

# Finding our Roots...

Encouraging Agriculture in an Urbanizing County



*Sarah Wilcox, Program Coordinator for Agricultural Assistance*

Pierce Conservation District, Puyallup, WA



# Food System Impacts...

## PCD Activities:

- **Food Policy Coalition Development**
- Capacity Building of Farmers Markets
- Senior Food Box Program
- Farmer and Consumer Cooperatives
- Urban Awareness of Local Products and Farmland Issues
- Community Gardens



# Tahoma Food Policy Coalition

*“growing a just, healthy, and sustainable food system by influencing policies, developing projects, and sharing resources.”* Since June 2008

## Stakeholders:

Health department

Parks department

Local farmers

Neighborhood & Community Orgs.

Farmers markets

Environmental organizations

And more...





# Pierce County, Washington

SQUARE MILES: 1,790

POPULATION: 805,400

PRINCIPAL CITY: Tacoma



Source: "Pierce County Profile" <http://www.co.pierce.wa.us/pc/abtus/profile.htm>



# A Fourth Generation, Looking for Roots...



1942 Victory  
Garden  
in Tacoma



Puyallup berry fields – summer 1916

Opportunity...



We have some of the best farmland (soil) in the world.



*BULB INDUSTRY BLOSSOMS. Hamilton Gronen, second from the right, and other bulb growers, examine the results of their efforts, c. 1930. By this time, 150 acres—over 11 million bulbs—had been planted in the Puyallup Valley. (Courtesy Kay Gronen.)*

38,940 acres remaining which are well suited to farming (2008).

<http://www.piercecountycd.org/images/PierceFinalReport.pdf>

Pierce County

# What Is Grown There?

- 2<sup>nd</sup> in nation for rhubarb production (2007 Ag Census)
- 9<sup>th</sup> in WA for vegetables, melons, and sweet potatoes... including: pumpkins, cabbage, lettuce, radishes, green onions, etc.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> in WA for tulip and daffodil production
- Aquaculture
- Largest egg producer in Western WA & 3<sup>rd</sup> in WA
- Many small-scale diversified operations



\$84 million  
agricultural  
goods sold  
(2007 Ag Census)

## Challenges ...



However, our local agriculture faces some big challenges.



