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In 2004, Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon's first and highest priority after taking office was to stop the loss of our agricultural economy in Snohomish County. In November 2004, he held the first of what has become the annual Focus on Farming Conference. About 350 farmers and citizens participated in the daylong conference where farmers had the opportunity to voice their concerns regarding the viability of agriculture in Snohomish County. Two overall concerns arose during that conference. First was the significant loss of farmland in the county. Second was a realization that even if farmland was preserved, the number of people willing to sacrifice themselves to the hard work it takes to farm was diminishing. All of the information gathered was compiled, and Executive Reardon issued the Snohomish County Agricultural Action Plan in March 2005.

In response to the Action Plan, Executive Reardon convened the Snohomish County Agricultural Economic Development Action Team (SAEDAT). This team was charged with taking the information in the Ag Action Plan and recommending feasible implementation strategies for economic development. The report that was issued in February 2007 contained the following sub-committees:

- Land Base – to develop recommendations that modify and clarify the land-use regulations to protect the agricultural land base;
- Infrastructure – to provide recommendations for Snohomish County support for needed infrastructure and financing options for area farmers;
- Marketing – to recommend policies, projects and programs that enhance the economic viability of agriculture.

The Snohomish SAEDAT report identified key strategies for economic recovery and expansion of Snohomish County's Agriculture Industry. Strategy #3 under *Infrastructure* is the **Agriculture Sustainability Project (ASP)**. The goal of this strategy is to create a vision of how the farming community and the general public want local agriculture to look and function 100 years from now. The ASP Report contains findings that are far reaching and have the ability to impact every sector of the agricultural economy.

The ASP looked at many issues affecting the agricultural economy and the opportunities that exist for Snohomish County farmers. These opportunities were documented and feasibility studies completed on some of the findings as part of the ASP Report. These opportunities include land-use policy, economic development projects and community involvement. An example of this work includes a full feasibility study for a full-time farmers market located in Snohomish County. Recommendations for each of these sectors can be found in the Executive Summary with an in-depth study in the body of the report.

An important part of the ASP was a collaborative mapping project with the agricultural community. The objective of this was to determine how much acreage was truly being farmed in Snohomish County and what farm products were being raised. This “snapshot” in time through agricultural land mapping provides us with a base of information that can be used for economic development activities and efforts as well as to further identify critical farmlands that should be targeted for preservation programs. This same information could be used in conjunction with salmon habitat restoration plans to find lands not able to be farmed due to their soils, hydrology, location or other site constraints and to provide the landowner a financial return if the land is purchased for habitat restoration. This allows for valuable habitat projects and for the landowner to profit from otherwise unused land. These same areas used for restoration could be used to complement adjacent farm operations by improving drainage or other impacts.

Additional recommendations and findings included in the report include new land-use concepts, the need for additional advocacy and support for the agricultural economy and a thorough review of Snohomish County’s Agricultural Profile.

In the Infrastructure element of the report, it is noted that the support for farming -- such as processing plants, slaughter houses, commercial kitchens and distribution -- had also been equally impacted by the recent decline in farming. New farmers were struggling to get started due to the lack of infrastructure to support their new ideas and crops.

Under the Marketing element, the lack of a support agency to support and promote local agriculture through one voice was documented. The demand for local products continues to rise; the opportunity to promote high-quality products through direct marketing and wholesale markets, as well as agritourism, is needed.

The comprehensive findings of the ASP Report, coupled with the ongoing efforts and focus of Snohomish County to support and enhance agriculture, can be found in the following table of programs and projects. These are based on Executive Reardon’s priority to keep agriculture alive and growing.

Farmland Preservation

Program	Action	Lead Department
Transfer of Development Rights	New policy and code allowing additional flexibility to create new sending & receiving areas.	Planning and Development Services & Economic Development Division
Purchase of Development Rights	Target key agricultural properties in the Tualco Valley PDR Pilot Project Area. Assist in other farmland preservation opportunities.	Planning and Development Services, Public Works & Economic Development Division
“No Net Loss” approach	Look for projects or programs that have a negative impact on agriculture and find solutions to allow the project to continue forward and farmland to be saved. Continue to work with Ag Board and Farm Bureau.	Planning and Development Services, Public Works & Economic Development Division

