



Farmland Preservation Recommendations for Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve

*Prepared for the National Park Service by
Jones and Jones Architects and Landscape
Architects, Ltd.*

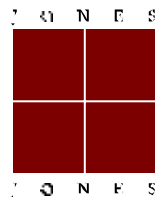
October 22, 2001

FARMLAND PRESERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR
EBEY'S LANDING NATIONAL HISTORICAL RESERVE

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
BY

JONES & JONES
ARCHITECTS AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS, LTD.
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

22 OCTOBER 2001



FARMLAND PRESERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	03
II.	STRUCTURE.....	04
III.	RECOMMENDATIONS.....	05
A.	PROTECT THE FARMLAND	05
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• RESERVE OVERLAY DISTRICT• CONSERVATION EASEMENTS• EBEBY'S DEVELOPMENT CREDIT BANK	
B.	SUPPORT THE FARMERS.....	06
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ADVOCACY AND EDUCATION• WASHINGTON FARMLINK• EBEBY'S FARMLAND LEASING• TAX RELIEF• FARM BUSINESS INCUBATOR• VALUE-ADDED PRACTICES AND PROCESSING	
C.	CULTIVATE MARKETS.....	08
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "EBEBY'S RESERVE" LABEL• COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE (CSA)• FARMERS MARKETS• AG-TOURISM	

I. INTRODUCTION

In this report we recommend measures to improve the viability and sustainability of farms and woodlots at Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve (the Reserve). These recommendations are based on precedents in diverse case studies of farmland preservation strategies around the country and an evaluation of the historic and present character of the Reserve's cultural landscapes.

The majority of Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve is privately owned and protection is afforded through conservation easements, community support, the National Register (for buildings and structures), and state and non-profit group ownership. In 1988, the NPS turned over management of the Reserve to a partner, the Trust Board of Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve. This Trust Board, made up of representatives of NPS, Island County, Coupeville, and Washington State Parks, has used a Comprehensive Plan prepared by NPS in 1980 to work to preserve the Reserve's resources. The National Park Service is currently taking the lead role in developing a revision to the Comprehensive Plan. This new General Management Plan (GMP) will set the direction of the Reserve for the next 15 to 20 years. The recommendations of this report will inform the approach taken in the GMP to preserve farmland and woodlots into the future.

A cultural landscape is a living thing. The landscapes of the Reserve will grow and change as agricultural practices and land use goals evolve, so these landscapes cannot be regarded as static visual resources. Any plan to preserve farmland should address not only protecting the land, but also protecting the farmers who must sustain the land. The landscape and the people that cultivate it are interdependent. Our recommendations are grouped into three broad categories of strategies. Each strategy is briefly described and one or more case studies are recommended for further reading. These categories are:

- **Protect the farmland.** NPS and its partners should identify and protect the land in the Reserve that is best suited to farming and woodlots.
- **Support the farmers.** NPS and its partners should implement measures that make it easier for existing farmers to remain in farming and new farmers to begin farming.
- **Cultivate markets.** NPS and its partners should help farmers to cultivate markets for the farm and forest products of the Reserve.

It is important that any plan to preserve farmland consider both restrictions and incentives. Implementation of restrictions without incentives often creates a hostile political climate for preservation, while the use of incentives without restrictions is rarely able to overcome periodic intense economic pressures for conversion of agricultural lands. Our recommendations include a balance of restrictions and incentives.

FARMLAND PRESERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS

II. STRUCTURE

In order to protect farmland, NPS should expand partnerships with government agencies and non-governmental organizations in the management of the Reserve. The three most important partners are:

