendix A.)

It is important to note that in 1997, Public Law 105-113 transferred the responsibility for conducting the Census of Agriculture from the Census Bureau, US Department of Commerce to US Department of Agriculture’s National Agricultural Statistics Service.
RECENT TRENDS

A trend that has gained momentum nationally and certainly locally has been the small-acreage farming movement. As Figure 8 illustrates, since the mid 1990s small acreage farming has been on the increase in the County. This County-wide trend mirrors a rise in small acreage farming nationally. The back-to-land movement has encouraged many to buy smaller tracts of land and produce enough to supply their families and often times sell their surplus at market or on-site farm stands (Green 2012). Some agribusinesses have followed the small acreage farming model and operate successful organic farms. This shift from larger-scale commercial operations to small-acreage farming generally corresponds with the increase in number of farms depicted in Figure 7. The trend in small acreage farming is poised to continue moving forward and should be addressed so that it can continue to flourish. There is a potential for small acreage farming to positively affect local food system self-sufficiency.
ISSUES

Currently there is more agricultural land than necessary to meet market demands. However, as the population of Bonner County continues to rise, there will be a greater need to protect the remaining finite amount of prime agricultural land. This agricultural land is currently being lost through non-farm development. Fractionalization of agriculture land removes that land from production both directly and indirectly. Development directly removes agricultural productivity on which it was built. Indirectly, it may force nearby farmers out of production by traffic, trespassing, and pilferage by non-farm residents, by their complaints about dust, smells, sprays, and noise, and especially by causing a general rise in land values, and higher property taxes. Certain federal programs have made it easier for those farmers holding marginal cropland to take said land out of production (American Farmland Trust 1997).

Federal programs can provide financial incentives for a farmer to convert marginal cropland to permanent pasture. One such program is administered by the Farm Service Agency and is called the Conservation Reserve Program. Through the program, farmers are encouraged to convert highly erodible cropland or other environmentally sensitive acreage to vegetative cover, such as tame or native grasses, wildlife plantings, trees, filter strips, or riparian buffers. The program is designed to reduce soil erosion and sedimentation in streams and lakes, improve water quality, establish wildlife habitat and enhance forest and wetland resources. Farmers receive an annual rental payment for the term of the multi-year contract. Cost sharing is provided to establish the vegetative cover practices. Programs such as these often make land conversions away from harvested cropland more profitable for farmers (United States Department of Agriculture n.d.). Much of the shift in agriculture land use over the previous 10 years in Bonner County can likely be attributed to this and other similar programs. Further contributing to the shift is the decline of the family-owned farm.

The 2007 Agriculture Census indicates that 96% of farms in the County are family farms. Reversing the decline of the family farm is of paramount significance to retaining productive agriculture lands. Many factors influence the next generation's decision to take over the family farm. A host of farm laws passed in the 1960s and 1970s were intended to help traditional family farmers cope with the
industrial features of modern agricultural technology without losing authority. Despite programs such as farm credit laws, price supports, crop insurance, disaster payments, family farms are on the decline. As family farmers are growing older and passing down their operations, their heirs are finding that tax liability is much lower on capital gains than on earned income. If younger generations no longer have the desire to continue the family business it is often more cost effective to sell the land than lease it to a willing farmer (Breimyer 1982). This temptation to sell land must be addressed if the loss of family owned farms is to be slowed.

Idaho Code currently allows for qualifying agriculture land to be exempt from property tax valuations. This provides farmers or potential farmers with a financial incentive to utilize land for agriculture operations. In order to qualify for such an exemption land must be more than five acres and under one ownership, producing agricultural field crops, nursery stock, or grazing, or in a cropland retirement or rotation program, as part of an agricultural enterprise. Land that is less than five acres may still qualify if the owner produces evidence that each contiguous holding of land under the same ownership has been devoted to agricultural use for the last three growing seasons and it agriculturally produced for sale or home consumption 15 percent or more of the owner’s or lessee’s annual gross income or it produced gross revenue in the immediate preceding year of one thousand dollars or more (Idaho Code §63-604). Appendix A illustrates the timber and agriculture exemptions that were granted in 2012.