Sept. 2008

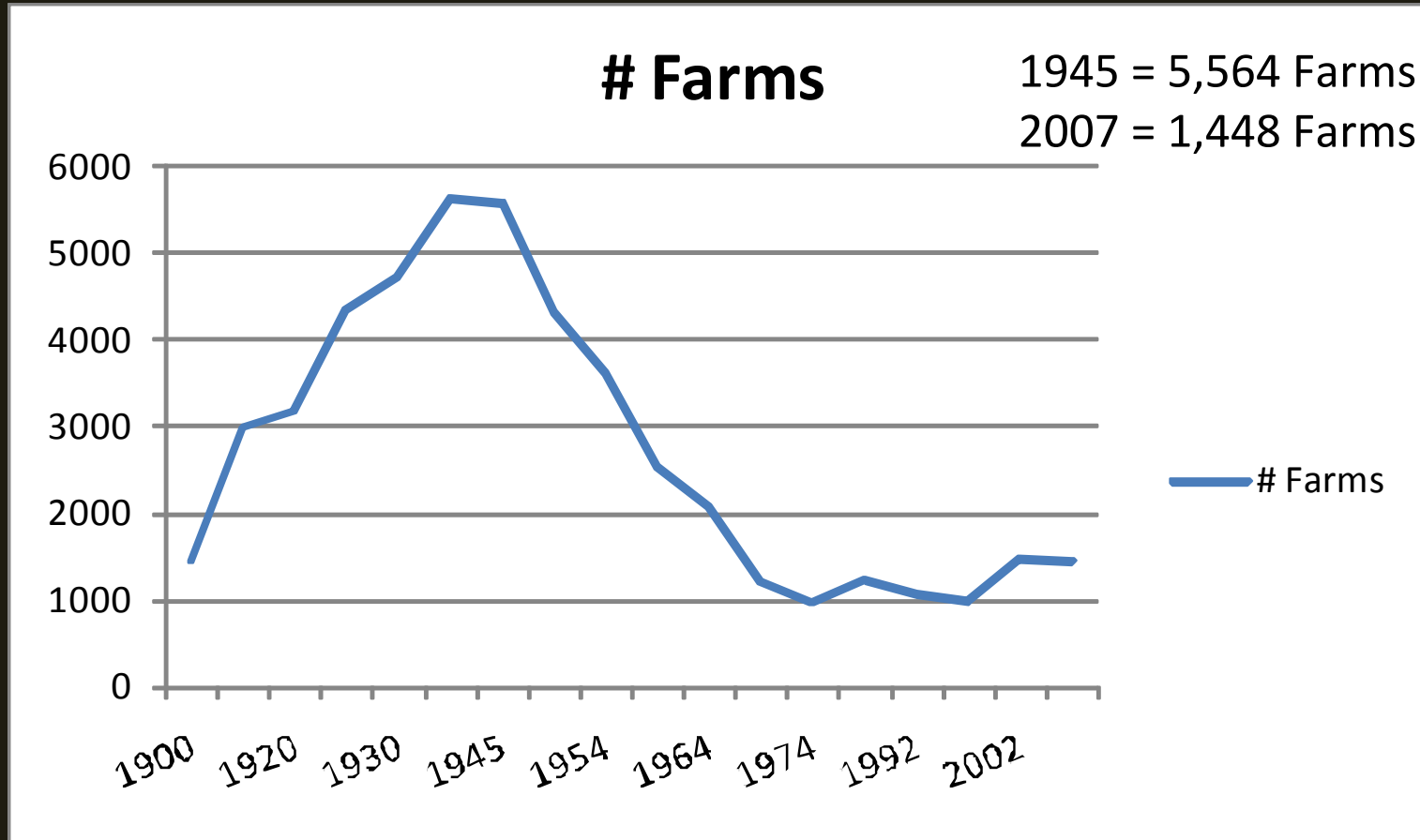


- Land Development
- High Land Prices
- Water Rights
- Aging farmer population
- Global retail markets
- Labor Issues

Pierce Co. lost 18,000 acres of farmland between 1982 and 1997.

<http://www.co.pierce.wa.us/pc/abtus/profile/agriculture.htm>

# Historical Farming Trends, Pierce County



# A Note About Soil...

*“A civilization can persist only as long as it retains enough productive soil to feed its people. A landscape’s soil budget is just like a family budget, with income, expenses, and savings. You can live off your savings for only so long before you run out of money.”*

- David R. Montgomery, *Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations* (pg. 23)

Estimated that it takes 500 years to make one inch of topsoil  
(American Farmland Trust)



