

Snohomish County Executive  
**AARON REARDON**



Priorities in Action



Latest News & Upcoming Events

Friday, October 10, 2008

[www.snoco.org](http://www.snoco.org)

 **Executive Reardon and Councilman Koster proclaim Domestic Violence Awareness month**

Calling it a “critically important issue,” Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon, along with County Councilman John Koster, has declared October to be National Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

Reardon, a longtime proponent of victim awareness, wrote in the joint proclamation that domestic violence “is an epidemic affecting all communities.” Koster said during the signing that “no one is immune.”

In Snohomish County, more than 30 people have died during the past 10 years as a result of domestic violence, including 10 since March 2007. Last year, the Domestic Violence Services of Snohomish County’s emergency hotline received more than 3,000 calls for help.

Working to end domestic violence in Snohomish County are several organizations, many of which were present Wednesday for the proclamation signing.

If you or someone you know is the victim of domestic violence, or needs help due to domestic violence, please call 425-25-ABUSE (425-252-2873).

 **Focus on Farming Conference returns Nov. 20**

Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon welcomes farmers, chefs, growers and retailers to the 5th annual Focus on Farming Conference to be held Thursday, Nov. 20 at the Lynnwood Convention Center.

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**How are we doing?**

Did you know that you can track how well the County is meeting its performance goals?

The SnoStat system tracks how well the County is delivering services, the costs of those services, and the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery.

Simply visit our [SnoStat website](http://www.snoco.org).

The annual conference, initiated by Reardon and local farmers in 2004, continues to grow in attendance and participation from a broad sector, including new rural residents with an interest in farming, government agencies and individuals interested in food, sustainability and regional agriculture.

Titled “Breaking New Ground,” this year’s conference offers a diverse program featuring renowned speakers including 2008 MacArthur Fellowship winner David Montgomery, author of “Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations.”

Montgomery is a doctorate-level professor at the UW Department of Earth & Space Sciences, where he studies the evolution of topography and the influence of changing landforms on ecological systems and human societies. His most recent studies have taken him around the world, only to discover that humanity’s most necessary natural resource is most likely its soils. Yet, current mechanized agriculture has eroded much of the land, putting humanity’s future at risk.

Montgomery is expected to talk about ways to overcome these agricultural hurdles. In addition, participants will enjoy top-notch sessions on successful farming, new techniques and lucrative advice from regional experts.

All this will be pleasantly interrupted by a world-class lunch featuring local fare prepared by the Northwest’s premier chefs. The evening will end with wine tasting featuring Washington State vintners.

Breakout sessions still are being planned but participants will have a chance to learn more about distillation and wine-making, green gardens, container gardens, polyculture, product marketing, seed drying for profit, pest control and much more.

The conference will run from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the Lynnwood Convention Center, 3711 196th St. SW. Early registration is \$35 and runs through Nov. 6. After that, the cost to attend is \$45. Register online at [www.focusonfarming.org](http://www.focusonfarming.org) or by calling 425-388-7492.

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Or, [send me an email](#).

And please be sure to [visit me on the web!](#)

Sincerely,



Aaron Reardon

## Winter energy assistance program up and running

Snohomish County's energy assistance program is preparing to help nearly 8,000 low-income families and elderly needing help with this winter's energy bills.

The county expects to distribute as much as \$3.1 million in local, state and federal grant funds for energy assistance.

"In these tough economic times, we're going to find even more families needing help with energy bills," said County Executive Aaron Reardon. "We're ready to serve them and make paying the winter heating bill one less worry."

Already available is funding from the Puget Sound Energy HELP Program, which assists low-income PSE natural gas customers living in Snohomish County. The program began taking applications for assistance this week.

This past winter, the county distributed \$468,023 to 1,305 households through the program, the largest number since the program began in 2003 and a 41 percent increase over the number served in 2007. The average gas grant was \$359 per household.

This year, funding will start at \$417,683 with the potential for more to be made available as the season continues. Program guidelines allow household income up to 150 percent of the federal poverty level.

Federal assistance distributed through Snohomish County is expected to be available by Nov. 17. This past winter, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) provided nearly \$1.9 million in assistance to 4,589 low-income families living in Snohomish County.

Initial funding ran out, but Reardon and others petitioned for additional funding, which the Washington Congressional delegation eventually secured.

"What we had wasn't enough to help our hard-working families needing a quick lift," said Ken Stark, the county's Human Services Department director. "Finding additional ways to help them is what government should be about."

As a result, it's estimated by county officials that this year's funding could be nearly 50 percent higher at \$2.7 million. Final allocations to counties are expected in the next two to three weeks.

Assuming such an increase, more than 6,600 families will benefit this season from this federally funded program.

Average grants last year were \$408 per household and are expected to be the same this year. Program guidelines allow household income up to 125 percent of the federal poverty level.

Families needing assistance should call 425-388-3880 and set up an appointment.

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## **County protects farmland through PDR pilot program**

Snohomish County has preserved more than 50 acres of farmland in the Tualco Valley near Monroe through its Purchase of Development Rights pilot program.

In particular, the county has successfully purchased permanent conservation easements restricting future development on 52 acres of land owned by the Broers, long-time Snohomish County farmers.

In 2004, Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon recommended creating the grant-funded Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) pilot program so as to save prime farmland from increasing development pressures. The County Council approved the plan, which allows for continued farming of the land once easements are purchased.

“We must balance growth with protecting our agricultural heritage – not only the farmland itself, but farming as a family livelihood,” Reardon said. “Preserving the Broers’ farm, which has been used by this family for four generations, is a step toward keeping a diverse and prosperous agricultural industry.”

Agriculture is a \$127 million industry in Snohomish County. Today, there are approximately 1,600 farms in

Snohomish County. About 70 percent of those farms are family or individually owned.

The Tualco Valley near Monroe was selected as a target area because it traditionally has been a highly productive agricultural area in Snohomish County. Yet, market forces recently have made land there more valuable for residential and commercial development than for farming.

“The PDR program is proving to be a useful tool in preserving Snohomish County’s farmland,” said Dave Remlinger, a Monroe-area farmer and chairman of the Snohomish County Agricultural Advisory Board. “Despite the current economic situation, pressure to convert farmland to non-farm uses will continue.”

Funding for the project comes primarily from grants awarded to the county by the state Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) and the federal Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

For the Broers’ Organic Berry Farm – which grows strawberries, raspberries, thornless blackberries, marionberries and blueberries – the county will spend \$465,430 in grant money to purchase the development rights to three parcels, making this the second purchase under the PDR program.

In 2005, Chester Hoberg agreed to sell the development rights on his 40-acre farm to the county for \$542,850. Half of the funding for the purchase came from a federal grant and the other half came from Conservation Futures Property Tax funds.

The county is in negotiations with several other farmers and hopes to have at least one more conservation easement purchase finalized before the end of the year.

“Through programs such as PDR, we can help keep farming an economically viable industry,” Reardon said.

To be considered for the PDR program, properties must meet certain eligibility criteria. For example, they must be in private ownership, have more than 50 percent prime farmland and be within the Tualco Valley eligibility area.

The purchase price of the easements is based on the difference in land value between the current agricultural use and what the land would be worth if it were subdivided and developed.

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