

## **Speech for Focus on Farming Conference**

*By Heather Foster, Snohomish County 4-H*

Hi I'm Heather Foster from the Snohomish County 4-H. I am the president of Lucky Beef-N-Us 4-H club. This is my eighth year in 4-H. Some agricultural projects that I am highly involved in are showing beef cattle, swine, veterinary science and junior loggers. I have been doing these projects for seven years. Along with being on the Snohomish County 4-H livestock judging team and competing at state. Some other projects that I've done are cats, sewing, mechanical science, creative arts, and photography.

Agriculture plays a very important role in our world. In 4-H, I have learned many things such as pasture and mud management, breeding and raising calves, disease transmission, and quality assurance. All these have also helped me achieve and produce a market animal. However agriculture is taking a downfall in today's world. That is why it is so important to keep agriculture strong and inform people on why it is so important to us in order to survive.

My family has even noticed a difference over the years with the growth around us. It used to be we could slaughter and wouldn't have to worry about it. Now we have to notify our neighbors as to when we are going to do it so they can go away or close their drapes. We have even had people stop by and say "can't you put up a tarp or something so it can't be seen?" My parents have always used the slaughter time as an educational experience. That way you can learn the anatomy of the animal. Besides that is what the animal is for. We raise the animal for meat and that is its purpose.

We have even noticed that since there has been more growth around us and on top of the hill above us that our water table on our land has raised. And now we have to make adjustments to keep it under control. This is another problem that farmers often get stuck dealing with. Is the run off from the growth and development, since the farmer has flat land and the water settles on it, the farmer also loses the use of that land. Now the county says it has become wetlands, and it needs to be protected. Farmers can only do that for so long before their land cost more than what can be produced off of it. The farmer has to work so hard to make a living. So the farmer either quits or moves to another state that has less regulations and taxes if he still wants to continue farming.

In 2003 Washington lost 500 farms and 50,000 acres of farmland. That is equivalent to all of Spokane and half of Camano Island. Snohomish County alone from 1997 to 2002 has lost 245 farms and 4,270 acres. If we keep it up, where will we grow our food? That nice sweet corn on the cob that we enjoy in the late summer, the creamy rich ice cream, and the wonderful summer markets with many varieties of goods? Would we have to import it all? How fresh would that be? How sweet would the flavor be? Other questions would be what kind of feed did they feed the animals? What chemicals were used on the produce? Are quality assurance practices being used in their programs?

No doubt there are practices in farming today that are questionable to me and I don't always agree with some of them. That is why I feel it is important for people to get to know their local farmer and understand their practices and support a healthy way. Don't chase the farmer away and put so many regulations on them that they cannot afford to survive. Just look at the dairy farms and their decline over the years. From 1970 to 2000 alone there has been 189 dairy farms lost in Snohomish County. Just think when you go to buy a gallon of milk in the store for \$3.98 a gallon and some stores more than that. The farmer usually gets only a \$1.00 or so. Some one is making money and it is not the farmer. Farming is the only job that I

know that if you do well at it and produce a quality product or a good supply you usually get paid less for it. Look at the apple crops this year. They have a high yield and are getting paid less. How is a farmer to make a living? Most jobs if you do well you get a raise, but the farmer just seems to get penalized in some way. We need to think of ways to keep that quality of life and the farm fresh supply of food in our county. It would be healthier for all of us. Don't chase out agricultural industry away.

I know myself just in growing up on a small farm, that I have become a responsible person that will make a difference in our community. I want to become a large animal veterinarian and to continue supporting our agricultural industry. I also want to have a Black Angus ranch, however if all the farmland disappears then I won't be able to follow through with my goal. It is hard work being a farmer, the hours are long and the conditions are not always that great. But the outcomes are wonderful when you have your finished product that you have cared for and raised. So as the bumper sticker says hug a farmer. And support them any way you can, we need to keep them here in our county.

(I got my information from the United States Department of Agriculture)