American Farmland Trust - Earth as an Apple

<http://www.farmland.org/resources/reports/default.asp#>



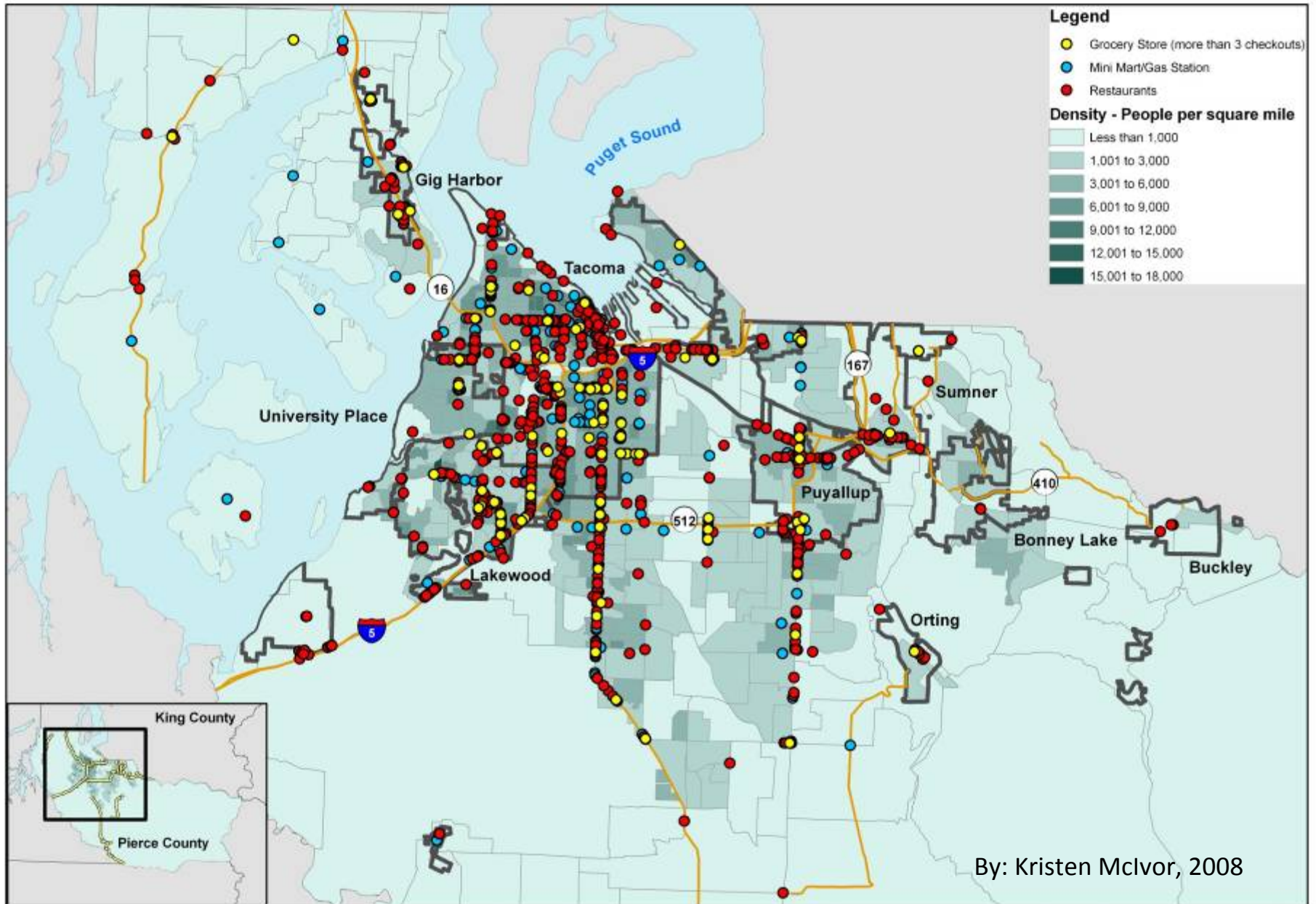
# Some Pierce County Health Stats

- 28 % of adults (163,000) are obese and an additional 37% are overweight.
- 10 % of children (10<sup>th</sup> graders) are obese and an additional 16% are overweight.
- 55 % of residents eat fast food at least once a week.
- 23 % of 10<sup>th</sup> graders eat the recommended five or more servings of fruits and vegetables daily.