- **Island County.** NPS should encourage Island County to adopt a special zoning or overlay district covering the Reserve. This designated area would be subject to the land use laws of Island County, but also to additional rules developed in cooperation with NPS to establish a higher standard for the protection of farmland and rural character in the Reserve.
- **Ebey's Farmland Trust.** NPS should help establish a non-governmental organization, Ebey's Farmland Trust, to oversee acquisition of farmland and conservation easements and operate a development credit bank. This local non-governmental organization could partner with NPS and other public agencies as well as larger land trusts such as American Farmland Trust, the Nature Conservancy and the Trust for Public Land. Ebey's Farmland Trust could harness the resources of these larger organizations while maintaining close relationships with local landowners. A local organization could best recognize opportunities to purchase interests in valuable or vulnerable land. The Trust could pursue funding from foundations, area citizens, and government agencies for its ongoing activities. The trust could also accept tax-deductible donations of farmland, conservation easements, and funds for the purchase of easements.
- **Ebey's Farmers Cooperative.** NPS and Ebey's Farmland Trust should help Ebey's Reserve farmers establish a cooperative processing and marketing organization. This cooperative would allow farmers to share the costs of infrastructure needed to produce value-added products. For example, the Cooperative could operate a dairy making an "Ebey's Reserve" label cheese. Farmers could also collaborate on marketing and services. For example, the Cooperative could run a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) business that bundles produce from participating farms into weekly packages delivered to urban residents. The Cooperative would give farmers a direct role in the management of the Reserve.

This matrix illustrates important partnerships for each strategy:

		N	P	S
		+		
		Island County	Ebey's Farmland	Ebey's Farmers Coop
Protect the Farmland	Overlay District	X		
	Conservation Easements		X	
	Development Credit Bank	X	X	
Support the Farmers	Advocacy & Education		X	X
	Washington FarmLink		X	
	Farmland Leasing		X	
	Tax Relief	X	X	
	Farm Business Incubator		X	X
	Value-Added Practices			X
Cultivate Markets	"Ebey's Reserve" Label			X
	CSA			X
	Farmers Markets			X
	Ag-Tourism			X

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. PROTECT THE FARMLAND

- RESERVE OVERLAY DISTRICT

Island County should adopt an “overlay district” covering Ebey’s Landing National Historical Reserve. An overlay district is a designated planning area within which development is guided by additional rules specific to that area. Within the Reserve overlay district stronger agricultural protection zoning (APZ) is necessary to slow the conversion of valuable farmland and the erosion of the historic character of the Reserve. Within the Reserve, the minimum lot size for agricultural zoned parcels should be 20 acres. Permitted uses should be written to explicitly exclude sprawling residential development that is devouring the Reserve in five-acre bites. Island County’s Historic Advisory Committee and Coupeville’s Design Review Board should be given veto-power over projects proposed within the Reserve overlay district. A suite of additional incentives and services, many described in the following recommendations, should be available to support farmers within the overlay district.

Related Case Studies:

San Juan County, Washington
King County, Washington

- CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

Ebey’s Farmland Trust should buy development rights to valuable and vulnerable farmland. These rights are often called conservation easements. The Trust should also accept tax-deductible donations of farmland, conservation easements, and funds for the purchase of easements. The Trust should allow farmers to choose incremental payments for easements over a number of years in order to minimize their capital gains taxes. This installment plan also allows Trust funds to be spread out over more easement purchases initially while ongoing fundraising and partnerships are developed for payments in future years. An innovative use of the installment payment system would involve the purchase of farmers’ mortgages by the Trust. These mortgages could be forgiven over a number of years in exchange for conservation easements. This protects farmers from significant mortgage obligations that come due in the event of a conservation easement sale.

Related Case Study:

Franklin Land Trust, Massachusetts

- EBEY’S DEVELOPMENT CREDIT BANK

Coupeville is a historic town in the middle of the Reserve. Much of its charm derives from its rural setting apparently far from the sprawling suburbs of Seattle. Encouraging increased density to create attractive and affordable housing in walkable neighborhoods would protect farmland while protecting the distinctive rural town character of Coupeville. A development credit bank, under the direction of Ebey’s Farmland Trust, should be established to facilitate a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program that can buy development rights from “sending” areas in the agricultural lands of the Reserve and sell development rights in “receiving” areas in Coupeville and other developed lands of the Reserve. Land use restrictions in the Reserve overlay district of Island County and the Town of Coupeville will be needed to enforce the goals of the development credit bank. Sales of development rights can take place on the open market like any real estate transaction. The credit bank can buy and sell development rights, guarantee loans using credits for collateral, and maintain a registry of owners and purchasers. The development credit bank is an important way to gain landowner support for stronger agricultural protection zoning because

FARMLAND PRESERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS

reducing the capacity to subdivide and develop properties often reduces their value if there is not a legitimate market for the development rights that have been restricted. The protection of farmland should be understood as part of a larger planning effort to improve quality of life for rural and urban citizens, and the cost of this protection should be borne equally by all who benefit from it.

