

Goal 3: Protect soil and water health

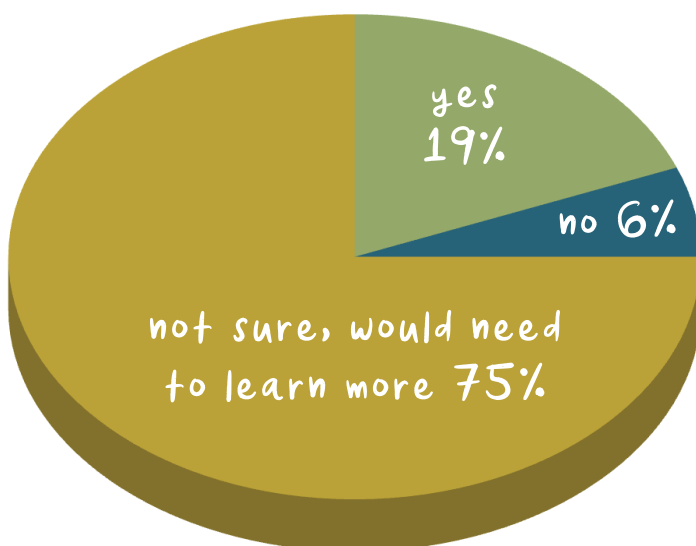
Soil and water resources in the Rogue Valley provide the very foundation of our food system. Historically, the Rogue River watershed has been one of enormous abundance – salmon runs, oak forests, meadows of camas, elk, deer, rushing rivers, hazel, berries, and much more. The agricultural management decisions made in the 1920s through 1960 profoundly reshaped this landscape. Today, the interconnected web of water, land, wildlife, and agriculture continues to feel the impact of management decisions made one hundred years ago.

The food production practices we choose can either extract from or regenerate this natural resource base. In the Rogue Valley, there is strong support for food production practices that protect and regenerate our soil and water.

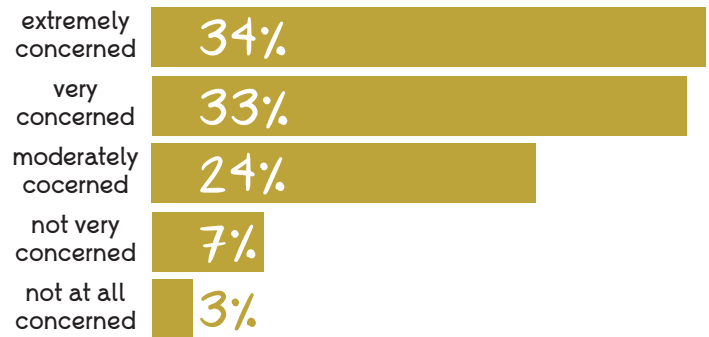
The Rogue Valley Community Food Assessment highlighted key needs and opportunities voiced by the community when it comes to protecting our environment and natural resources:

- **A shifting climate baseline** will bring significant impacts to the region: The climate in the Rogue Valley is predicted to be warmer, drier and more variable. This shift will impact the crops that can grow in this area, the prevalence of pests, water availability, and production capacity as the growing season lengthens and freezing diminishes. It also impacts the working conditions for farm laborers as long and intense heat waves and smoky summers become more frequent.

Are you interested in implementing regenerative agriculture techniques on your farm/ranch?



How concerned are you about the impact of environmental changes on your community's food system at some point in your lifetime? This may include factors such as extreme weather events, shifts in temperature patterns, wildfire and other climate-related influences.



- **Water management continues to be a pivotal issue**, with a strong need for coordination between urban and agricultural water management as well as a need to improve and incentivize better water conservation practices and infrastructure.
- **Wildfires impact food production**, labor, harvesting conditions, housing, and the quality of key products such as wine.
- **Indigenous foods** such as salmon, acorns, camas, game animals, and berries were historically plentiful in the Rogue Valley. Managing resources and partnering with Indigenous leaders and communities to support their vision of restoring indigenous foodways is an important part of natural resource management in the region and fundamental to creating a resilient, thriving, equitable food system.
- **Regenerative farming and ranching**: seventy-six percent of the producers surveyed for the Rogue Valley Community Food Assessment said that they use some form of regenerative farming or ranching practices. Technical and financial assistance were listed as the primary needs in more producers implementing regenerative practices.
- **Agricultural lands threatened by development**: Despite a 50% increase in the number of farmers in the Rogue Valley since 2012, the utilization of prime farmland to meet housing and other development needs is putting food production at risk. Although Oregon has strong exclusive farm use (EFU) protections in place, Jackson County currently has the potential to be one of the three hardest hit counties in Oregon, with 13,700 acres at risk for development by 2040.

Objectives and Actions

The objectives and actions in this goal are aimed at strategies to protect water quantity and quality, build healthy soils, and preserve land for food production.

Objective 1. Protect water quantity and quality

Actions: Ensure food systems stakeholders engage with water management stakeholders and water managers in the region; convene regional water management summits that include conservation, municipal and ag use stakeholders; facilitate and include conversations about water rights and watershed protections in collaborative water management planning; expand and promote financial and educational incentive programs for water quality enhancement ranchers in the Rogue Valley; expand access to programs and policies for safe greywater and rainwater use for irrigation; increase education and subsidize required equipment; restore acreage of land under beaver management as a component of water management strategy; explore ecosystem service credits; collaboratively develop water rate policies that reward conservation and prioritize food production; facilitate the development of a collaborative regional water management strategy; develop transparent data collection processes to assess water use by sector; develop partnerships with timberland managers and livestock producers to implement best practices for watershed protection, including sustainable forest management techniques, riparian buffers, and livestock waste management systems.

“Strengthening the Rogue Valley’s food system while preserving and restoring it’s natural resources requires convening and connecting a diverse range of stakeholders... this collaboration emphasizes the complexity of the interconnected systems that govern water, land, and wildlife, where decisions made in one domain often ripple across others.”

Objective 2. Build healthy soils

Actions: Support peer-to-peer learning and other educational programs to expand the use of climate-adapted agricultural practices that protect environmental and human health; incentivize climate resilient farm management practices that maximize soil carbon and water storage capacity of soils; expand and incentivize projects and businesses that develop compost suitable for agricultural use to improve soil health; increase access to equipment for use in regenerative farming practices; create insurance programs that support specialty crop diversity and community resilience; support education and incentive programs to support and protect biodiversity above and below ground; protect, promote, and support locally adapted seeds grown in the region; increase production and access to locally adapted specialty crops and cover crop seed, especially in quantity.

Objective 3. Preserve land for food production

Actions: Promote and ensure sustainability of programs that connect farmers with farm land; promote and educate about land use policies that prioritize food production and agricultural use needs; link regional brand and marketing to agriculture management practices that care for the environment, including soil, water, and biodiversity; develop resources to make land conservation easement opportunities accessible and easy for landowners and the community to navigate; identify gaps and opportunities in conservation and agricultural land preservation policies and programs on county, state and federal level; promote and support education and awareness of indigenous foodways; consider creating an easement for tribes on conservation lands.