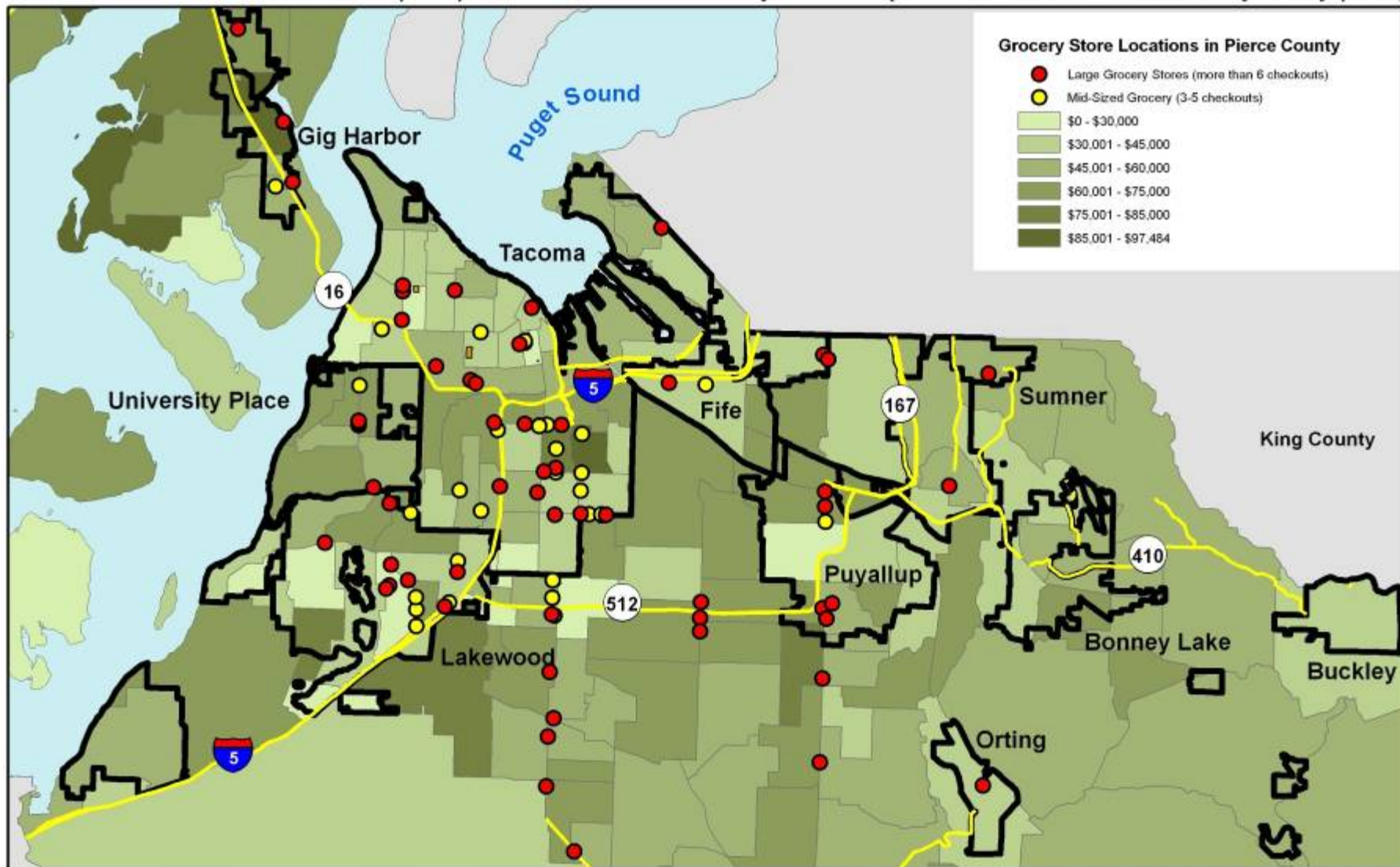
# Type of Food Outlets in Pierce County

Data Sources: US Census Bureau, 2000 and Tacoma Pierce County Health Department - Food and Community Safety, 2008



# Type of Food Outlets and Median Income in Pierce County

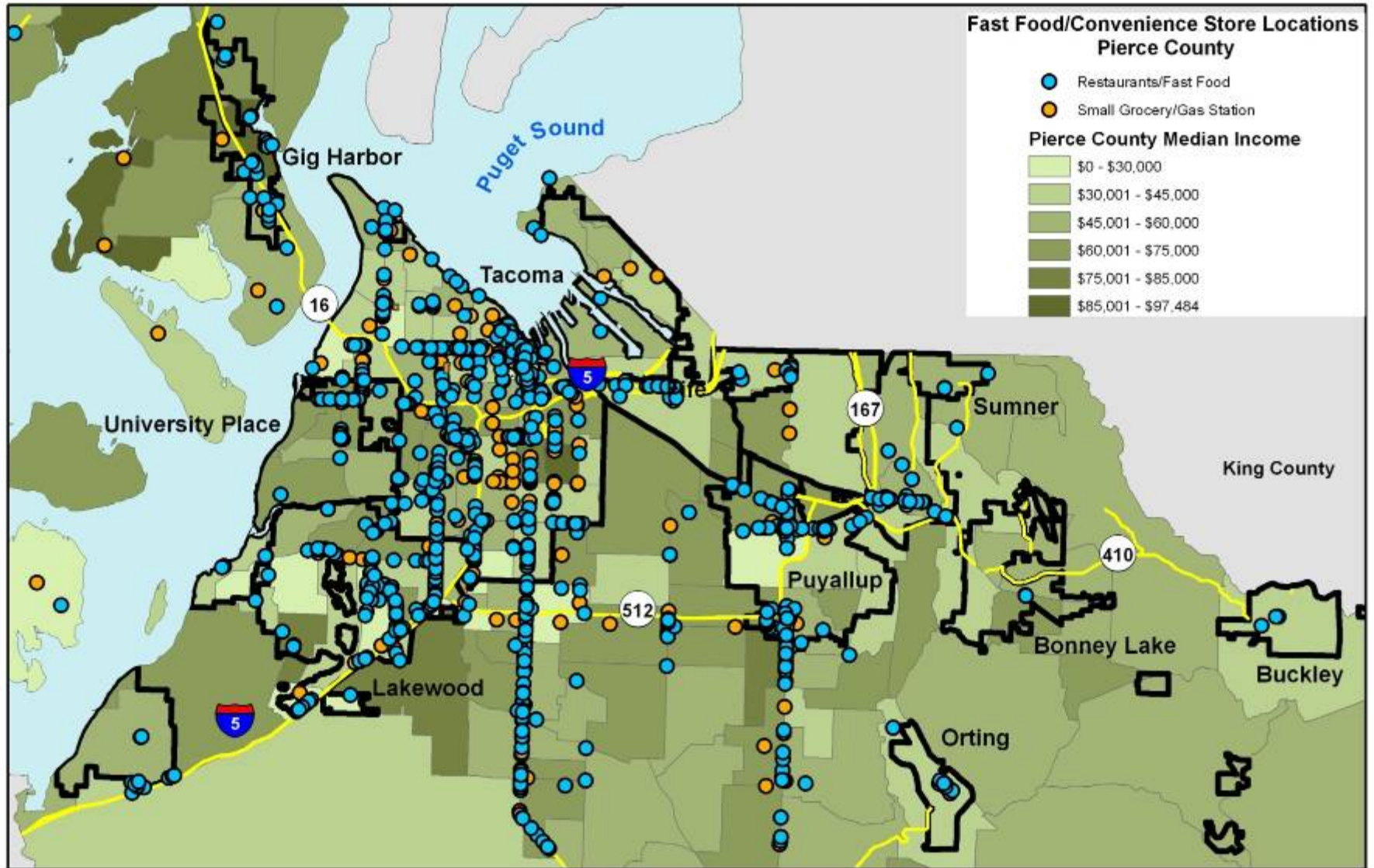
Data Source: US Census Bureau (2000) and Tacoma Pierce County Health Department - Food and Community Safety (2008)



