



Snohomish County Agriculture Action Plan

A Plan to Preserve and Enhance the
Agricultural Economy in Snohomish County

March 2005



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Overview

The first annual Focus on Farming Conference was convened on November 18, 2004 to discuss the obstacles and opportunities for local agriculture. Nearly 350 citizens attended the conference, including farmers, ranchers and growers whose roots in Snohomish County agriculture span more than five generations.

The purpose of the conference was to engage in a healthy discussion with farmers regarding farming issues in Snohomish County. We must work together to promote policies that remove barriers to economic expansion into new markets, while at the same time increasing the opportunity for farmers to seek out their own economic goals within our community.

Agriculture is a vital industry in Snohomish County that must be preserved and enhanced. Government's role should be as a collaborative partner with farmers to continuously work through issues and challenges as they are identified. A viable and vigorous agricultural economy is a high priority for my administration, as it is a critical element of Snohomish County's economy.



This report outlines an agriculture action plan based on input from the conference. This document builds the foundation to assist local governments, organizations, farmers and citizens to strengthen the Snohomish County agricultural community.

The Snohomish County Agriculture Action Plan is structured by the issues and categories identified at the Focus on Farming Conference. It is performance based, as it identifies action items and measurable outcomes within four issue areas:

- Farm Regulation Reform
- Economic Development
- Outreach and Education
- Cultural Heritage

These four areas are intrinsically linked, each forming a critical link in the agricultural chain. Well-thought out plans, coupled with the ongoing focus of this and future administrations, will collectively spell success for agriculture in Snohomish County. My administration will ensure that these links are not only maintained but also strengthened over time.

Findings:

- Regulatory redundancies increase costs and impair predictability. Regulatory reform must focus on achieving outcomes, not bureaucratic processes. Snohomish County Government must ensure that regulations are outcome-based, streamlined and simplified. The goals of regulations should be to reach the desired result in as few steps as possible. Permit applications should be simplified and permit assistance by staff at the front end will result in a complete application, fewer denials and fewer appeals.
- Agriculture is a vital component of a healthy and diverse economy. Snohomish County Government must ensure that agriculture is included in every economic development plan and that economic incentives are identified and pursued for the industry's health and prosperity.


Overview

- The agricultural industry and economy affects the health of the entire community, both socially and economically. Snohomish County Government must promote and encourage outreach and education assistance to increase the level of public understanding and appreciation of local agriculture.
- Agriculture is part of the social, economic and environmental fabric of Snohomish County. It is emblematic of the enduring values of this community. Snohomish County Government must communicate the value of the cultural heritage of the industry, both verbally and through its policies. A change in cultural and governmental mindset is required. It must be recognized that farmers are stewards of the land and are focused on the continued productivity of the land. Farmers are not impediments to environmental quality; they are imperative to the health of the environment. Environmental stewardship, economic prosperity and the health and security of our food supply are staples of a thriving agricultural community.

Partnerships are required to effectively address the issues outlined in this plan. No single agency or industry can do it alone. I want to thank the Snohomish County Council for partnering with me in sponsoring the 2004 Focus on Farming Conference. I also want to thank the more than 300 farmers, ranchers and growers who took time out of their busy schedules to provide their insights and ideas on how to improve the agricultural economy in Snohomish County.

It is important to recognize where we are, why this plan has been developed and why it is important to act now. Over the years, Snohomish County has seen a continued decline in farming and the numbers of farms in production. We are now at a crossroads. This plan, if implemented, followed-through and measured can help this county change its future. However, if this plan sits idle and the politicians of today follow the direction of those who came before them, the agriculture industry and the families who farm this land will continue to decline. Our economy will forever lack the necessary components of stability and valuable, nutrient-rich land will lay fallow.

I will convene the second annual Focus on Farming Conference in November 2005 to discuss our progress with the action plan and assess our focus and priorities for 2006. I look forward to working collaboratively with farmers, as well as with local, regional, state and federal agencies, both public and private, to implement the action plans to ensure the future viability and vitality of the agriculture industry in Snohomish County.



Aaron Reardon
Snohomish County Executive

Farm Regulation Reform

Regulations are necessary to many aspects of our lives, from health and education to the environment and the economy. However, when regulations and bureaucracy impede the sustainability of any vital industry, appropriate intervention is necessary.

Historical Perspective

In the 1800s, agriculture was the primary industry in Snohomish County. As mills opened and the industrial age developed, more people were attracted to the area as the County's economy diversified.

As the economy expanded and knowledge increased, industries were regulated by legislation aimed at protecting workers and the environment. Federal regulations set forth in the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act have impacted agriculture in Snohomish County.

These landmark federal regulations grew out of a public desire to regain and leave clean water for their generation and generations to follow. The regulations had a profound impact on the waters and species of our nation. Since that time, much more environmental legislation has been enacted at the state and local level which has created a complex array of regulations for not just the agricultural community but for every county business.

