

Resources  
for the  
Beginning  
Farmer

# Start Farming in King County



Get started on the right path  
to farm business success!



King County

# Learn to Farm

A good first step for aspiring farmers is to learn about the fundamental skills necessary to run a farm. Typically, there are three ways to get started: classroom training programs, farm incubator programs, and on-farm work. You can try out one or complete all three to see if farming is right for you!

## TRAINING PROGRAMS

Programs for those who have minimal to no experience farming or managing a farm business.

**Viva Farms' Practicum in Sustainable Agriculture (PSA):** This is a bilingual (English-Spanish) hands-on, applied course in certified organic production practices and small farm business management. Participants will learn techniques of sustainable agricultural production on a certified organic parcel, located at one of the Viva Farms incubator sites. This program is accredited through Skagit Valley College and Seattle Central College. To apply for the PSA, visit [vivafarms.org](http://vivafarms.org).

**Highline College's Sustainable Agriculture Certificate/Degree Program:** Offers a 3-course certificate, 1-year certificate, and/or a 2-year (transfer option) degree to prepare students for a rewarding career in farming, conservation, education, non-profit, or food system related work. Visit [sustainableag.highline.edu](http://sustainableag.highline.edu) for more

**Washington State University's (WSU) Cultivating Success Program:** This three-course series provides planning and decision-making tools, production skills, and support necessary to develop a sustainable small acreage farm. For more information visit [foodsystems.wsu.edu/cultivating-success/](http://foodsystems.wsu.edu/cultivating-success/)

**Organic Farm School:** a full-time, 8-month, experiential training program designed for aspiring farmers to learn and practice the skills they need to run a small-scale organic farm. Located on Whidbey Island. For more information visit [organicfarmschool.org](http://organicfarmschool.org).



## FARM INCUBATOR PROGRAMS

Incubator farms offer beginning farmers a more hands-on approach to learning. These programs provide temporary and affordable access to small plots of land, equipment, and infrastructure. Incubators allow farmers to develop their commercial farming skills and build capital.

**Viva Farms Farm Business Incubator Program:** This bilingual program offers support to both beginning farmers and experienced farm workers in five essential areas: access to land, infrastructure and equipment; markets, capital and training. Based in Mount Vernon and Woodinville. To apply for the incubator program visit [vivafarms.org](http://vivafarms.org).

## ON-FARM WORK

Working on a farm provides invaluable knowledge, skills, and experience. Established farm businesses are frequently looking for employees around the start of the new year and are a great place to learn, begin building a support network, and find mentors. Some ways to connect with farm businesses include:

Inquire about on-farm work opportunities at **King County Farmers Markets:** [wafarmersmarkets.org/](http://wafarmersmarkets.org/).

**Seattle Neighborhood Farmers Market Alliance** has a list of vendors organized by market location: [seattlefarmersmarkets.org/](http://seattlefarmersmarkets.org/).

**SnoValley Tilth's Farm Directory** includes information on farmers in the Snoqualmie and Snohomish valleys: [snovalleytilth.org/member-directory/](http://snovalleytilth.org/member-directory/).

**Tilth Alliance's Farm Guide** provides contact information for farms and farmers markets across the Puget Sound. Visit [farm-guide.org/](http://farm-guide.org/).

**Craigslist** and **Good Food jobs** are also great places to find farm jobs. Visit [craigslist.org](http://craigslist.org) and [goodfoodjobs.com](http://goodfoodjobs.com).



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## Develop a Business and Marketing Plan

Identifying who will buy your products is an important first step in establishing a successful business. A reliable market is critical to financial success, and many farmers find that multiple markets will bring the most stable income. It is important to continually review your marketing strategies as additional options often develop as your farm business matures.

Below is a list of guides and templates to help you develop a business and marketing plan:

**SARE's Guide to Building a Sustainable Business:**

[sare.org/Learning-Center/Books/Building-a-Sustainable-Business](http://sare.org/Learning-Center/Books/Building-a-Sustainable-Business)

**USDA New Farmer Discovery Tool:** [newfarmers.usda.gov/discovery](http://newfarmers.usda.gov/discovery)

**University of Minnesota Guide to Building a Sustainable Business:**

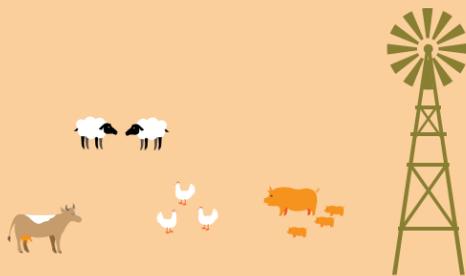
[misa.umn.edu/publications/buildingasustainablebusiness](http://misa.umn.edu/publications/buildingasustainablebusiness)

**Washington State Department of Revenue (WSDR) Start a Business Guide:**

<http://bls.dor.wa.gov/startbusiness.aspx>

**ATTRA Agricultural Businesses Planning Templates and Resources:**

[attra.ncat.org/attra-pub-summaries/?pub=276](http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub-summaries/?pub=276)



