

The Current State of Snohomish County Agriculture from a Farmer's Perspective

Presenter: Don Bailey, Bailand Farms, Snohomish

SNOHOMISH COUNTY FARM-CITY FORUM: SOLUTIONS FOR A GROWING COMMUNITY

Memo to Participants -February 4, 2002

Notes from Meetings of Issue Steering Committees

On Friday, Feb. 1, 2002, the steering committees that were asked to help advance the issues identified for further progress at the Snohomish County Farm-City Forum met at the County Administration Building.

Next Steps: Each of the four Steering Committees discussed the next logical steps for their issues. All four concluded that the Forum ought to identify some specific actions and move directly to getting them implemented. No broader public meeting was believed necessary at this time, but rather the original Forum participants should reconvene in March (before planting season gets too far underway) to consider the recommendations and actions from the Steering Committees and to propose specific immediate actions by the Forum group.

The following is an outline of issues we discussed and of the recommendations offered:

1. Enhancing; Economic Development for Agriculture (9:00 a.m. -10:30 a.m.)

Members of this committee are: Jackie Macomber, Chris Lundvall, Jason Bartelheimer, Kamuron Gurol, Mark Wolken, Ned Zaugg. In attendance at the meeting were: Jason Bartelheimer, Mark Wolken, Ned Zaugg, Bob Hilgenberg, Don Stuart.

This Committee decided that the single most immediate and useful step that might be taken soon would be if we could help launch a Strategic Plan for Economic Development and Sustainability for Snohomish County Agriculture. Such a plan would produce a series of specific proposals and opportunities to enhance agriculture and would create the political basis for broad community support for completion of the plan. Such a plan could spell out goals and projects needed to secure agriculture's place in the community for the next 3, 5, 10, & 20 years, would allow us to draw in participation from all sectors of the community, and would enhance the credibility of agriculture as a permanent part of our County's future.

To develop such a credible plan, we will need the assistance and cooperation of the Economic Development Council of Snohomish County. Support from the Farm-City Forum and from our hosts, Snohomish County Executive Bob Drewel and Everett Mayor Ed Hansen, would be very helpful in securing the help of the Economic Development Council.

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The Steering Committee assigned the following tasks:

.Don Stuart and Bob Hilgenberg will draw up a short bulleted list of the importance of such a plan for agriculture in Snohomish County and will present this document to Paul Roberts (for Mayor Hansen) and Steve Holt (for Executive Drewel).

.Mark Wolken will contact Debbie Knutson, President & CEO of EDC of Snohomish County to ask her perspective on this idea.

.Bob Hilgenberg will present this idea to the Snohomish County Agricultural Advisory Board to get their input.

Then we will approach the Mayor and County Executive with a request that they address a joint letter to the EDC asking them to launch such a project and prepare a draft letter appropriate for this purpose.

In addition to the above, Bob Hilgenberg provided a list of points relating to direct marketing and value added agriculture that had been brainstormed and produced in cooperation between Snohomish County and King County farm advisory groups and staff members. A copy of this list is attached.

2. Improving the Livability of our Cities (10:30 a.m. -Noon)

Members of this committee are: Paul Roberts, Kamuron Gurol, Dorothy Vandeventer, Tristan Klesick. **In** attendance at the meeting were: Paul Roberts, Dorothy Vandeventer, Tristan Klesick, Bob Hilgenberg, Ryan Hembry, Don Stuart.

After a careful discussion of the issues defining how farming relates to improving the livability of urban areas, two themes emerged as seeming relevant to the work of the Farm- City Forum:

1. How can we reduce pressure on our rural farmlands by making our cities and towns more desirable places to live with a stronger sense of place and thereby encourage people to choose to live there rather than on or near our valuable farms and farmlands.
2. How can we strengthen the connection between our farms (and farm products) and our urban communities to build stronger county-wide community, improve agriculture, and make our cities better places to live.

A number of specific issues and recommendations emerged from this discussion including:

- Improvements in the communication of ag calendars and ag products maps to urban residents
- Including a Puget Sound Fresh link on City web page
- Implementing the new farmers market at the County's office complex and seeking other appropriate sites for farmers markets around the county.
- Work with and through the Snohomish County Council of Neighborhoods to strengthen farm-urban relationships and communications

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- Involve children in farm events to draw urban residents to farms and to get them involved in farm issues. Create a place for community-farm events and activities
- Develop a power point presentation of educational materials and make presentations at community groups and community events.

3. Reducing the Impacts on Agriculture from Adjacent Growth: (1-2:30 p.m.)

Members of this committee are: Jackie Macomber, Kamuron Gurol, Sue Adams, Mark Craven, Dorothy Vandeventer. In attendance at the meeting were: Kamuron Gural, Sue Adams, Mark Craven, Dorothy Vandeventer Ryan Hembry, Don Stuart.

This Committee discussed a number of ways in which we could strengthen agriculture's input into processes designed to mitigate impacts of growth and ways in which such impacts could be mitigated. These included:

- Establishment of a TDR program with a TDR bank. This could be done as a specific pilot project in an appropriate area of the County that had urban areas willing to accept density and rural areas deserving of protection. It would also lead to or strengthen the possibility of PDR funding as well. There seemed to be a possibility of such a program in the north part of the county at this time.
- Drainage is a serious problem for lowland farmers as nearby uplands are developed. The question was posed as to how can farmers make their point effectively with Surface Water Management folks. There are currently several processes in which farmers might participate. These include updates to Title 24 underway, a Drainage Needs Report with DNR, and an NPDES Permitting Process. It was suggested that the Ag Advisory Board could create a SWM advisory committee to work with the SWM folks. Also, we could arrange to have SWM folks come and address the Ag Board on their issues.
- Transportation issues. Transportation and congestion are continuing problems for many farmers. We have some concurrency requirements that should require planners to deal with these, but this is not always done. There are transportation elements in the comprehensive plan that farmers should have input on and perhaps there ought to be a specific ag component in the transportation part of the Comprehensive Plan. This is also something the Ag Board might have input on.
- Right to farm laws were discussed, but it was concluded that there were probably no significant improvements to be made here. Relevant to this, however, was signage for agricultural areas. This could be a program in public works to improve warnings to people who live in or travel through farming areas. This would help make people aware that they are in farming areas and that they need to anticipate some of the inconveniences associated with that.
- We need to increase the interaction between agriculture and other community groups - particularly Snohomish County Tomorrow which could play a role in helping deal with many of these problems.

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There was further discussion at this meeting about economic development for agriculture. Kamuron Gurol pointed out that current EDC planning includes an "1-405/1-5 High Tech Corridor" and an "Evergreen Crescent" corridor for some of our County's smaller towns, but that a strategic plan for agriculture would very nicely fill out the planning processes the EDC is currently completing and allow them to, in effect, have a full "county-wide" economic development plan for Snohomish County.

4. Simplifying Permitting and Easing the Burdens of Environmental and Other Regulation:

(2:30 p.m. -4:00 p.m.)

Members of this committee are: Ned Zaugg, Mark Craven, Stephen Holt, Wiard Goreneveld, Don Bailey, Sue Adams, Kamuron Gurol, Jason Bartlheimer. In attendance at the meeting were: Ned Zuagg, Mark Craven, Wiard Goreneveld, Don Bailey, Sue Adams, Kamuron Gurol, Jason Bartlheimer, Ryan Hembry, Bob Hilgenberg, Don Stuart.

The central problem for permitting and environmental and other regulation seems to be the inability of the agriculture community to adequately and responsibly cover the multitude of regulatory processes and departments that have some impact on agriculture. This is aggravated by the fact that many, perhaps most of the problems arise with departments and processes for which the impact on agriculture is never foreseen and therefore not even considered because the rules are intended to deal with issues that have nothing to do with farming. We need some kind of process in place through which agriculture gets better notice of regulations that might affect it and is in a stronger position to work with potential regulators when such matters come up -before the fact, whenever possible.

Specific recommendations included:

- We need to streamline Health Department permits. There are too many permits needed for too many separate issues. We should advance the concept of a seasonal permit for farm operations and farmer's market sales. County ag staff will work with Mark Craven to draft a letter/memo that identifies the issues here to help public officials understand them. We may seek support from County Council members on this if needed.
- There should be a way to include a curriculum on agriculture issues in the training that is received by government regulatory personnel so they are more sensitive to how agriculture may be affected by their actions.
- There is an annual report completed by Snohomish County Planning on local land uses
- and activities. This might have an "Agriculture" component that would provide a statistical base/profile so we could track more closely what is happening over time to local agriculture. This would be useful as an adjunct to the Economic Development Strategic Plan as well.
- Farmers through the Ag Board should meet with the SWM committee to explain the predicament of lowland farm landowners and advocate for their position in managing drainage requirements for new upland developments.
- Specifically, at this time there is consideration being given to increasing SWM fees to pay for reduction of some of these impacts. Farmers need to have input on this.

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- It may be appropriate for the Farm-City Forum group to urge additional County funding for the local Conservation District to help with cost-share and assistance to farmers seeking to comply with heightened environmental regulations -particularly for salmon. This might include increasing the dollars available to cover the land lost to production from new buffer requirements.
- Also the County and the Ag Board should look at ways to use the "model" for an HCP being developed by the group of farmers near Monroe currently developing one.
- There needs to be a new, careful look at ways to find new funding in urban areas to pay some of agriculture's environmental compliance costs in the rural countryside -including money to help with buffer requirements.

Respectfully submitted,

Don Stuart
Pacific Northwest Regional Director American Farmland Trust

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Key Points for a Snohomish County Agriculture Economic Development Strategic Plan:

It has been proposed that a Snohomish County Agriculture Industry Economic Development Strategic Plan be developed that would describe the steps that could be completed to assure that we retain a viable agriculture industry in future years. The following is a list of key components that might be included in such a Plan:

1. Marketing and market development

- a. International marketing of wholesale products ..". .
- b. Local, direct, urban edge marketing -Puget Sound Fresh program
- c. Alternate creative marketing, branding, new approaches
- d. Vertical integration
- e. Agri-tourism
- f. Farmers markets

2. Product transportation

3. Growing more and stronger agriculture businesses

- a. Focus on retention of existing businesses
- b. How to attract new agriculture enterprises
- c. How to protect and add to agriculture infrastructure
 - i. Support businesses
 - ii. Markets & processors
 - iii. Vertically integrated businesses
 - iv. Non-economic infrastructure

4. An agriculture that is supported by the local community

- a. Stronger participation in community processes
- b. Stronger community partnerships
- c. Better press
- d. Stronger and broader coalitions within a diverse agriculture industry
- e. An agriculture economic development component included in the Snohomish County Comprehensive Plan

5. Providing an information base by including agriculture statistical data in the Annual Reports of the County Planning Department

6. Deal with increasing agricultural land cost

- a. Transfer of development rights programs
- b. Purchase of development rights programs (leveraging federal and state money)

7. Deal with increasing environmental compliance cost

- a. Coordination of environmental regulations
- b. Cost-share and technical help with environmental compliance (Conservation District role)

8. Public investment in agriculture

- a. Cost of community services
- b. Environmental cost share
- c. Incentive based land protection
- d. Market & economic development assistance

9. Regulatory coordination and simplification

10. FarmLink program and other ways to keep farmers and their land in farming

11. Identification and description of the “value package” provided by agriculture as both an industry and as a land use within the county