The goals of preserving clean water, taking care of the land and leaving resources for future generations are not new to, or in conflict with, the agricultural community. Our farmers need assistance and partners in government to provide simplified regulations and clarified information regarding the permit regulatory process so that the good purposes of the laws are not undermined by unnecessary bureaucracy, cost and time lost.



Many farmers cite over-regulation as one of the largest obstacles to sustainable and successful agricultural activities.

As a result of the challenges associated with the regulatory process, farmers have felt that their needs were not being met and, consequently, adversarial relationships with government have developed.

Discussion

We have a great opportunity to effect meaningful change. The local permit process can be simplified and its timeliness increased in order for farmers to effectively manage their farms.

The Farm Regulation Reform elements in this section will assist in moving the regulatory process from complexity to simplicity; from needs-based to having identifiable solutions; and from adversarial relationships to partnerships that focus on solutions.

Summary of Issues

The issues identified regarding Farm Regulation Reform include:

- County permit applications are too complex.
- Staff are not familiar with permit requirements.

Farm Regulation Reform

- The Agricultural Advisory Board's role is unclear.
- Farmers are unclear on how they can participate in regulatory revision and approval processes.
- Many agricultural permits are processed as "commercial" projects.
- County code does not contain provisions for infrastructure such as slaughterhouses, canneries or auction barns near agricultural operations.
- Multiple agency permit requirements are complex and redundant.
- Dike maintenance and repair approvals are difficult and confusing.
- Signage for farming operations is too restrictive.

The following are the issues identified in the farm regulation reform area that should be undertaken to assist in agricultural growth and development.

Each issue includes an action plan as well as measurable outcomes.

Issue 1

The paperwork required for permit applications is complex, and it is difficult for farmers to determine permit requirements.

Action Plan:

1. Establish a permit assistance center for staff to work directly with farmers at the front end of the application process.
2. Simplify the permitting process and eliminate redundancy.

Outcomes:

- ✓ The regulatory burden will decrease.
- ✓ Fewer phone calls will be required.
- ✓ The duplication of requests for information will be reduced.
- ✓ Paperwork will be minimized.
- ✓ Permit applications will be easier to understand and complete.

Issue 2

County staff are unfamiliar with the requirements and operations of agricultural businesses.

Action Plan:

1. Educate key County staff and department heads about critical agricultural issues through a series of comprehensive workshops. These issues include but are not limited to: a) current and future infrastructure needs; b) transportation; c) flood protection including the economic impacts of failed flood control structures; d) labor requirements.
2. Schedule designated County staff to participate in agriculture industry meetings and events.

Outcomes:

- ✓ Agricultural customers will spend less time explaining permitting needs to staff.
- ✓ The value of the agricultural industry to the overall quality of life for Snohomish County will be emphasized.
- ✓ There will be an increased knowledge, understanding, and respect for farmers and staff to the needs of the respective industries.

Farm Regulation Reform

Issue 3
The role of the Agricultural Advisory Board is unclear to the agricultural community.

Action Plan:

1. Conduct a study involving the Agricultural Advisory Board, County Executive and County Council to review roles, responsibilities and ordinances affecting the operation of the Agricultural Advisory Board.
2. Implement the recommendations of the study to clarify and enhance the operation of the Agricultural Advisory Board.

Outcomes:

- ✓ The role of the Agricultural Advisory Board will be clearly stated.
- ✓ The Agricultural Advisory Board will have established procedures for a semi-annual review of needs for zoning code amendments.
- ✓ Procedures for operations will be revised for effectiveness and efficiency of operations.
- ✓ Community support for the Agricultural Advisory Board’s mission will increase.

Issue 4
Farmers are unclear how to participate in regulatory approval processes currently underway in Snohomish County.

Action Plan:

1. When the County proposes changes and designations to land use zoning, the County will provide adequate communications to farmers and landowners that may be affected.

2. The County will maintain an agricultural website with information on regulatory issues that could affect the agricultural community, dates for public input and County contacts. The website will also keep current Agricultural Advisory Board agendas and minutes from past meetings.

Outcomes:

- ✓ The 10-Year Comprehensive Plan Update, Shoreline Master Program Update and Critical Area Regulation revisions will have significant and valuable input from the agricultural community.
- ✓ The Right to Plow ordinance will be further clarified.
- ✓ Ties to the agricultural community will be strengthened so that opportunities for input are clear and thoughtfully considered in the decision-making processes of the County.
- ✓ All policy and regulatory review processes will be designed to receive maximum agricultural input.

Issue 5
Many agricultural permits are processed as “commercial” projects, resulting in requirements that are inconsistent with agricultural industry standards and needs.

Action Plan:

1. Create an alternative way to process agricultural permits separate and unique from residential and commercial permits.
2. Review internal processes between County departments to clarify and streamline items such as traffic safety requirements for permits.

Farm Regulation Reform

3. Provide customer-service comment opportunities to farm-permit applicants to generate feedback on the County's quality of service.

