

## County, Farmers Share Ideas

### A Lynnwood conference helps Snohomish County farmers find new markets and learn how to grow alternative crops.

LYNNWOOD - Farming long ago faded into this town's past with fields and crops being replaced by houses and business offices.

But on Thursday it was a place where farmers gathered to talk about their future.

Snohomish County's third annual Focus on Farming Conference took place Thursday at the Lynnwood Convention Center. Despite snow overnight, a few hundred people attended the daylong event.

The county is one of the sponsors and expects to pay up to \$15,000 for the conference, said Laura McLeod, the county's communications specialist.

The conference was held in Monroe its first two years. On Thursday, county officials held the conference in Lynnwood to make it a regional event. Speakers from outside the county, including King County Executive Ron Sims, came to the conference.

Agriculture is changing; farmers need to develop their expertise and find innovative ways to thrive, Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon said.

"This conference is about opening markets and helping farmers expand their businesses," Reardon said.

At the first conference, county officials focused on listening to farmers, Reardon said. At the second one, the county showed action plans to help farmers, he said.

"The government has to be flexible and fast. The government has to know the needs of stakeholders, in this case, farmers," he said.

At separate sessions on Thursday, people learned business tips such as how to diversify their income and how to grow profitable alternative crops. Their lunches featured local produce prepared by volunteers.

Mark Craven, who grows pumpkins at a 70-acre farm in Snohomish, attended the event for the first time.

"It's a good chance for farmers to get together and talk about different ideas," said Craven, 48.

Craven, a third-generation farmer, said that his grandparents used to operate a dairy farm. Now, in addition to the pumpkin patch, the family holds company picnics and weddings at the farm, he said.

The county has worked to streamline regulations to help farmers over the last few years, Craven said.

"They are willing to listen to us and try to help us survive," he said.

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