

Bonner County Planning Department

"Protecting property rights and enhancing property value"

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BONNER COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

COMPONENT: AGRICULTURE

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Introduction

Agriculture's impact on a community can be felt in many 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 in comparison to its overall economy, all five of the county sub-area plans concluded that the county's agriculture segment is an important element of the rural character of Bonner County. As a result, the sub-area plans expressed strong community support for goals, objectives and policies designed to preserve viable agricultural land uses in the County. The size of the agriculture sector makes protecting the valuable natural resources that allow it to function all the more important. In order to maintain a viable agricultural sector, it must be planned for in a comprehensive manner that recognizes both long- and short-term considerations.

Chapter 1 - Bonner County's Agriculture History and Trends

The 2017 USDA Census of Agriculture indicates that 89,331 acres of Bonner County's 1.1 million acres of total land are dedicated to agriculture. An analysis of the soil types found in the County and their suitability for agriculture can be found in the Natural Resources Component of this plan.

As shown in Table 1, the total value of agricultural products sold in Bonner County in 2017 was about 10 million dollars. This value remained relatively constant (without adjusting for inflation) during the period from the 2012 USDA Agriculture census to the 2017 census. About 60% of this value is derived from various crops, and 40% is derived from livestock, poultry and their products.

Table 1 Bonner County: Annual Value (\$000) of Sales by Commodity

COMMODITY	2012	2017
Crops		
Other crops and Hay	D	\$ 2,549
Nursery, Greenhouse, Floriculture, Sod	\$ 2,862	\$ 2,112
Cultivated Christmas Trees	D	\$ 574
Fruits, Tree Nuts, Berries	\$ 256	\$ 318
Other crops	\$ 365	\$ 588
Subtotal, Crops	\$ 6,159	\$ 6,141
Livestock, Poultry and their Products		
Cattle and Calves	\$ 1,476	\$ 2,201
Horses, Ponies, Mules, Burros and Donkeys	\$ 692	\$ 396
Milk from Cows	\$ 618	\$ 192
Poultry and Eggs	\$ 62	\$ 181
Other animals and animal products	\$ 1,101	\$ 631
Subtotal, Livestock, Poultry	\$ 4,090	\$ 4,054
Total Market Value	\$ 10,249	\$ 10,195
D: Not shown to avoid revealing data from individual farms		

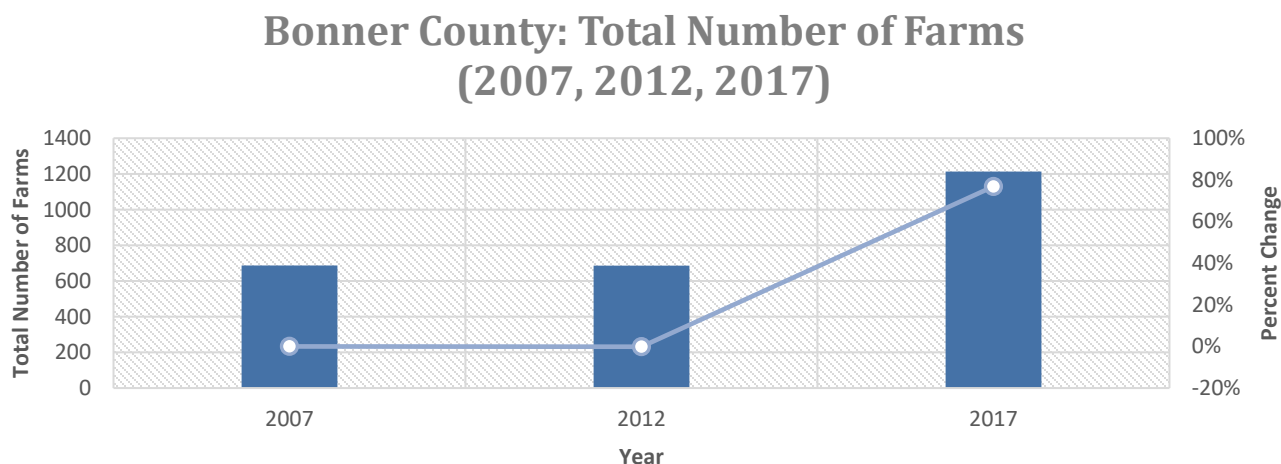
Source:

2007 Census of Agriculture - County Data, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service

2012 Census of Agriculture - County Data, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service

2017 Census of Agriculture - County Data, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service

Figure 1 Bonner County: Total Number of Farms and Percent Change (2007-2017)



Source:

2007 Census of Agriculture - County Data, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service

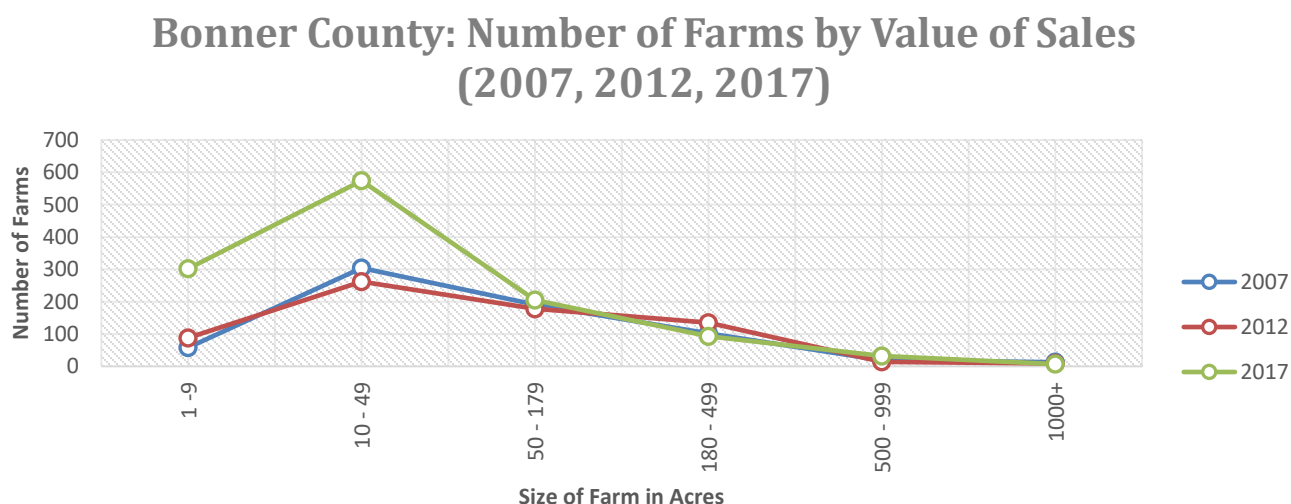
2012 Census of Agriculture - County Data, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service

2017 Census of Agriculture - County Data, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service

The total number of farms in the County grew by 76.8% from 2012 to 2017, with all of the growth being a resultant of the increase in the farms smaller than 50 acres in size.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of farms in Bonner County by size in 2012 and 2017. During this time the number of farms increased by 77%; from 686 to 1,213. The growth in the number of farms was exclusively in farms smaller than 50 acres, which grew from 350 to 876 during this time. While there were some changes in the distribution of farms above 50 acres, the overall total was relatively constant during this time period at about 335.

Figure 2 Bonner County: Number of Farms by Size in Acres (2007, 2012, 2017)



Source:

2007 Census of Agriculture - County Data, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service

2012 Census of Agriculture - County Data, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service

2017 Census of Agriculture - County Data, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service

The significant increase in the number of farms was not accompanied by a corresponding increase in the number of acres dedicated to farming, which had a modest 11% increase from about 80,000 to 89,000 acres. As a result, the median farm size in the County fell from 46 acres to 20 acres in 2017.