Outcomes:

- ✓ Permit requirements will be more consistent with agricultural industry standards and needs.
- ✓ Disputes associated with permit requirement interpretations will be reduced.

Issue 6

County regulations should provide for adequate agricultural infrastructure in areas convenient to agricultural operations (i.e., slaughterhouses, canneries and auction barns).

Action Plan:

Review and update comprehensive plan, zoning and development ordinances in order to remove obstacles to siting agricultural infrastructure facilities in rural areas.

Outcomes:

- ✓ Additional sites will be identified where infrastructure to support agricultural activities can be developed.
- ✓ There will be an increase in jobs and revenue in the local economy.

Issue 7

There are complex requirements with multiple agency overlap, as well as redundant/multiple permit requirements.

Action Plan:

1. Develop a standardized decision process, and a one-stop process at the local level for all local, state and federal permit requirements.
2. Work with state government to allow state permitting decisions at the local level.
3. Create a task force with farmers and local, state and federal agencies to discuss permitting obstacles and opportunities and report options for discussion at the next Focus on Farming Conference.

Outcomes:

- ✓ Requirements will be coordinated among local, state and federal agencies.
- ✓ Paperwork and conflicting requirements will be reduced.
- ✓ Permit requirements will be integrated with the farm plan needed for a variety of other reasons.

Issue 8

Approvals for dike maintenance and repair are difficult and confusing.

Action Plan:

1. Review the options for a process that would authorize the County to approve maintenance-level work on existing dikes via a single site inspection.

Farm Regulation Reform

2. Develop an annual programmatic permit approval to maintain and repair existing dikes.

Outcome:

- ✓ The process for dike maintenance and repair approvals will be simplified.
- ✓ Time involvement for both the farmer and the County will be reduced.

Issue 9

Signage for all types of farm operations is too restrictive; sign permits are too difficult and expensive to obtain.

Action Plan:

1. Identify and implement methods to simplify regulations pertaining to signage.
2. Coordinate with municipalities to adopt signage policies in support of agriculture.

Outcomes:

- ✓ There will be an increase in visibility for farm businesses through signage.
- ✓ The creative use of signage in support of agri-tourism will generate more tourists' interests.

Economic Development

Historical Perspective

Agriculture has been one of the defining economic cornerstones in Snohomish County. As pressure to transfer agricultural lands to other suburban and urban uses increases, there is an obvious need to protect these lands from development if agriculture is to be preserved.

Discussion

The best way to accomplish preservation is for these lands and the farmers who work them to become economically viable. By appointing an Agriculture Coordinator, the County Executive has initiated an effort to define what the County can do to support agricultural/economic development interests.

In order to ensure success in the preservation of family farms and agricultural sustainability, an economic blueprint is needed to effectively prioritize the resources for this industry.

There is tremendous agreement that saving family farms is vital to preserving the quality of life for all residents of Snohomish County. However, preservation can only happen if farmers have the opportunity to be profitable in their business.

The input regarding economic development activities generated at the Focus on Farming Conference represents a first opportunity to address the needs of existing businesses and remove barriers to expansion into new markets.

Summary of Issues

The issues identified regarding economic development include:

- The lack of a blueprint for agricultural economic growth



- Production and infrastructure roadblocks
- Exploring financing opportunities
- Land use compatibility
- Few agricultural marketing and promotion activities
- Building and expanding partnerships

The issues presented in this section revolve around six primary areas. Each issue has an action plan and identifies measurable outcomes.

Issue 1
There is a lack of an organizational structure necessary to develop a blueprint for agricultural growth in the county.

Action Plan:

1. The County Executive will name an advisory group for proposing agricultural economic recovery and expansion strategies. The advisory group will be composed of a wide variety of agricultural disciplines, members of the financial community, operators of infrastructure businesses and appropriate agencies.

Economic Development

2. Build strategic alliances with other counties and regional entities to pool and leverage resources in areas of economic development that make more sense at a supra-county level.

Outcome:

- ✓ The County Executive's agricultural advisory group will specifically look for ways to address agricultural economic growth.
- ✓ The County will be able to more efficiently and effectively review and benchmark current activities and also respond to new economic challenges and opportunities.

Issue 2

Production and infrastructure obstacles create roadblocks to successful farming operations.

Action Plan:

1. Assess the current and future needs of agricultural infrastructure.
2. Assess current and future transportation issues affecting agriculture.
3. Assess current and future flood protection needs and the potential economic impacts of flood control structure failure.
4. Perform an audit of agricultural staffing and financial resources in County departments, Snohomish Conservation District, Washington State University, Cascade Harvest Coalition, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and other agencies providing services to our farmers. Propose changes to County Executive that improve services delivered by these agencies to farmers.

5. Actively recruit new processing facilities to locate in Snohomish County in order to expand the value-added capacity of the industry. These facilities will include but not be limited to a USDA Certified processing facility for beef and chicken; as well as berry, jam, juice, and syrup processors.
6. Review agricultural labor needs.
7. Analyze dairy pricing dynamics and explore new opportunities for value-added products.
8. Provide additional research for corn silage "seed" product in Western Washington.

