



Snohomish County
County Executive's Office

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Reardon appoints high-ranking planning official to new Agriculture Coordinator post

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Local agriculture leaders praise high-profile position

MONROE – Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon announced today that a high-ranking planning official will serve as the local agriculture community's point-of-contact within County government.

John Roney was introduced as the County's new Agriculture Coordinator before a group of farmers, ranchers and other agriculture officials at the Lower Skykomish Habitat Conservation Group in Monroe. He assumes the post after spending the past decade as Special Projects Coordinator in the County's Department of Planning and Development Services.

Local agriculture leaders expressed enthusiasm for Reardon's appointment.

"From the farmers' point of view, this is very gratifying," said Dale Reiner, president of the Snohomish County Farm Bureau and vice president of the Lower Skykomish Habitat Conservation Group. "We asked for a position just like this when we talked to Aaron during the election. He's listening, that's for sure.

"Not only has the County Executive created the new Agriculture Coordinator's position, but he has included two people with strong agriculture backgrounds on his Citizens Cabinet. He is looking at the issues of Snohomish County agriculture in a non-partisan way."

Jackie Macomber, chair of the volunteer Snohomish County Agricultural Advisory Board, said that local farmers were pleased by the announcement.

"We appreciate that the County Executive is raising the profile of agriculture within Snohomish County government," she said. "This is very important to those of us who are committed to making a go of farming. If we are going to succeed, we need to have this sort of strong partnership."

Roughly 60,000 acres are designated for agriculture in Snohomish County's comprehensive plan.

Farmers told Reardon during his election campaign that their own efforts to grow the local agriculture economy would benefit if a single, high-profile position was created within County government. Roney's appointment to the agriculture post underscores the Executive's commitment to not only preserving existing farms and ranches, but seeing that additional economic development opportunities are pursued.

"Just preserving Snohomish County farmland isn't enough – I want to provide farmers and ranchers with new opportunities to increase their production, enter expanded markets and improve their bottom line," Reardon said. "When I talk with agriculture people they tell me they don't know who they can turn to at the County. They say that in the past they didn't feel they received answers.

"John Roney's appointment will change that. He will be the point of contact for the agriculture community. He will be the person at Snohomish County who is responsible for providing coordination between the various departments and agencies that work locally with farmers and ranchers."

Roney is a 16-year veteran at Snohomish County.

"I look at myself as a problem solver," Roney said. "The Executive feels very strongly about the need to do more than just set aside farm land. He wants to find new opportunities for agriculture to grow – through the creation of farm stands, the promotion of farmers' markets, agri-tourism farms and other innovations. He is also very interested in programs that promote the sale of local produce to grocery chains, our schools and local restaurants.

"Agriculture in Snohomish County faces challenges because this is a County that has urbanized rapidly in the past 20 years. But there's a positive side to this too. Our farmers have a huge local market that's barely been tapped – millions of consumers around Puget Sound who live just a short drive from our fields."

Reardon said he will be actively engaged in promoting local agriculture. He and King County Executive Ron Sims will soon be meeting with representatives of national grocery outlets. The two county executives will urge the grocers to purchase local produce through the Puget Sound Fresh program, which is also targeting consumers, wholesalers, retailers and restaurants.

The meeting is scheduled for 9:30 a.m., Monday, March 15 at the King County Building, 201 S. Jackson Street, in Seattle.

The Executive said he also backs a Snohomish County Department of Corrections pilot program starting in June in which locally grown cabbage will be purchased for inmates' meals. If the program is successful it will be expanded to other types of produce, according to Corrections officials.

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