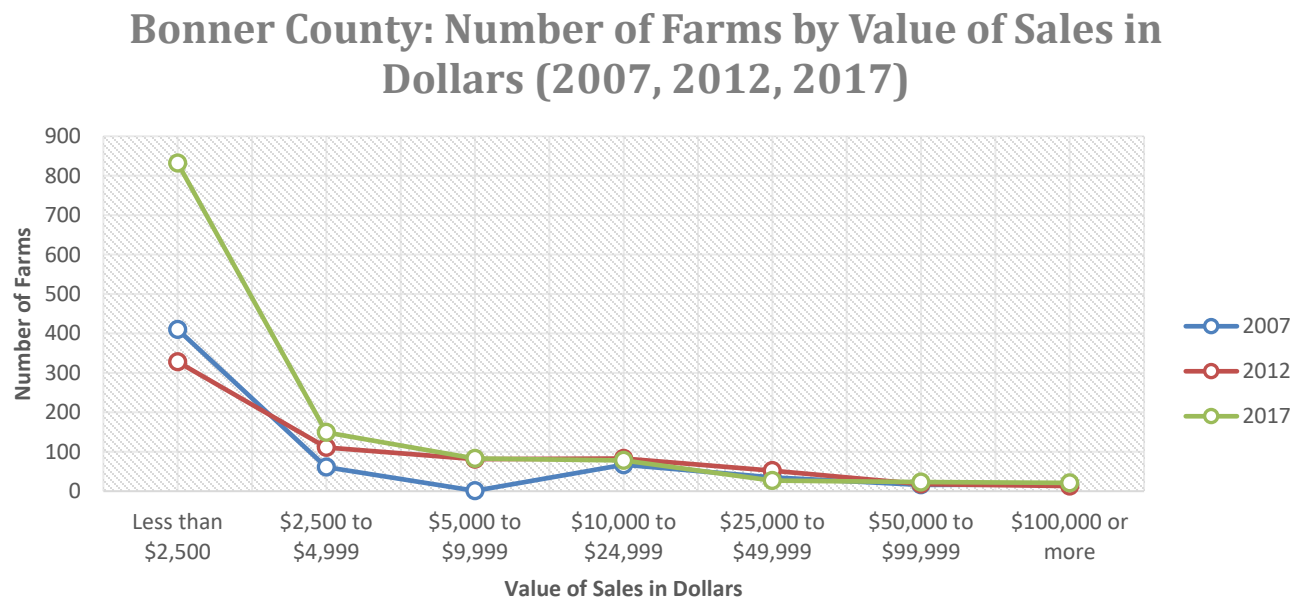
Data from the prior Comprehensive Plan shows that the local trend towards smaller scale farming has been ongoing in Bonner County since the early 2000's and mirrors a rise in small acreage farming nationally. The small-scale farming movement has encouraged many to buy smaller tracts of land and produce food to supply their families and often times sell their surplus at market or on-site farm stands. Some agribusinesses have followed the small acreage farming model and operate successful organic farms. This growth in small-acreage farming generally corresponds with the increase in number of farms depicted in Figure 2. 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.

The relatively constant number of farms larger than 50 acres over this time period indicates that there continues to be a market demand for the agricultural products that are produced on larger scale farms. This would include hay and cattle, which are two of the larger commodity categories by annual sales volume in Bonner County.

A majority of farms in the County have sales volumes that indicate they are not the sole or primary source of income for the family.

This trend towards smaller farms is reflected in an analysis of farm income. Figure 3 shows that there has been a significant growth in farms with annual sales volumes of under \$2,500. With median household income in the County being about \$51,000 (Idaho Dept. of Labor), it would seem that most farms in the County are not operated to provide the sole or primary source of income for the family.

Figure 3 Bonner County: Number of Farms by Value of Sales (2007, 2012, 2017)



Source:

2007 Census of Agriculture - County Data, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service
 2012 Census of Agriculture - County Data, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service
 2017 Census of Agriculture - County Data, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service

The value of food sold directly from farms to consumers has nearly doubled from 2012 to 2017.

Table 2 shows that the annual value of food sold directly by producers to consumers grew from about \$397k to \$755k over this time period. This indicates that a significant amount of food produced in the County is sold through farm stands, farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs and other direct to consumer market channels. All the county sub-area plans expressed support for continuing to enable these small-scale direct to consumer models for locally grown foods.

Table 2 Food Marketing Channels

Food Marketing Practices (\$000)	2012	2017
Value of food sold directly to consumers	\$ 397	\$ 755
Nursery, Greenhouse, Floriculture, Sod	NA	\$ 195
Cultivated Christmas Trees	NA	\$ 307

Source:

2012 Census of Agriculture - County Data, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service
 2017 Census of Agriculture - County Data, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service

County Sub-Area plans expressed support for maintaining a viable agriculture sector.

All five of the Bonner County Sub-Area plans identified Goals and/or Objectives supporting the continuation of viable agricultural uses in their respective areas. All the sub area plans identified a desire to maintain the current rural character of Bonner County as the primary overall goal for the new Comprehensive Plan. Maintaining agricultural uses ranging from small scale “hobby farms” on up to larger commercial farms was cited as a critical element of maintaining the County’s rural character.

The following are a representative sample of agriculture related goals/objectives from the sub-area plans:

- To retain commercial agriculture, and hobby farms as viable uses. (Selle)
- Land use regulations and policies that foster traditional rural lifestyles, rural-based economies, and opportunities to both live and work in rural areas, including supporting working farms, ranches, and forestry. (Sagle)
- As farmland diminishes across rural America, the community recognizes the need to protect agricultural pursuits within the Priest Lake Area. (Priest Lake)
- The purpose of The Plan’s vision is to: Support small scale (family) agriculture and forestry. (Priest River/Oldtown)
- A local culture that values natural resources, rural lifestyles and unincorporated communities. This includes, but is not limited to, an acceptance and understanding of the importance of income generating opportunities such as logging, livestock grazing, farming... (Southwest Bonner County)

In light of the community desire to maintain a viable agriculture sector, the sub-area plans identified a number of goals/objectives that touch on other components of the Comprehensive Plan and which are necessary to support the overall agriculture goal:

- Protecting environmental quality so that farming continues to be a viable use in the county.
- Protecting agricultural uses and activities from conflicts arising out of nearby residential, commercial and industrial uses.
- Developing land use regulations that support and enable home-based occupations and farm-based businesses.

Bonner County’s agriculture sector has a long history and has been an important element of the community for many years. Its presence is a key factor in establishing the county’s rural character which is highly prized by its residents. The community has expressed the desire to continue to enable viable agricultural uses ranging from small hobby farms all the way to larger commercial enterprises. Realizing the community’s desire will require preserving the natural resources necessary for successful agricultural pursuits, implementing land use policies that provide opportunities for agricultural land uses, and enabling uses such as farm stands and agribusinesses to coexist with farms in the rural areas of Bonner County.

Appendix

Table 3 Bonner County: Number of Farms by Size in Acres (2007, 2012, 2017)

	2007	2012	2017
Total Number of Farms	687	686	1213
Percent Change in Total Number of Farms		-0.1%	76.8%
1 -9 acres	58	88	302
10 – 49 acres	304	262	574
50 – 179 acres	191	178	205
180 – 499 acres	102	135	93
500 – 999 acres	19	14	32
1000+ acres	13	9	7

Source:

2007 Census of Agriculture - County Data, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service

2012 Census of Agriculture - County Data, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service

2017 Census of Agriculture - County Data, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service

Table 4 Bonner County: Number of Farms by Value of Sales in Dollars

	2007	2012	2017
Total Number of Farms	687	686	1213
Less than \$2,500	410	328	832
\$2,500 to \$4,999	61	111	149
\$5,000 to \$9,999	1	81	83
\$10,000 to \$24,999	67	83	78
\$25,000 to \$49,999	35	52	27
\$50,000 to \$99,999	16	18	23
\$100,000 or more	17	13	21

Source:

2007 Census of Agriculture - County Data, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service

2012 Census of Agriculture - County Data, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service

2017 Census of Agriculture - County Data, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service

Bibliography

USDA - National Agricultural Statistics Service - Census of Agriculture. (n.d.). Retrieved April 5, 2023, from <https://www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus/>