

**Focus on Agriculture Conference
November 18, 2004**

Breakout Group A: The Challenges of a Changing Industry

Question #1: What new “agriculture infrastructure” is needed to support farming in the County?

- Sale Barn (a new one is needed)
 - Livestock, poultry, tractors, feed, etc.
- Effective, relevant information (a central place)
- Tell farmers what is most current research
- Fine-tune relationships between regulators and Ag.
- “Bovine is King” – capitalize on this
 - Get a new private local dairy label
- Drainage – farmers in the valley need \$\$ from the folks in the hills
 - Maintain ditches as a farm-owner responsibility
 - “Do more than just set aside Ag. land”
 - Habitat, open space, good environment-support the farmers

- Relevant Information
 - Organizations maintained:
 - WSU Extension
 - CHC – Cascade Harvest Coalition
 - SCD – Snohomish Conservation District
- Labeling for Dairy “Tillamook”
 - Maintains large land and infrastructure base
 - Drainage
 - All must maintain upstream and downstream impact
 - even if not farmland with “ditches”
 - How water movement changes with small changes on land (i.e. roads)
 - Westin A. Price Foundation – consumer’s representative for 50 families
 - Raw milk, organic produce and meats, etc. <www.rawmilk.org>
 - Cited a scientific document to help L.A. County get raw milk
 - Transportation issues
 - Traffic is a big infrastructure problem
 - Direct marketing
 - Website helps - an extremely effective way

- Maintain “old” also (infrastructure)
- Drainage
- New: Mt. Vernon (WSU Ext) – redevelopment
 - Snohomish County should support:
 - Residents
 - Government funds
 - Donations

- Larger regional Farmer's Markets
 - Critical mass
 - Draw more customers
- Drainage
 - Can excess H₂O created be "used" from upland development
 - ? Retention
- Money
 - Expand rural econ uses of land
 - Ball fields generated "tourism" revenue
- Livestock Slaughter Facility
 - Gain access to local
 - Markets
 - Restaurants
 - Schools
- USDA

Question #2: How can we encourage new generations of farmers?

- Active in 4H
 - Education
 - Consumer – "where they come from"
 - Legal issues – liability
 - Leaders –community, industry and farmers
 - Advertisements
 - Conference logo, partnership between ag and county
 - Opportunity
 - Cooperation
 - All members of community
 - Incentives to stay
 - Tensions in Rural/Urban interface
 - Strong environmental focus in schools the last 30 years
 - More Ag. Needed to balance it
 - Educate the youth and parents
 - Displays/posters
 - "Edible School Yard" program (comes from CA)
 - Alice Waters website <Farm to School.org>
 - Maybe some government help available that we are not taking advantage of (sometimes you can't rely on it, but check it out)
 - Another push for raw milk-29 families want raw milk for natural fermentation for raw cheese
 - Make concerted effort to advertise/promote "Locally Grown"
 - Can't put signs anywhere-signs are needed
 - If left up all week, road crews take them
 - South of highway 2 Trestle-lost business due to regulations closing access
 - New signage with Snohomish County logo "Farming Area"
 - To show there is respect

- A viable industry
- Simple road sign
- More Ag. education in schools, 4H, etc.
- Fairgrounds/Fair – opportunity to educate public (kids, adults & consumer) about farming
- Echo - #3
 - Cartoon message
- Set up market at fairgrounds
- Eat at schools (& milk)
 - Local food, meet farmer
- State give \$ to keep business – Boeing, County
 - Tax incentives to existing
 - TDR – get equity from land to reinvest
 - Look at how can get \$ to support ag. Business

Question #3: How can we preserve and support food crops and other traditional farm products?

- Presenter from 4 generation farm: founded 1919
 - Dairy → Beef → Row Crops
 - Infrastructure went away, growth of population demands turf, topsoil, nurseries, greenhouses
 - Opportunities also include direct marketing. Almost exclusively retail; almost no Wholesale.
 - Focus on opportunity to do it collaboratively
 - Strong alliances
 - 3-legged stool: the people and their energy, land to do it on, and markets
 - Cross the matrix back and forth
 - Bond together as an industry – (Pumpkin Festival) – not as competitors
 - Processors/Infrastructure leave →
 - Production follows
 - Mainly sell direct to consumer
 - Need new skills – be cost effective
 - Focus on local options
 - 3 legs:
 - People to do work – new generation
 - Land
 - Markets – place to sell
 - If can cross all 3, can be successful – work together to solve
 - Four pumpkin farms, pool resources to promote all
- Are those the “right products”
 - Internationally – are we growing what they want
- Convenience – stay at home mom
 - access to fast paced world
- Puget Sound Fresh – good

- Drop out when charge grower
- Puget Sound Fresh - \$35 membership fee
- Value of “local” 92% at stores
- Want local especially & will pay for it (comparably priced)
 - If = price, will select local
- Local – need to produce product that generates respect
 - Sell quality, real food, local

Question #4: What can be done to stem the loss of farmlands?

- What is critical mass
 - Every acre you have, can't lose more
- Regulatory environment – GMA
- Need to be economically viable
 1. Landbase
 2. Profitable
 3. Infrastructure
 4. Public support – Political will
 - Codes and permits support policy
 - Long term stability-prevent speculation
- Skagit County use conservation tax to preserve farmland
- 82% voters want government to protect instead of market forces

- Pressures
 1. City expands
 2. Non farm households in farmland-conflicts
 3. Habitat

- Wildlife habitat being lost, too. Ag. Has to be preserved in concert with wildlife habitat
- Charlie Chang – plenty of new American farmers to help answer all four questions
- Expand uses to include more rural economic uses
 - . ball fields
 - rural referrals
- Farming is not profitable
 - When it's profitable the solution to question 4 is answered
- How many farmers can access the web? (more than half raised their hands)
- Issue has to be done on a County level
 - The individual decisions will most always result in selling out for retirement
- A new comer from N.Y.
 - Need tax incentives
 - Shout as loud as you can
- Needs to be profitable
- Listen to farmers – bottom up approach to policy development
 - Montana & Wyoming – no tax on farm machinery

- TDR- Transfer of Development Rights

- Allow to put in infrastructure for long-term farming
- Market driven
- Tight zoning
- Way to manage farm depends on long-term view
 - Development vs. Farming
- Ensure market
 - Everyone needs support
 - Why don't others
- Need to educate public on value of purchasing local
 - What organizations can support this
- Education needs to be @ urban community
- Urban population needs to support local
- Re-focus curriculum to support
- Education about lifestyle (and nutrition)
 - Farming as lifestyle
- Need to support infrastructure
- Farming is a business (vs. lifestyle)
 - If no profit – no farm

Question #1: What new “agriculture infrastructure” is needed to support farming in the County?

- Local labeling and marketing
 - New auction barn. Tillamook-like brand.
- Effective relevant information
 - Education/research to support “new ag.”
- Fine-tune relationships with regulators
 - Drainage issues
- Linking new farmers with land
- Not just ag., but rural economic development

Question #2: How can we encourage new generations of farmers?

- Education: consumers and school youth
 - new farmers
- Economic Incentives
 - Tax breaks like Boeing

Question #3: How can we preserve and support food crops and other traditional farm products?

- Develop new markets and products
 - Raw milk, direct markets
- Market research: what to grow and sell
 - Are we growing what buyers/consumers want
 - Convenience factor

Question #4: What can be done to stem the loss of farmlands?

- Farms must be economically viable
 - Land base, profitability, infrastructure, political will (public support)
 - Implementation of policies matches goal
- Educate the public on value of and how to support ag

Breakout Group B: Wrestling with Regulatory Issues

Question #1: How can we ensure that the “voice of the farmers” is genuinely heard and considered during regulatory review processes?

- Create more open lines of communication to increase participation at meetings, with the one exception of no Spring meetings.
- Some suggestions to improve communication were the following: a website, additional small group meetings, a newsletter.
- Invite communication repetitively through different outlets, for example, radio, newspaper, farm newsletters, etc., as many in the farm community do not necessarily read, listen to, or interact with the same communication outlets.
- Invite feedback on ideas and potential regulatory changes prior to finalizing any decisions.
- Provide an early alert to the community prior to discussions about such decisions.
- The licensing process needs clarification, consistency among agencies, and better connections between local, state, and federal agencies.
- There needs to be accountability of agencies to the public.
- There should be broader representation on the agricultural advisory board
- Public input at meetings should be placed at the beginning of the meeting rather than at the end.

- Provide education on agriculture – what it is and why it is important. A clear understanding is vital to make informed decisions on ag issues.

- Have joint Planning Commission/Ag Board meetings on Comp Plan updates that affect Ag and Ag issues (including transportation elements).

- Appointments to the county’s Planning Commission and other groups that approve code changes should include at least one member of the Ag community at all times.

- Educate urban citizens about Ag as an issue – how much it costs to grow food, where food comes from, how much the farmer makes for each item...

- ALSO educate policy makers (elected officials, appointed members) about Ag issues so that the issues are better understood and more quickly addressed.

Farmers assume that city-dwellers are envious of large farm parcels, and also have more political “clout” than the rural farmers

There was some enthusiasm for “one vote per acre” so that farmers could have political clout equivalent to urban populations; however, the idea of a weighted vote” so that farmers aren’t ignored by urban interests should receive some attention. The farmers own more land, but their needs fall behind urban pressures.

-One-person felt that getting city-dwellers out to a farm (to see alpacas) had been helpful in educating the public; others pointed out that because of bioterrorism and foreign animal disease threats, as well as some bad previous experiences with visitors, the idea of opening farms to visitors may not be such a good idea.

-There seemed to be some consensus that “farmers don’t get respect.” The political influence and decision-making in Snohomish County has been controlled by the home building industry and farmers have been ignored and not treated with the respect due to local taxpayers who contribute to the community. This needs to change – it’s a problem of attitudes toward farming and farmers.

-There was also general consensus that farmers feel more threatened than salmon, all consideration is given to saving salmon, but not much to saving farms and farmers.

Because of local history, the farmers have very little trust of county government and this complicates things. Importance of attending meetings and/or getting on the mailing list of the Agriculture Advisory Board and/or the Farm Bureau to keep abreast of current events, issues and public meetings related to farming.

Ongoing process. In decision making

- E-mail (not everyone has it)
- Letters
- Local meetings
- Farmers have regular input along the way
- Better notification of when County making regulation
- Coordination of policy
 - DOH (Dept. of Health)
 - DOT (Dept. of Transportation)
- Better communication with farmers.
- Lack of contact info for Ag. Producers
- Utilize existing forums to Community
 - Cattlemen
 - Farm Bureau
- County website: post agendas
- Capital Press

Question #2: In what ways can county regulations better serve agriculture?

- Clearly define farming and agriculture, making sure that any definition used meets the needs of small as well as large farmers.
 - Clearly define what is considered wetlands.
 - Clearly define what is considered a “supportive business” to farming.
 - Link the county regulations to other agencies that have both regulatory responsibilities and communication methods such as USDA, WSDA and NRCS.
- Inspectors should have the courtesy to make appointments, rather than just showing upon properties and sometimes blocking driveways. Farmers don’t always know whether it is a trespasser or an inspector, or someone who intends to cause harm.
- Carolyn Henri's excellent economic summary of the contributions of Ag to the local/county economy should be used as the starting point for Planning Commission and County Council meetings that deal with this element of the Comp Plan updates. (PDS employees should also view this info.)
- Docketing should be restricted so that proponents can’t simply “come back next year if their proposals are denied. Dwayne Lane has been through docketing 3 times (!) and this takes up a lot of resources and means that other things aren’t accomplished. If a docketing item related to Ag is denied, it should not be allowed back for at least 3 more years.
- Right to Farm waivers have to be signed off on by new buyers (who purchase with 1500?? Feet of a farm). This waiver should be honored – and code enforcement officers should be able to type in the name of someone calling in a code violation to determine whether that person has signed a waiver acknowledging that they understand they’ve purchased property that allows their existing neighbors the Right to Farm. If someone signs such a waiver, they should not be able to call in complaints about farming activities; they knew they were buying into a rural area. This would reduce the number of code complaints.
- All implications of a regulation should be recognized before passing legislation to correct the “bad apples”. Don’t punish those doing a good job when regulating those who don’t.
- Change complaint system so that “neighbor reporting on neighbor” is not encouraged. Farmers believe a basic right is to know who called, what the specific issue is and other details relevant to the complaint report.
- Trying to figure out who to talk with, or who can solve a problem, is far too complicated. How many people should have to be involved in solving an issue? The regulatory process needs to be simplified. Coordination of county departments and other agencies if important.