Rural Element	Add a Rural Element to our Growth Management Act Comprehensive Plan that will address farmland use and protection in commercially designated farmland.	Planning and Development Services
Critical Area Regulations & Shoreline Master Plan	Work with agricultural community and state agencies to provide mandated regulations that still allow agricultural operations to remain viable. Goal is to keep farmland in production while enhancing environmental quality.	Planning and Development Services
Open Space Taxation	Provide reduced tax rates for land in agricultural production.	Planning and Development Services
Drainage Assistance Grant Program	Provide \$150,000 annual grant to Diking and Drainage Districts to assist in their projects.	Public Works
Flood Fencing	Provide technical assistance with the development of flood fencing and other flood preparation infrastructure on farmland.	Public Works
Farmland & Habitat Working Group	Working group to develop policy recommendations on how to move forward with farmland preservation and salmon habitat restoration projects.	Planning and Development Services, Public Works & Economic Development Division

Develop New Markets & Products

Program	Action	Lead Department
Cathcart Biofuel Facility	Continue to work with ag community to find new crops that can be used in the grain dryer and/or crusher.	Public Works & Economic Development Division
Cathcart Biofuel Facility	Monitor and develop biofuel crop opportunities as the market allows.	Public Works & Economic Development Division
Biofuel Growers Cooperative	Partner with WSU Cooperative Extension and Northwest Cooperative Development Center to coordinate with farmers in their pursuit of biofuels crops.	Economic Development Division

Stimulate Innovation in AgriTourism	Work with farmers to develop summer and fall farm festivals and educational opportunities at Focus on Farming Conference.	Economic Development Division
Small Business Development Assistance	Coordinate with other agencies and groups to offer assistance and education to small agricultural businesses. Key partners include WSU Cooperative Extension & Northwest Agriculture Business Center. Focus on Farming Conference is a prime example.	Economic Development Division
Focus on Farming Conference	Provide a forum for farmers from Snohomish County and throughout the Puget Sound region to learn about new methods, markets and products that can add value to their ag business.	Economic Development Division
Focus on Farming Web site	Provide a high amount of relevant information for ag community. This website will be redeveloped in 2009 so that it can be updated and be designed for better access.	Economic Development Division
Northwest Wine Competition	2009 is the first year for this competition, which highlights the successes that growers and winemakers are experiencing using Western Washington grapes to make top-quality wine.	Economic Development Division
Farmers' Market	Using the feasibility study in the ASP Report, seek strategic partnerships to help coordinate, develop and plan for a year-round farmers' market.	Economic Development Division
Snohomish County Growers Alliance	Utilize grant funding to assist in the development of a dedicated agricultural business group. This group would be able to take advantage of a new farmers' market.	Economic Development Division

Permitting

Program	Action	Lead Department
Agricultural Permit Coordinator	Provide a dedicated staff person to assist with ag-related permits. This staff person is knowledgeable of all flood and development regulations.	Planning and Development Services
Traffic Study Exemption	Farm stands, farm product processing and other similar uses on farmland are exempt from needing a traffic impact study. This step is taken to assist in the success of these farmland operations.	Planning and Development Services & Public Works
“No Net Loss” approach	Review all non-farm projects that take place on farmland for their potential negative impact on the farmland and on the farming community. Work with Agricultural Advisory Board.	Planning and Development Services, Public Works & Economic Development Division

Outreach, Education & Ombudsman

Program	Action	Lead Department
Agriculture Coordinator	Staff support to issues that farmers are experiencing with Snohomish County or other agencies.	Economic Development Division
Evergreen State Fair	Highlight farmers and the crops they produce in Snohomish County. Fun educational events and recognition of our Centennial Farms.	Economic Development Division
Workshops & other partnerships	Team up with local partners to offer new information and opportunities for our local farmers.	Economic Development Division

The recommendations included in the ASP Report require a collaborative approach with the farming community, local agencies, concerned citizens and nonprofits in order to be successful. Renewed interest in local food and consumer awareness helps keep soil cultivated and the potential for new processing facilities fuels new ideas and aspirations. The opportunities that exist for local agriculture are immense. Snohomish County is and will continue to be a leader in the promotion of its agricultural industry, which leads to a stronger market, a better food chain and supply as well as an increased quality of life for its residents.