Outcomes:

- ✓ Increased understanding of the infrastructure needs of farmers.
- ✓ Increased understanding of the transportation obstacles to successful farming and agri-tourism.
- ✓ Farmer-friendly infrastructure planning and decision-making.
- ✓ Improved service to farmers.
- ✓ New local processing opportunities will be available to farmers.
- ✓ A better understanding of the labor market and the costs to farmers will be known.
- ✓ Greater public awareness of the needs of dairy farmers and a better understanding of how dairy prices are determined.
- ✓ Production opportunities for farmers will be expanded.
- ✓ Research opportunities in the Northwest will increase.

Economic Development

Issue 3

Limited financial resources are available to assist farmers.

Action Plan:

1. Assess the feasibility of developing a corporation that could assist in all areas of agricultural financing, including low interest loans, loan guarantees, grants, and grant matching funds.
2. Increase business development assistance to agriculturally based businesses, including assistance in business plan development, marketing, and financial management.
3. Focus on increasing grant expertise on behalf of the agricultural industry.
4. Review the tax structure in Snohomish County for equity for farmers.
5. Require an economic impact analysis for regulations.
6. Participate with Skagit, Whatcom, San Juan, and Island Counties in development of an Agriculture Incubation Program to assist in providing farmers with the facilities and expertise to develop value-added products.
7. Establish a Fix-Up Fund which will provide low interest loans and grant dollars for farm-site renovation and rehabilitation projects.
8. Make salmon recovery a viable agricultural enterprise. Compensate landowners for improving habitat, and utilize conservation programs such as Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) and Purchase of Development Rights (PDR).



Outcomes:

- ✓ The tax structure in Snohomish County will be more equitable.
- ✓ Regular fund sources will be available for conservation easement-type payments.
- ✓ The Comprehensive Plan will provide for farmland preservation through payments such as transfer development rights (TDRs) and purchase development rights (PDRs).
- ✓ The cost and value of a new regulation will be known.
- ✓ A central support network will be created to help new entrepreneurs get started or sustain and expand existing enterprises.
- ✓ Pride in buildings and equipment in rural areas will increase.
- ✓ Farmers will have funds available to improve farm appearance.

Economic Development

Issue 4

Land use incompatibility negatively impacts farmers' ability to continue farming.

Action Plan:

1. Comprehensive Plan updates should address land adjacency issues with agricultural land and agricultural industries.
2. Review the inclusion of forestry lands as part of the agricultural initiative, specifically farm forestry and agro-forestry on agriculturally zoned lands.
3. Continue to work with area farmers on clarification of the Right to Plow initiative.
4. Review studies of drainage impacts from upland development to resource agricultural lands and establish a policy for public or development responsibilities related to those impacts.

Outcomes:

- ✓ Greater understanding of the implications of encroaching development on farmlands will be achieved.
- ✓ The financial impact of drainage impacts related to upland development will be identified.
- ✓ Regulations and procedures will be in line with the Right to Plow initiative.
- ✓ Exemptions associated with normal agricultural practices will be clarified for farmers and County staff.

Issue 5

Population growth and development often create incompatible land uses and traffic congestion in farming areas.

Action Plan:

Identify areas of traffic interference with farming activities. Make recommendations and allocate funds and staff resources to mitigate the interference.

Outcomes:

- ✓ An understanding of the range of issues associated with traffic hazards for farmers and which time of the year is most dangerous will be known.
- ✓ A range of options to change traffic patterns to assist farmers will be provided.
- ✓ Awareness of the needs of the farming community will increase for all drivers and users of the road.

Issue 6

Current agricultural marketing and promotion activities are not coordinated to achieve maximum impact and effectiveness in Snohomish County.

Action Plan:

1. Develop a marketing campaign for the sale of Snohomish County agricultural products and promotion of agri-tourism.
2. Establish a farmers market association to assist in promotion and development of farmers markets.
3. Establish an agricultural special events team to organize and market annual events.
4. Develop producer cooperatives to assist growers in accessing larger markets.
5. Develop new links and use existing links between local farm product producers, schools and institutions for the purpose of expanding markets and educating consumers.

Economic Development

6. Establish a permanent regional farmers market.

Outcomes:

- ✓ Agri-tourism will be expanded.
- ✓ Improved promotion and development of farmers markets will occur.
- ✓ New farmers market sites will be established.
- ✓ Sales from farmers markets will increase.
- ✓ More farmers will be able to sell their products at markets.
- ✓ A calendar of agricultural events will be produced for distribution throughout the Puget Sound region to reach more customers.
- ✓ More members of the agricultural community will be involved in events to promote the region and its products.
- ✓ Local farmers will have additional opportunities to develop value-added products.
- ✓ New opportunities will be available for small farm businesses to utilize facilities they may otherwise be unable to afford.
- ✓ Healthier meals made from local farm products will be provided at local schools and institutions.
- ✓ Sales of locally grown farm products will increase because citizens will want to buy from local farmers.