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## Finance your Farm Business

Access to capital is crucial at every stage of farming – from starting a new farm to beginning a new diversified enterprise. Accessing credit to support and grow an operation can be one of the most significant challenges to a farmer. Fortunately, there are numerous loans and grant programs designed to support farmers:

### LOAN SOURCES

• **Local banks, Community Development Financial Institutions, and Cooperative Credit**

- o Community Capital Development, Craft3, Evergreen Business Capital Rural Loan Program, Farm Bureau Bank, Mercy Corps Northwest, Northwest Farm Credit Services

• **Federal and State Loan Programs**

- o USDA Farm Service Agency: Farm Ownership Loans, Operating Loans, Microloans. Learn more at [fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA\\_File/fsa\\_br\\_01\\_web\\_booklet.pdf](http://fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/fsa_br_01_web_booklet.pdf)
- o Washington State Housing Finance Commission Beginning Farmer Rancher Program

• **Unconventional Financing Arrangements**

- o Community sourced capital, Kickstarter, and Kiva Zip

**Farm King County** provides a list of federal, state, and local grant programs. Learn more about these financing opportunities and more at: [farmkingcounty.org/farm-financing.html](http://farmkingcounty.org/farm-financing.html).

### Lenders frequently use the five “C’s” when evaluating a loan application

- 1 **C**apacity to repay the loan
- 2 **C**apital or the money you have already invested in your business
- 3 **C**haracter, or the general impression you make on the lender, including qualifications, experience, and management skills
- 4 **C**ollateral is the assets you own that the lender uses as a backup to recover funds if you happen to default on the loan
- 5 **C**onditions surrounding the intended purpose of the loan

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## Get Required Permitting and Licensing

Washington state law requires certain licenses and permits for farm and food businesses. The most comprehensive resource is WSDA's Green Book, which will help you find the right licenses, pay the proper taxes, get the necessary insurance and be sure to have the financing to make their operation a success.

Please visit WSDA's website to learn more about voluntary certifications and regulations for food processing and specific agricultural products. The WSDA Green Book explains the licensing requirements you may need to start or expand your farm business: <https://agr.wa.gov/departments/business-and-marketing-support/small-farm/greenbook>.

Farm King County's website has information about how local, state, and federal product regulations apply to farm businesses.

Their informational guides, hands-on workshops, and educational videos will help you navigate the regulatory requirements to produce certain products for sale.

**For more details, visit:**

[farmkingcounty.org/farm-product-regulations.html](http://farmkingcounty.org/farm-product-regulations.html)



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## Find a Place to Farm

The final step in this process is finding land to begin your farm business. There are multiple methods for accessing land, including ownership, leasing, and community or shared ownership. Knowing which option is right for your business is important. The following resources are helpful for assessing your options:

**PCC Farmland Trust's Farm to Farmer** enables new and expanding farmers to connect with land matching assistance. Relevant to farmers throughout the region. Visit [farmtofarmer.org/](http://farmtofarmer.org/) for more information. The Working Farmland Partnership assists King County farmers and landowners in finding land for food production. Visit <https://pccfarmlandtrust.org/the-working-farmland-partnership-keeping-land-in-production-in-king-county/> for more information.

**Viva Farms' Farm Business Incubator:** Farmers get access to certified organic land plots ranging from .25 - 10 acres, along with access to the farming essentials and technical assistance to build their farm businesses. Relevant to farmers in King and Skagit Counties. Apply at [vivafarms.org/farm-business-incubator/](http://vivafarms.org/farm-business-incubator/).

**SnoValley Tilth's Experience Farming Project:** This project offers land for individuals with experience working on farms and are ready to start their own farm business. Relevant to farmers in the Snoqualmie Valley. Email [info@snovalleytilth.org](mailto:info@snovalleytilth.org) with your personal information or call at 425-270-8469 for more details.

**Tilth Alliance's Washington FarmLink:** This program connects farmers with landowners and hosts workshops about land transition. Relevant to farmers throughout Washington State. Visit [wafarmlink.org](http://wafarmlink.org) to see a list of resources that can help you find farmland.



# Additional Resources

**Farm King County** is your one stop resource for information and assistance for your farm operation. Visit [farmkingcounty.org](http://farmkingcounty.org) for details.

**WSU Food Systems Program** provides resources and training opportunities for farmers related to business, production, and natural resource stewardship. Visit [foodsystems.wsu.edu](http://foodsystems.wsu.edu) for more information.

**Thank you to our partners:**

- **King County Local Food Initiative**
- **Farm King County**
- **Viva Farms** ([vivafarms.org](http://vivafarms.org))
- **Tilth Alliance** ([tilthalliance.org](http://tilthalliance.org))
- **SnoValley Tilth** ([snovalleytilth.org](http://snovalleytilth.org))
- **Highline College**
- **WSDA**
- **USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program**

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**VIVA FARMS**