By: Kristen McIvor, 2008

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# How does Nutrition fit in with Local Food?



- Increase in Fruit and Vegetables Consumption
  - Farmers Market = 1.5 X Increase over supermarket
    - Interaction with Farmers, “fresher” Univ. Calif. 2008
- Mostly raw foods
  - Food Processed Inputs
- Seasonality
  - Diet Variation
- Fresh
- Varieties = Taste
  - Multiplier effect?





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# Roles of Food Policy Groups

- Public food system education
- Identify and define the necessary food system
- Food system research
- Advocacy initiatives
- Guidance to elected officials & government offices
- Proposing legislation
- Establishing food projects

Source: Food Security Begins at Home: Creating Community Food Coalitions in the South,  
<http://www.foodsecurity.org/FPC/HowFoodPolicyCouncilsAreOrganizedandOperate.pdf>



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# TFPC Committees: 2009 Policy Goals



- **Distribution Committee:**

- Improve Health Department regulations, interpretation and enforcement of food sold in public/farmers markets
- Create policy recommendations to improve accessibility, marketability and distribution capacity of locally grown foods

- **Education & Health Committee:**

- Develop programs and policies to address and prevent childhood obesity and chronic disease
- Improve school nutrition in Pierce County

- **Farm Issues Committee:**

- Preserve farmland and farmers in Pierce County
- Encourage the next generation of farmers

- **Food Access Committee:**

- Development of a municipal community garden program in Tacoma
- Re-instate a gleaning program in Pierce County
- Conduct a Community Food Assessment for Pierce County

# Potential of Food Systems Work?



*At the dawn of agricultural civilizations, the 98 percent of people who worked the land supported a small ruling class that oversaw the distribution of food and resources. Today, the less than 1 percent of the U.S. population still working the land feeds the rest of us."*

-David R. Montgomery,  
*Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations*



- Re-localizing the food system
  - Saving resources: soil, water, transportation impacts
  - Building a new food economy
- Connect people with where their food
- Grow better food access in urban/rural areas
- Develop habitat & green spaces in urban areas
- Encourage healthier eating habits and behaviors....

And more.

“One might begin with the illuminating principle of Sir Albert Howard’s *The Soil and Health*, that we should understand ‘the whole problem of health in soil, plant, animal, and man as one great subject.’ Eaters, that is, must understand that eating takes place inescapably in the world, that it is inescapably an agricultural act, and that how we eat determines, to a considerable extent, how the world is used.”