Issue 7

There is a need to build and expand partnerships between the farming community and agencies.

Action Plan:

1. Include agricultural representation on the Economic Development Council.
2. Expand partnerships between local agencies, as well as with regional natural resource and salmon recovery efforts such as Shared Strategy for Puget Sound. Promote salmon-friendly farming by providing stewardship incentives to farmers and by developing public awareness of the benefits to salmon of well-farmed land. Promote salmon-friendly labeling both with consumers and farmers.
3. Continue agricultural representation in the watershed salmon conservation forums to ensure salmon conservation recommendations are well-grounded in the related needs of the agricultural community.
4. Invigorate and add focus to the partnerships between the agricultural community and local government.

Outcomes:

- ✓ All local and regional economic development strategies will include an agriculture component.
- ✓ There will be more exposure to economic opportunities.
- ✓ Business Community will see Agriculture as a viable industry in Snohomish County.
- ✓ A win-win situation will be created for fish and farmers.
- ✓ There will be a better understanding of farm stewardship issues by local government.
- ✓ Cities will have a better idea of the importance of the agricultural lands for their quality of life and feeding their population.

Outreach and Education

Historical Perspective

Urbanization has increased the pressure to convert farmlands to residential uses. As development encroaches on farmlands, there are increasing nuisance complaints from the public about farming activities.

In part, public understanding of agriculture has diminished because agriculture curriculum in public schools has given way to more “core academic” classes. Agriculture’s educational efforts now focus primarily on rural schools instead of urban schools, where greater populations exist and where there is greater market potential for local agriculture.

The ambiguity of definitions in Snohomish County Code creates confusion about permitted activities on farmlands. Some farmers perceive government, particularly County government, as “regulators” with an agenda that is in opposition to farmers’ interests. There is also considerable misunderstanding between local government and the farming community about priorities for environmental protection and the viability of local agriculture.

Further, the public, particularly the younger generation, does not understand the relationships between food prices, food safety, farmland preservation and the sustainability of working family farms.

The lack of a broad, inclusive communications process between the County and the farming community causes many farmers to feel that they are not adequately consulted when regulations are developed that affect them.

Discussion

Environmental and land-use regulations affecting farmlands in Snohomish County are complex and often change. Complex regulations



and lengthy permitting processes are serious obstacles for farmers, impeding both traditional farming activities and new entrepreneurial endeavors.

The agricultural community expressed interest in a mechanism to learn about the latest technology or research in order to apply it to their business. Young people must learn about the merits of farming so they will view it as a viable career option.

Finally, we need better communication between agricultural groups, boards, associations, agencies, clubs and other agriculture stakeholders so that limited resources are used more effectively on behalf of the whole industry.

Summary of Issues

The issues identified regarding outreach and education include:

- A lack of public understanding of local agriculture.
- A lack of a cohesive voice to represent the agricultural industry.
- A lack of understanding by farmers of regulations affecting agriculture.

Outreach and Education

The comments at the Focus on Farming Conference reflect the feelings and frustration in the agricultural community. There is a sense that partnerships and an agricultural message for consumers need to be developed. The comments are categorized as “Issues” and are outlined below. Each issue has an action plan and includes measurable outcomes.

Issue 1

The current level of public understanding and appreciation of local agriculture does not favor success for farmers.

Action Plan:

1. Create a stronger pro-farming presence in all environmental or conservation education efforts presently underway, or undertaken in the future, by Snohomish County, the Snohomish Conservation District and other agencies receiving County funding, to enhance the visibility and understanding of the character, value and importance of local agriculture.
2. Develop and implement a roadside signage program that informs and educates motorists about specific farming activities on adjacent properties, as well as surrounding rural lands and farming communities in general.
3. Seek grant funding to support more outreach and educational efforts by agricultural organizations and farm advocacy groups in the county.
4. Raise public awareness and appreciation of County farmers by increasing the presence and visibility of locally grown food at the annual Evergreen State Fair.

5. Implement a media relations program to increase press coverage of farm community issues, achievements and events. Prepare informational materials, conduct field tours and other special events to enhance journalists’ knowledge of local agriculture; include training for farmer participants/hosts.

Outcomes:

- ✓ A consistent message will be transmitted to farmers and the public about County priorities for preserving farmlands and farming operations.
- ✓ Existing County outreach resources and expertise will be used more efficiently.
- ✓ Public awareness of the use and value of fields and the open spaces that surround them will increase.
- ✓ Farmers will receive public recognition for their farming operations.
- ✓ More community resources and energy will be mobilized on behalf of agriculture.
- ✓ An improvement in partnerships between the County and local agriculture will result as the County utilizes its expertise and resources to empower farming groups.
- ✓ The public will receive more pro-farming information directly from the farming community.
- ✓ Existing County resources will be used to reach a mass audience.
- ✓ In addition to entertainment, fairgoers will have an opportunity to enjoy locally grown food.
- ✓ The actual business value of the fair will be increased for local growers.
- ✓ Journalists will have a broader and more accurate understanding of agricultural issues.

Outreach and Education

- ✓ Journalists will receive more leads, support and appreciation for agricultural coverage, thereby making their work easier and increasing the likelihood of articles being published.
- ✓ An increase in the publication of news and human-interest stories about local agriculture from a non-sales oriented, trusted source will occur.

Issue 2

Local agriculture has lacked a cohesive voice to represent the industry as a whole in public policy matters that affect farmers.

Action Plan:

Convene an annual “Focus on Farming Conference” to bring agricultural groups, farm organizations and farmers together to provide educational forums on emerging topics, discuss issues and formulate policy recommendations to local and state government.



Outcomes:

- ✓ A communications infrastructure will continue to be used for agricultural groups to share views.
- ✓ The County will take advantage of an efficient method for communicating with diverse agricultural organization leaders.
- ✓ A formal mechanism will be in place for obtaining reliable feedback on agricultural industry preferences and opinions on County proposals.

Issue 3

A lack of understanding of the regulations affecting agriculture is a major obstacle to the success of working family farms in the county.

Action Plan:

1. Continue to develop and promote the County’s Focus on Farming website with the following priorities:
 - Assist farmers in understanding County regulations that most affect them, and in communicating with specialized staff who can help them with permitting matters.
 - Provide a centralized informational resource for local farm community events and activities.
 - Provide an information and referral service for farmers to obtain technical and business assistance.

Outreach and Education

2. Conduct a series of “Farming Issues & Answers” workshops in which farmers meet with technical experts, agency representatives and County staff on subjects such as:
 - Working with environmental regulations
 - Diversifying a farm business; laws and licenses
 - Health regulations for direct marketers
 - Stewardship programs that pay you
 - Big rivers, fish and farms

Outcomes:

- ✓ Farmers will be better informed on environmental and land use regulations that affect them.
- ✓ There will be higher farm-customer satisfaction with County regulatory services.
- ✓ A more convenient permit application process for farm customers will be seen.
- ✓ Farmers will have direct access to specialized expertise on agricultural regulations and economic development opportunities.
- ✓ A centralized communications medium will increase participation by farmers in agricultural community events.
- ✓ Supportive partnership will be developed between the farming community and regulatory agencies.
- ✓ Farm businesses will be improved through better understanding of legal requirements for operations.
- ✓ The chance of success for farm entrepreneurs seeking to diversify will increase.
- ✓ Farmers will be encouraged to include conservation in their business plans.

Cultural Heritage

Historical Perspective

The early settlers who came to this area in the 1860s marveled at the fertile river valley soil and mild climate, ideal conditions for farming. They cut virgin forests, began building dikes for the rivers and prepared farms that they thought would be passed on for generations. These farms were to provide a good lifestyle for the farming families, as well as the needed food for other inhabitants of the Puget Sound and Snohomish County region.

Discussion

Today, farmers and growers face the challenges of development, and the need to protect the very soil and water from which they – and the populace they fed – benefited. As always on the farm, hard choices need to be made to not only preserve this rich land and its lifestyle, but to stabilize and build the farming economy and provide for opportunities to feed our community today and in the future.

The Cultural Heritage recommendations included in this section will remind us who our original farmers were and where they came from. We need to understand what organizations of farmers have provided service to the farmers and their families, and help us identify who the farmers of tomorrow will be in Snohomish County.

Summary of Issues

The issues identified regarding cultural heritage include:

- Assisting urban dwellers to reconnect with the land
- Assisting agricultural tourism
- Preserving viable historic farmland, agricultural buildings and equipment



Issue 1

Urban dwellers need assistance to reconnect with the land and their sources of food.

Action Plan:

1. Expand the use of the Evergreen State Fair as a venue for teaching the history and current relevance of farming through exhibits, demonstrations and product sales.
2. Assist in the creation of a venue similar to the Pike Place Market for year-round farm product sales and the display of exhibits on the history and culture of agriculture.
3. Involve farm families in educational outreach to city dwellers. Examples could include: a “Festival of Family Farms” event, weekend farm visits, “adopt a city kid” programs, school demonstrations of traditional farm activities (canning produce, wool processing/spinning/weaving, wood chopping, goat milking, egg candling, honey extraction, etc.)

Cultural Heritage

4. Encourage farms surrounded by dense housing to involve neighboring homeowners in the farm operation through u-pick, subscription produce sales, historical education, demonstrations, etc.
 5. Use the Internet and media outlets with vivid imagery to share farm history using a “Now/Then” comparison technique; advertise events/products of interest to urban dwellers; and, with the help of farm teens, develop interactive games that could address agricultural history and issue topics.
 6. Encourage community groups that are not normally associated with agriculture to become involved with the topic. For example, museums creating agricultural history exhibits, chambers of commerce sponsoring “Chatauquas” as entertaining forums for discussion of rural/urban issues, granges taking their square dance groups and exhibits “on the road” to urban senior centers and schools.
 7. Develop a hosting program in which adventurous city dwellers could spend time living with a farm family for a period of time and share those experiences through coverage in the media.
 8. Work with schools to develop a way that urban senior-level students could fulfill their community service graduation requirement by working on a farm.
 9. Use farm history articles already produced for the Third Age News by the Historic Preservation Planner, along with new issue-based and historical pieces, for a regular “farm news” column to be offered to the Everett Herald. A smaller but potentially popular section might be a regular “Farm Basket Trivia” box that could share fascinating facts.
 10. Collaborate with the multi-cultural programs at Edmonds and Everett community colleges to share with the general public the history of farm involvement by immigrants in cooperation with diverse groups such as the Sons of Norway, Swedish Vasa groups, Vietnamese refugees, Hmong people and Latinos.
- Outcomes:**
- ✓ Agricultural information will be available at the Evergreen Fair for more than 800,000 visitors per year (845,278 in 2004).
 - ✓ A public market, a major year-round agricultural attraction, will be created, which will be easily accessible by urban dwellers.
 - ✓ Urban and rural dwellers will have the opportunity to come together to share a “hands-on,” face-to-face farm experience, conducive to learning and discussion of issues.
 - ✓ Use of a model, such as Fairview Gardens in California, will show that barriers and misunderstandings between urban dwellers neighboring farm families can be broken down and result in mutual benefits.
 - ✓ The Snohomish County website will become a viable means of sharing agricultural information of interest to both urban and rural citizens as well as an entertaining site for teens. “Now and Then” photos are already available via the Planning and Development Services Department’s Centennial Farms site and could be expanded to include topics such as “milking then and now,” “haying then and now,” etc.
 - ✓ Exposure to agricultural history, issues and entertainment will increase for urban dwellers.

Cultural Heritage

- ✓ A “Host a City Family” program is likely to be supported by the travel industry, resulting in more exposure nationwide for the county as a great place to visit and live.
 - ✓ High school seniors will become more aware of agricultural issues as they enter their adult years.
 - ✓ Farmers will feel respected and know that their issues are taken seriously.
 - ✓ Exposure and recognition will be given to the high numbers of ethnic minorities that are involved in agricultural production and the role they play in building our community.
4. Develop tour brochures in cooperation with a multitude of organizations (such as the Snohomish County Tourism Bureau) that feature agricultural and historic sites, arts, food, rest stops, products and events. Tours could include various forms of transportation from cars to canoes along short to medium length loop trips. Some examples could include: Pioneer Highway, Mountain Loop Highway, or biking from Monroe to Sultan and river rafting back to Monroe.
 5. Involve the Snohomish County Parks Department in a collaborative effort with the Historic Preservation Commission to increase agricultural history interpretation at county park sites (such as River Meadows and the Lloyd Family Historic Farm) that are built on former homesteads.
 6. Use the Internet and media outlets to publicize farm tourism opportunities and to provide historic context in the form of illustrated articles about each farm tourism destination.
 7. Utilize appropriately trained staff to provide technical assistance for the creation of “mini-museums” in restored out-buildings on farms open to tourists.
 8. Support the establishment of agricultural heritage interpretive centers in order to provide more agri-tourism destinations in the County.
 9. Ensure that the 2005 tourism study supported by Snohomish County includes agri-tourism as a major element.

Issue 2

Agricultural tourism needs assistance.

Action Plan:

1. Make available for loan existing farm history exhibits and help owners design new exhibits for farm stands in order to increase sales through direct marketing of products.
2. Continue the Centennial Farms recognition program (100 years or more under single family ownership) and consider expanding the program to include “Landmark Farms” (less than 100 years under single family ownership).
3. Offer standardized, commemorative roadside signage to Centennial Farms. Coordinate this with other signage such as crop identification, “locally grown produce,” or event signage for an instantly recognizable “Snohomish County Tourism” identification.

Outcomes:

- ✓ Farm history exhibits in connection with farmstands will increase sales because customers are more inclined to buy products if they understand and feel a connection with the people selling those

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products. Knowing the family's history helps establish rapport and respect between visitors with their farm hosts.

- ✓ Expansion of the farm recognition program to include Landmark Farms as well as the (dwindling) Centennial Farms will allow owners of prominent farms that have passed from one owner to another, but have remained as landmarks in their communities, to receive recognition and respect. In addition, their histories will be documented in text and photos, adding to the wealth of website and exhibit material available to further farm appreciation.
- ✓ Tourism (a relatively clean, low impact and high financial benefit industry) will increase because visitors enjoy traveling routes that offer information as well as amenities and unusual experiences.
- ✓ A series of brochures to guide visitors through various tours, targeted to both passive and active participants, will be developed over a number of years, increasing tourism as partnerships are created and signage/publications are created.
- ✓ Interpretive signage will be increased in County parks that have historic, agricultural roots. Interpretive programs and possibly farm-skills demonstrations will add to park visitors' experiences.
- ✓ Expanded and cooperatively planned and interlinked websites will provide ease of information access and a depth of content not currently available.
- ✓ Those who visit farms for an educational family experience will benefit from having small exhibits set up to further their appreciation of the hosting farm and understanding of the long-term importance of agriculture. Those hosting may find that

their product sales improve because of this new-found appreciation.

