

Report on Washington Island Natural, Agricultural and Cultural Resources 3/25/24

Between March 11 and March 22 I continued to interview representatives of the Agriculture Community. I interviewed Russell and Alessandra Rolffs and Jeannie Kokes about Gathering Grounds, and Mike Davis from Birchwood Farms.

General “trends” of agreement with regard to the future of agriculture on the island

1. The need to preserve tracts of large acreage (20 acres) open land is imperative
2. Island Agriculture is best scaled for an Island market
3. Best market for Island Agriculture is year-round and summer residents.
4. Make sure “working” land is “worked” regularly to keep it clear and fertile as farmland.
5. General consensus that natural, non-commodity agriculture has a future on the island. Any product that has value-added processing, or is natural and/or Sustainable has a future on the island. Large commodity agriculture isn’t feasible for the island unless it is a hobby project.
6. The majority of people I interviewed believe that there is a future for agriculture on the island and that agriculture can be a good and viable income producing livelihood for the future of the island. It just will not be large commodity farming but will be value added, small scale, island market focused or it will be newer farming techniques creating new farming products. It might also be land/forest/natural prairie management.

Barriers include:

1. Transportation of products or processing off island is a barrier
2. Waste water by-products of manufacturing/processing cannot be managed on the island
3. Off island processing
4. Land affordability
5. Land availability for farming
6. Affordable housing

Ideas for Future growth:

1. Agri-tourism
2. Internships or apprenticeships
3. Eco-tourism
4. Sustainable/Natural/Value added products
5. New farming methods

Russell, Alessandra Rolffs and Jeannie Kokes with Gathering Ground along with TPAC is sponsoring an Agricultural Forum to discuss the future of farming on the island. The event will be held on May 4 at 10 AM.

Respectfully submitted by Susan Kochanowski

Goals and Objectives for Washington Island Long Term Plan for Agriculture, Natural and Cultural Resources

Goal: The preservation of the significant natural features (Little Lake, the mountain wetlands, shoreline, beaches, clear lake waters, bird & wildlife habitats) and natural resources of the Island.

Objectives:

- Preserve the open spaces, meadows, fields and forests of the island
- Create policies that help maintain the ecological balance and natural habitats that help support the economic well-being of the Island.
- Work with the County, state and other organizations/entities to protect the shorelines from potential coastal hazards
- Discourage development and businesses that will spoil or interfere with important natural resources
- Preserve wildlife habitats

Goal: Preserve open spaces such as meadows, fields and forests and the agrarian/rural character of the community.

Objectives:

- Preserve existing productive agricultural resources such as large tracts (20 acres or more) of open acreage and farmland.
- Support zoning that encourages local family farming operations and small specialty farms in order to maintain agriculture as a productive part of the rural landscape
- Support zoning that enables encourages new/innovative farming ideas/practices while preserving ecological and sustainability needs of the Island Habitat.

Goal: Preserve and protect historic resources of the Island to preserve the island cultural history.

- Protect documents, resources, monuments and traditions and history that conveys the historic and cultural roots of Washington Island.