- Wendell Berry, *The Pleasures of Eating* 1989

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Thank you!



APPENDIX SLIDES (Just In Case ;)

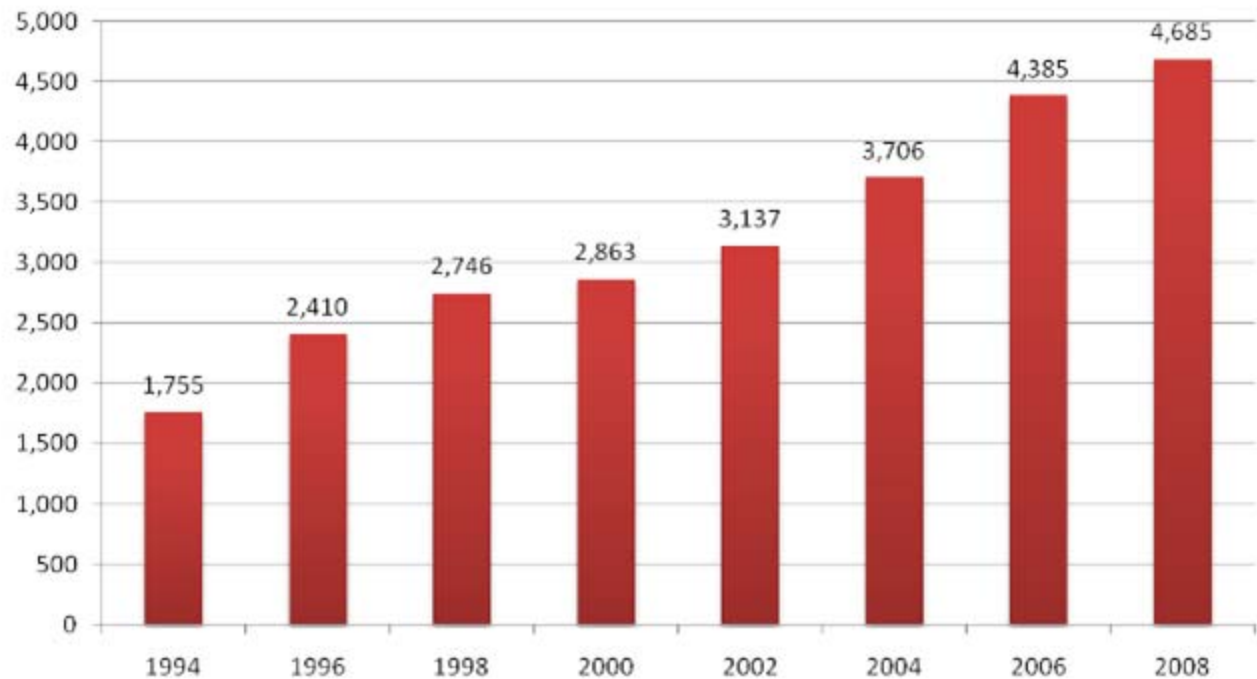




# Farmers Markets on the Rise

Creating the space for face-to-face interaction between producers and consumers...

Number of Operating Farmers Markets



According to the USDA AMS there has been a 6.8% increase in markets



# WA State Ag Facts

- Agriculture top employer in WA
- WA ag. sales = \$42 billion food and agriculture industry employs 160,000 people and contributes 13% to states economy
- More than \$9.3 billion in food and agricultural products were exported through WA ports in 2007, the third largest total in the US.
- Apples 1st, milk, wheat, potatoes 2<sup>nd</sup>,
  - » WSDA, Agriculture: A Cornerstone of WA's Economy.  
<http://agr.wa.gov/AginWA/>

# A Local Multiplier Effect



- the benefits of buying local -  
A vibrant local economy.



For every \$100 spent at a grocery store...



\$25 goes back into the local economy.

For every \$100 spent at a farmers market...



\$62 goes back into the local economy... and \$99 of the \$100 stays in the state.



- Sustainable Seattle  
Dr. Vicki Sonntag, "Economic Impact of Washington State's Farmers Markets and the WIC and Senior FNSP Farmers Markets Check Redemption Programs," January 6, 2007.  
[www.tacomafarmersmarket.com](http://www.tacomafarmersmarket.com)

# How Much of That Does the Farmer Get?



What a dollar spent on food paid for in 2000

National Trend –  
Farmer gets \$0.19 of the dollar