Related Case Studies:

Montgomery County, Maryland
New Jersey Pinelands National Reserve
Vermont Housing and Conservation Board

B. SUPPORT THE FARMERS

• ADVOCACY AND EDUCATION

NPS should collaborate with the Trust and the Cooperative on advocacy and education programs to support farmers in the Reserve. They would advocate for stronger local, state, and federal farmland protection policies, while interpreting the farming activities of the Reserve and promoting visits to the Reserve by urban people in surrounding cities and tourists to the region. The NPS should work with WSU extension and environmental organizations to educate farmers about sustainable farming practices and environmental issues. A successful plan depends on a strong base of public support for farmland protection. Programs should be developed to teach non-farming residents of the Reserve about their farming neighbors and how their qualities of life are dependent on each other. This is a great opportunity for events such as harvest celebrations, barn raisings, etc. Outreach volunteers could carry the message further into local schools, churches, and businesses. NPS, the Trust, and the Cooperative should communicate with other regional advocacy groups such as Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland to exchange knowledge and collaborate on regional initiatives.

Related Case Studies:

Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland
Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historic Park
Shelburne Farms, Vermont

• WASHINGTON FarmLink

NPS and the Trust should encourage participation of Reserve farms in Washington FarmLink. FarmLink connects people wanting to get started in agriculture with farmers and landowners who are committed to establishing the next generation of producers. FarmLink is a means to help ensure that working farms remain in agricultural production and to help facilitate the transition of farms to the next generation. The program maintains a database of participating properties and holds periodic workshops where interested farmers can learn how to seize opportunities and overcome challenges of farming in Washington. FarmLink is currently a joint project of the King County Agricultural Commission and the Snohomish County Agricultural Advisory Board. Island County should be encouraged to participate as well.

Related Case Study:

King County, Washington

• EBEY'S FARMLAND LEASING

NPS and the Trust should develop a program to lease Reserve farmland and farmsteads belonging to the National Park Service, the Trust, and local landowners. This program could be advertised to participants in the Washington FarmLink program and others interested in farming. Suitable

FARMLAND PRESERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS

future farmers could be selected through a request for proposals process and the Trust could assist new farmers with farm and business skills. Revenue from the market rate leases could be used to purchase more farmland and farmland conservation easements. Sustainable farming practices should be advocated on all leased farmland. The leases should be long enough for farmers to be willing to make significant investments in the farms.

Related Case Study:

Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Ohio

- **TAX RELIEF**

Working farms in Washington are eligible for reduced property tax assessment based on their use value. If farmland is later developed, the tax savings from the previous seven years are due as a penalty. However, this does not protect farms from conversion in times of strong development pressure. Developers simply assume the cost of paying off the tax penalty as a cost of doing business. A tool is needed to fairly tax land that remains in farming, but that protects the land into the future. NPS and Island County should develop a program that gives farmers within the Reserve overlay district an even greater level of tax relief in exchange for participation in a restrictive agreement taxation program. If farmers are willing to place a temporary farmland conservation easement on their land, perhaps in renewable ten year contracts, their land should be taxed at the lowest level. The easements cannot be violated, but a landowner may reconsider at the end of each contract.

Related Case Study:

State of California

- **FARM BUSINESS INCUBATOR**

NPS should collaborate with Ebey's Farmland Trust and Ebey's Farmers Cooperative to act as a business incubator and a source of "seed money" for Reserve farmers. Farmers should receive assistance in developing comprehensive business, marketing, and production plans. The Trust should coordinate technical advisors and maintain a database of successful participants that can advise new participants. Farmers that have successfully completed the planning steps should become eligible for small loans and grants to experiment with new agricultural and marketing techniques and sustainable practices that have been outlined in the prepared plans. The Cooperative could arrange for successful graduates to mentor new enrollees.