Further support for the family farmer has come in the form of experimental stations often subsidized by state universities as well as USDA sponsored programs. Many believe that both the USDA and land-grant university supported agricultural experiment stations have given a disproportionate amount of attention to large-scale technology at the expense of developing or improving technology for moderate and small-sized farms (Menser 2012). As harsh economic times continue to endure it is clear that resources are being shifted away from family farmers, who lack a commodity crop, to large-scale commercial operations driven by strong commodities. The closing of the Bonner County Experimental Station has forced the agriculture community to turn elsewhere for solutions for strengthening the local food system.

A local food system is a collaborative effort to build a locally based, self-reliant food economy - one in which food production, processing, distribution, and consumption is integrated to enhance the
economic, environmental and social health of the County (National Association of Counties 2007). A Bonner County food system represents the flow of products from production, through processing, distribution, consumption, and the management of wastes, and associated processes. Such a system would promote a strong local economy by building business ecosystems rooted in agriculture. Several initiatives across the Country have been successful in maintaining a healthy food system while jumpstarting economic development. For example Missoula, Montana began a Farm to School program in 2005. The program brings Montana grown food into the local school systems. A cost analysis revealed that buying local seasonal food is either less expensive or no more expensive than it would have cost to purchase comparable foods through mainstream suppliers (National Association of Counties 2007). Farm to Table, a non-profit corporation based in New Mexico, was created in 1996 to link local food and fiber to local community needs. The organization works to improve market opportunities for farmers and ranchers, coordinates food and agriculture policy initiatives, and develops education programs to help people understand where their food comes from (Farm to Table 2013).

Self-sufficiency has become a hot topic in the planning community over the last several years. Experts in food system infrastructure agree that true, complete self-sufficiency as it relates to food production is impossible. The region just does not have the natural resources to allow for complete independence. Certain products must be obtained outside of the region in order to maintain a healthy diet (i.e. citrus, bread, etc.) However, steps can be taken to encourage a shift toward increasing self-sufficiency. Initiatives such as a "10%" campaign can be implemented which encourage consumers to spend 10% of their monthly food budgets locally. Such a campaign can stimulate economic growth while promoting a healthy community. Potential partners on such an initiative are Panhandle Health, community organizations, the Bonner County Economic Development Corporation, Senior Citizen care providers, et al.

OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES

1. An evaluation of current land use code should be conducted to ensure current regulations do not overtly hinder agricultural productivity and farm-related activities. Barriers within the land use code have the potential to deter farmers from increasing production and can stunt growth in
the agriculture sector. Further, there is an opportunity to include regulations that promote agriculture, especially small-acreage farming. Current zoning districts should be evaluated to determine if changes to density and zoning requirements could encourage small-acreage farming or small-scale agricultural opportunities.

2. There are two generations of farmers in Bonner County that must be linked in order for agricultural productivity to continue into the future. Agriculture Census data indicates the average age of farmers in Bonner County was 58.5 in 2007. The majority of farmers in the County are over the age of 50. However, Census numbers also indicate an influx of younger farmers entering the sector in the last 10 years (National Agricultural Statistics Service 1987-2007). Several programs currently offer younger generation farmers the opportunity to gain valuable knowledge and practical training from experienced farmers in the County. Most of these programs are offered through the Bonner County Extension office. They offer yearly farm tours which provide younger farmers the opportunity to learn from successful operations valuable skills such as crop rotation, farm planning, labor management, etc.

3. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a model that was brought to the United States from Europe in the mid 1980s. CSA members or subscribers pay at the onset of the growing season for a share of a grower's anticipated harvest; once harvesting begins, they receive weekly shares of vegetables and fruit, and also sometimes herbs, cut flowers, honey, eggs, dairy products and meat, as well. Some CSAs provide for contributions of labor in lieu of a portion of subscription costs. Currently there is at least one successful CSA operating in the County. These models allow producers to provide consumers directly with local food and are at the core of achieving any level of self-sufficiency. The Planning and Zoning Commission should support efforts to grow CSAs and provide the necessary education, political support and available resources to ensure that these operations can prosper.

4. Another untapped resource which holds the potential to educate the younger generation is the currently closed experimental station. Several members of the agricultural community
foresee the potential in the station as a training facility for small acreage farmers who have little experience with agriculture. Such an arrangement would strengthen the local food system and provide County residents with a valuable training resource. Most in the agriculture community identify education as the most important component of maintaining a strong economic base (Bauer 2012). The challenge lies in delivering these educational resources to those who are interested in entering the agricultural sector. The experimental station could also operate under a community supported agriculture model which could provide local residents with much needed education as well as locally grown produce which serves to strengthen the local food system.

IMPLEMENTATION

If Bonner County is to achieve its goals of retaining agriculture land, encouraging local food production, and developing a strong agribusiness sector, it must implement strategies to meet these ends. Limited resources necessitate creative solutions that serve to strengthen the already strong sense of community in Bonner County. These efforts begin with the continued support of the Bonner County Extension Office operated by the University of Idaho.

Bonner County seeks to promote the retention of agriculture lands by implementing planning strategies that facilitate agricultural productivity and agribusiness activities. Further, it is necessary to increase opportunities for agribusiness, and encourage local food production by eliminating impediments and creating incentives for both producers and consumers. The County should develop strategies that support local food production and processing to provide a healthy local food supply. Doing so will encourage local producers to increase output which will strengthen the local food system.

The creation of an agriculture council could form a strong public network which can promote the value of local agriculture with a united voice by fostering relationships with government officials, the media and general public through education and awareness programs. The council should be comprised of members of the agriculture community who are motivated to achieve long term goals for agriculture and serve as an advisory group to the Planning and Zoning Commission on matters related to agriculture. The council could serve as a comprehensive bridge of communication between community stakeholders, ensuring that they are aware of a common vision for agriculture in the County. The
agriculture council could make recommendations, coordinate programs, create new programs, and address policy barriers. Further, there is a potential for the council to serve as a citizen resource and a source of inspiration for grassroots efforts to support farmers markets, community gardens, local food sourcing, etc.

The State of Idaho passed a right to farm act in 1981 which declared that the right to farm is a “natural right” and that agricultural operations need protection from nuisance actions to ensure that agriculture can continue in the Gem State. A similar policy implemented on the local level can serve as a formal policy statement that agriculture is a valuable part of the county economy and culture. Local right to farm policies serve to protect agricultural operators from complaints about legal and non-negligent agricultural operations and activities. Protection in the case of conflicts between agricultural operators and Bonner County visitors and residents are vital to the prolonged productivity of agricultural operations. Examples of such conflicts include, harassment of livestock and livestock losses due to free roaming dogs; trespass by livestock; livestock on highway and County roads; leaving gates open; fence construction and maintenance; chemical applications; maintenance of ditches across private property, storm water management; burning of ditches; complaints about noise, dust and odor; disposal of dead animals; etc.

A farmland protection program is another viable solution that would serve to retain agriculture land as well as promote local food production for the foreseeable future. Creation of such a program is the necessary first step to receive matching funds from the Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program (FRPP) to obtain the development rights to prime agricultural land. In selling the development rights to their property, owners voluntarily allow restrictive covenants to be placed on it that limit the property's use and development. The covenants restrict the property to agriculture or open space uses, limit the number of residences permitted, require that 95% of the property be kept open and available for cultivation, require a minimum lot size if the property is subdivided, and restrict activities that would impair the agricultural capability of the property. Before such a transaction can take place the land under consideration must be part of a pending offer from a local protection program. Such a local program could also coordinate with private land trusts such as the Inland Northwest Land Trust.
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APPENDIX A: AGRICULTURE & TIMBER EXEMPTIONS

Parcel Agriculture & Timber Exemptions (2012)

Legend
- Agriculture Exemption
- Timber 2012
- HIGHWAYS
- ARTERIAL
- COLLECTOR