- ✓ Agricultural heritage interpretive centers which could offer antique tractor club exhibits, mining, railroad and logging displays, will attract tourists from throughout the Pacific Northwest, benefiting in particular the cities of Monroe and Snohomish that offer overnight accommodations to WHC visitors.

Issue 3

Viable historic farmland, agricultural buildings and equipment need to be preserved.

Action Plan:

1. Publicize the state property tax incentives available through the Local Register of Historic Places program and encourage voluntary listing when appropriate.
2. Consider establishing agricultural historic districts and/or designating "cultural landscapes" with tax and zoning incentives as well as technical assistance associated with designation.
3. Develop a "Heritage Fund" (similar to the recently established Arts Fund) that could receive grants and donations from individuals, and be used for low-interest revolving loans and/or grants for rehabilitation projects.
4. Consider options for local financial incentives, building supply discounts and pro-bono engineering and architectural advice.
5. Join the National and Washington Trusts for Historic Preservation in lobbying Congress for the allocation of funds for barn preservation, as authorized in 2002 through the federal Farm Security Act.

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6. Support the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Barn Again program by incorporating that group's survey of historic barn buildings into the County Survey and Inventory of Historic Places, which is to be completed by September 30, 2005.
7. Offer technical assistance for building rehabilitation through programs and publications of the historic preservation commission.
8. Involve the Antique Tractor Club, Future Farmers of America, 4-H, schools and colleges in the restoration and demonstration of abandoned, antique farm equipment through shop classes mentored by club members.

Outcomes:

- ✓ Property owners who need to do major rehabilitation of their farm buildings will be eligible for tax incentives if the rehabilitation meets certain criteria for protection and if those buildings are on the National or Snohomish County Local Register of Historic Places.
- ✓ Snohomish County will have one or more designated districts or cultural landscapes that will attract visitors and permanent residents.
- ✓ A Heritage Fund will exist to assist farmers with low-interest loans or grants for rehabilitation projects.
- ✓ A well-publicized agricultural building preservation initiative is likely to encourage businesses to offer free or at-cost services to farmers. The benefit to businesses would be publicity valued in excess of those services.

- ✓ The Farm Security Act of 2002 authorized funds to preserve barns. Successful lobbying will result in an appropriation for funding that could be used for some County barn and historic agricultural building rehabilitation projects.
- ✓ Results of the National Trust's Barn Again survey will be used to encourage federal funding of barn preservation projects.
- ✓ Property owners who want to rehabilitate their buildings, but can't afford expensive architects and engineering firms, will receive assistance, including referrals to professionals who do pro bono or reduced-fee work, to further the cause of historic preservation.
- ✓ Residents new to farm areas will benefit from a decrease in what they consider "visual blight" – farm machinery rusting in fields. Their positive involvement would increase rapport with their farm neighbors. Shop classes will benefit from having projects that inspire students to learn how old machinery operated, and why, as well as presenting an unusual challenge to see if the machines could be restored. Students will also benefit from building one-on-one relationships with adults, similar to the Big Brother program.



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Issue 4

Many farm families want to encourage their young people to continue farming rather than leaving for urban employment.

Action Plan:

1. Assist children from farm families to initiate “Edible School Yard” programs and to be involved in urban and rural school demonstrations of farm skills, creation of family history displays, and farm life/issue exhibits.
2. Strengthen and support programs such as 4-H and Future Farmers of America through technical assistance to increase their outreach, programming, financial base and ability to offer agricultural education scholarships.

Outcomes:

- ✓ Residents new to farm areas will benefit from a decrease in what they consider “visual blight” – farm machinery rusting in fields. They might get involved out of curiosity, increasing rapport with their farm neighbors. Shop classes will benefit from having projects that inspire students to learn how old machinery operated, and why, as well as presenting an unusual challenge to see if the machines could be restored. Students will also benefit from building one-on-one relationships with adults, similar to the Big Brother program.
- ✓ Offering students from farm families the opportunity to be leaders of programs in their schools will strengthen pride in their agricultural “roots,” build self confidence and increase their resolve to continue involvement with farming.

Issue 5

Grant funding is necessary, specific to stated concerns, such as humanities commission funding for educational initiatives and preservation funding for barns.

Action Plan:

Assign a staff person familiar with grant writing to research the most appropriate sources of supplementary funding for the County.

Outcome:

- ✓ The County budget will be augmented in order to carry out specific initiatives of the Snohomish County Agriculture Action Plan.

Agriculture Action Plan Advisory Group

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