Related Case Study:

State of Massachusetts

- **VALUE-ADDED PRACTICES AND PROCESSING**

Many farmers are switching to organic and other sustainable practices because they recognize their responsibility as stewards of the land, but many are also recognizing that "going organic" is a profitable way to distinguish their products. Organic produce sells for considerably more than conventional produce and for farmers in places conducive to farming the transition is not very costly. There is an opportunity for NPS and Ebey's Farmers Cooperative to partner with cooperative extension officials in teaching organic farming practices to Reserve farmers. The Cooperative can also continue its role as a business incubator by supporting farmers and entrepreneurs in developing small businesses that use Reserve produce and milk to create value-added products such as cheeses and jams. For example, a dairy cooperative could be established to produce an Ebey's Reserve cheese. The woodlots of the Reserve cannot compete as a commodity with the vast logging operations threatening ecosystems around the globe. However, they can compete with these giants in niche markets for sustainably harvested wood and value-

FARMLAND PRESERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS

added products made from wood. NPS and the Cooperative can act as local partners of the Forest Stewardship Council to certify “well-managed” forestry practices on the Reserve. NPS and the Cooperative could also assist farmers and entrepreneurs in developing small businesses that use Reserve wood to create value-added products such as furniture and toys. These special items could be hand-crafted to take advantage of the unique qualities of the wood and would be lasting reminders of the enduring natural and cultural value of the Reserve.

Related Case Studies:

Shelburne Farms, Vermont
Tillamook County Creamery Association, Oregon
Tree Shepherd Woods, Washington

C. CULTIVATE MARKETS

- “EBEY’S RESERVE” LABEL

Ebey’s Farmers Cooperative should establish an “Ebey’s Reserve” label for farm and forest products grown and produced on the Reserve. Labeling, combined with promotional campaigns, could offer consumers a simple way to support local agriculture and maintain the character of Ebey’s National Historical Reserve. Consumers would know that they are getting products of exceptional quality while helping to protect important natural and cultural resources. Products should be certified as being entirely or mostly produced on the Reserve to receive the label. While a program specific to the Reserve is being established, Reserve farmers should participate in “Puget Sound Fresh,” a successful program supported by King County and Snohomish County that labels produce from Puget Sound farmers and develops innovative marketing programs to educate people throughout the region about their local farms and produce.

Related Case Studies:

King County, Washington
Napa County, California

- COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE (CSA)

Individual farms with sufficient crop diversity should operate community supported agriculture (CSA) programs and Ebey’s Farmers Cooperative should oversee a Reserve-wide CSA program that brings farm fresh produce directly to subscribing members throughout the growing season. Members pay a fixed amount at the beginning of the season or through monthly installments and receive a box or bag with a variety of ripe produce each week. Members could pick up their “shares” at a central location or farm or convenient local drop-off points. CSAs provide a form of insurance for farmers in the way of a guaranteed source of income while they provide non-farm families with the freshest produce available at a reasonable price. Both groups gain from the sense of community that grows between the people that grow the food and the people that eat it. Many CSAs hold regular work days and events in which members can visit and help out on the farm and learn more about the farm operations while enjoying a day in the country. CSA members become strong invested advocates for farmland preservation in their communities.

Related Case Studies:

The Root Connection Farm, Washington
GreenMan Farm, Washington

- FARMERS MARKETS

Ebey’s Farmers Cooperative should support the Coupeville Farmers Market in bringing fresh local produce to Island County citizens. The weekly event is also an important destination for

FARMLAND PRESERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS

visitors to Whidbey Island. The market would be an excellent place to introduce the Reserve and its farmers to these visitors. Cultivating relationships between farmers and urban citizens is essential to building consensus on issues of farmland preservation. A contingent of Reserve farmers could also represent the Cooperative at farmers markets throughout the region to introduce Reserve products to more people.

Related Resource:

Washington State Farmers Market Association online at www.wafarmersmarkets.com

- **AG-TOURISM**

Ebey's Farmers Cooperative should develop a promotional campaign and interpretive experiences for agriculture-based tourism at the Reserve. This program would increase understanding of the special character of the Reserve and the essential role played by agriculture in maintaining this character. The program would also provide sources of secondary income for Reserve farmers that are willing to offer tours, operate farmstands, hold special harvest events, and even host visitors in informal lodging. These visitors would also be an excellent market for value-added products of the Reserve and would act as ambassadors of the Reserve. They could bring stories of their adventures on the Reserve back to their own communities and help build regional support for farmland preservation. The success of wineries in promoting their products and the experiences associated with their production can be duplicated in farming communities. Farmers would need some instruction in hospitality and public relations, but the program could coordinate with the Washington State Ag-Tourism Forum, local tourism boards, and cooperative extension officials to offer training to interested farmers.

Related Case Study:

Purple Haze Lavender, Washington

FARMLAND PRESERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS