



A Progress Report from Executive Reardon on the Agriculture Initiative

Dear Friends:

November 2005

When I ran for office in November 2003, I promised to identify the obstacles and opportunities for local agriculture to ensure that this important segment of the Snohomish County economy remains sustainable for years to come. This was the basis of the Agriculture Initiative launched during the first months of my administration. A key early step was to convene the first Focus on Farming Conference in November 2004. Nearly 350 citizens attended the conference, including farmers, ranchers and growers.

Now, one year later, I am pleased to present this progress report in conjunction with the second annual Focus on Farming Conference. Our accomplishments would not have been possible without the dedication and commitment from other agriculture agencies and many hardworking representatives from the farm community. These partnerships have been key to the successful development and implementation of our Agriculture Action Plan. I look forward to our continued work together to ensure that agriculture in Snohomish County expands and thrives for generations to come.



Aaron Reardon
Snohomish County Executive

Growing Success Together

This past year, we began laying the foundation for a new partnership between the County and the farming community by taking decisive steps to improve communication and collaboration between the County, other government agencies and the agriculture industry.

We are committed to changing the way County government looks at local agriculture, a concern we often hear from the farming community. We are educating County staff and department heads about critical agricultural issues. We will continue to implement ongoing actions to ensure that providing top-quality customer service to farmers, growers and ranchers becomes ingrained in the culture of County government.

Actions we have taken and programs we have implemented to accomplish this include:

- Appointed an Agriculture Coordinator to represent the Executive on agricultural and economic policy issues.
- Designated an Agriculture Planner to assist agriculture permit applicants.
- Hosted breakfasts with local farmers and Governor Gregoire.
- Sponsored the Focus on Farming Conferences.
- Held quarterly meetings with the Agriculture Advisory Board.
- Formed a partnership with Shared Strategies organization.
- Coordinated the NW Counties Planner Meetings on agriculture issues.
- Conducted farm tours and workshops for department directors and key staff.
- Began design of a separate permitting process for agricultural activities.
- Provided leadership to coordinate state and federal regulatory processes.
- Formed interdisciplinary teams to simplify and streamline the regulatory process, and to coordinate grant-writing and budget resources more efficiently to benefit agriculture.



Cliff Bailey and Tristan Klesick, Co-Chairs of the Agriculture Economic Action Team, with Executive Reardon.

Cover Photo: Don Bailey shares his views on the needs of the farming community with Executive Reardon.

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Helping Build a Sustainable Farm Economy

To preserve the quality of life valued by all residents of Snohomish County, it is imperative that we preserve the county's working family farms. Facilitating economic growth for local agriculture is the primary objective of our Agriculture Action Plan. During the first nine months of the Agriculture Initiative, we:



Direct sales to consumers increase profits for growers at seasonal farmers markets.

- Implemented the Agriculture Action Plan by means of Executive Order; establishing priority and accountability for accomplishing tasks in departmental work plans, and authorizing specific economic development activities to be undertaken on behalf of local agriculture.
- Provided support for bio-energy research and development; initiated bio-diesel pilot project to test feasibility of converting County vehicles to use locally produced bio-diesel fuel.
- Collaborated with County Council to enable the first Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) transaction; providing permanent protection of commercial farmlands from conversion to residential development.

The Ag Action Plan: Performance Highlights

The Agriculture Action Plan is the County's blueprint for directing its resources in the most effective ways possible to remove economic obstacles and to promote new business opportunities for local agriculture. The plan is organized into four main sections corresponding to the primary issues identified by participants at the 2004 Focus on Farming Conference.

Regulatory Reform

Action items in this section of the plan are aimed at moving the regulatory process from complexity to simplicity and from changing adversarial relationships to partnerships that focus on solutions. A major focus of our efforts this past year was to assure more Ag-industry participation in regulatory development and approval processes. Other actions included:

- Adopted agricultural code amendments (Amended Ordinance No. 04-074) which significantly expand uses allowed under zoning on agricultural lands to enhance the economic viability of farming.

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- Proposed agricultural provisions in updated Critical Areas Regulations which would allow use of agricultural best management practices to achieve compliance.
- Proposed designation of farmlands as a priority resource in The Shoreline Master Program Update to encourage preservation.
- Submitted a proposal to the County Council that would reconstitute the Agricultural Advisory Board to provide broader industry representation and greater clarity regarding roles and responsibilities.
- Drafted new policies in The 10 Year Comprehensive Plan Update that increase support for agriculture.
- Began coordinating a multi-agency task force to develop a one-stop permitting process involving local, state and federal permit requirements.

Economic Development

Participants at last year's Focus on Farming Conference indicated that the County should play a leadership role in facilitating public and private-sector interests to work together to enhance our local agricultural economy. The Economic Development section of the Agriculture Action Plan is geared to accomplish that objective in both immediate and long-term ways. Some early accomplishments include:

- Support for a regional Agriculture Incubator Project which received \$300K during the 2005 Legislative session to establish a center to provide business assistance for small farms in Snohomish, Skagit, Whatcom, Island and San Juan Counties.



Executive Reardon talks business with farm entrepreneur, Keith Stocker.

- Appointment of an interdisciplinary Agriculture Economic Development Action Team to develop and recommend feasible strategies for economic recovery and expansion of local agriculture.
- Support for two private-sector Bio-Digester Projects currently underway in the County.
- Authorized a Public Works pilot project to test feasibility of converting County vehicles to use bio-diesel fuel.
- Initiated recruitment of new processing facilities and other Ag-related businesses to locate in Snohomish County.

View the complete Agriculture Action Plan online under "Focus on Farming" at www.co.snohomish.wa.us.

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Outreach and Education

Our main communications objective during this first year of the Agriculture Action Plan has been to improve the information services we provide to our farmer-customers, particularly in regard to regulatory and permit requirements. Accomplishments in this area include:

- Appointed a special Agriculture Planner to respond specifically to permitting questions from farmers.
- Enhanced the Focus on Farming Website to include an interactive map that allows users to see an aerial view of their property and quickly access all regulatory information pertaining to it.
- Published a series of customer assistance bulletins for agriculture with code and regulatory language written in lay terms.
- Began designing outreach workshops to be implemented in spring 2006 to inform and educate rural property owners about environmental regulations that may affect them.
- Began researching potential grant-funding to assist public outreach and education efforts by local Ag industry groups.
- Began publication of the quarterly Focus on Farming newsletter to approximately 3,500 members of the agriculture industry.

Cultural Heritage

Cultural Heritage activities in the Agriculture Action Plan keep us in touch with the rich agricultural history that has shaped Snohomish County's landscape. Some examples of actions taken in support of our agricultural heritage include:

- Centennial Farm program recognition of the Hillis and Hereth families at the 2005 Evergreen Fair. A total of 27 farms have been honored for continuous production under the same family ownership for 100 years or more.
- Conducted a survey of heritage sites under The Landmark Farms program which identified both potential local historic register properties and landmark farms. These farms will be recognized along with the Centennial Farms at the 2006 Evergreen State Fair.
- Sought grant funding to expand the popular museums tour map produced in cooperation with the League of Snohomish County Heritage Organizations.



Hillis family of Arlington at picnic. (ca. 1940s)

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Comments Welcome

Your thoughts are important to me. I'm interested in knowing what you think about the issues that impact our local farming community. Please send comments to me at the address below.

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