-The county needs to show local bankers that it is working with the community to help local Ag businesses; this will create momentum for local bankers to be more reasonable about Ag loans.

-There should be some kind of system – like a “Review Board” to help determine whether a code violation took place. Some activities are illegal, but others are actually legit – however, many county employees know so little about farming that they can’t tell the difference. A “Review Board” might help keep the bogus code enforcement problems to a minimum; the board can advise the Code Enforcement Officer about whether they think the action in question was a legitimate Ag activity.

Doberman introduced himself as having just been assigned to investigate the Ag violations for PDS.

-The county should help do a better job of marking local roadways as “AG AREAS” WHERE FARM VEHICLES HAVE PRIORITY. Many farm vehicles are slow, and/or big and drivers need to be warned to be careful.

-More flexibility in Ag. Code

-Have farmer input

-Use of farm plans to add regulatory issues

- Access for individual farmers (one on one with officials)
- Integrate right-to-farm intoUDC
- Identify who and where you go to address issues (this written in code)
- On farm advisors
- Reasonable amount of time to address conflict without penalty
- County Health Department and other agencies
 - Coordinate and have “farm friendly” policies

Question #3: How can county regulations help preserve farmland?

-Change the concept to preserve not just farmland, but farming in all its diversity, and preserve farmers and farm families as well.

-Provide incentives for farmers to stay in the area.

-Provide support to continue over generations or from farmer to farmer (use Farm Link programs).

-Provide compensation for losses in value (such as recent Oregon initiative allows).

-Do not allow conversion to housing, car lots, malls.

-Implement the transfer of development rights (TDR) and purchase of development rights (PDR) programs.

-Work to achieve balance among the conflicting goals.

-Bring all stakeholders into the process, for example, where are the owners of upland timberlands or small wood lot owners?

-The group discussed the idea of a farm plan as a mechanism to reduce the needs for multiple individual permits; this concept received a very mixed response with some indicating yes, it was a good idea; others indicating no; still others saying maybe; and others asking for more information.

- Allow intensive economic development on one part of farm to conserve rest of land
- Farmland distinct from open space
- Federal – local – state rules on habitat are in conflict
- Look at regulations that try to protect other resources and how it impacts farmland
- PDR prog.
- Prevent regulations from stopping innovation to solve problems and finding solutions
- Recognize Ag. as industry and develop appropriate regulations and industrial attraction
- Education of County on Ag. to reduce conflict

Question #4: What are the barriers to business diversification and entrepreneurship for farmers?

-The mixture of regulations from different county, state, and federal agencies create serious problems to business diversification. When one starts to be entrepreneurial and push the envelope, one typically crosses fields of responsibility by agencies, for example, adding ice cream sales to a flower shop means that public health agencies become involved in the regulations of the activity.

-Often the regulations of other agencies and offices start to affect the farm when trying to diversify and simplifying or building connections among these agencies from land use to public health to water quality to ecology would reduce the hassles associated with diversification.

-Barrier = Regulation

-Research on new products

-Capital investment (access to cap.)

-Regulatory uncertainty

Definition of farm business

-Forum for farms to come together with other support or related industry

-Lack of consistency in interpretation of regulations

-Limits on time for approval/resolution

-Educate general public on value of having farms. (non-farm folks)

Question #5: What programs or services could the county provide to help farmers deal with regulatory matters?

-The county could help farmers with federal regulations.

-The county needs to be flexible within the boundaries of its policies.

- The county needs to work with farmers who want to maintain their farm using other activities (diversification) to add to the farm revenue: such examples as farm stands, horse arenas, ball fields, and other entrepreneurial activities were cited.
- Create better linkages between agriculture and agritourism.
- Connect the Agricultural Advisory Board and land use regulations to the - Economic Development Council.
- Connect the land use regulations with other regulators, such as the Department of Health.
- Provide a licensing specialist to assist one to work through the regulations.
- Create a permit assistance and one-stop shop in the county for permits and licensing.
- Update the website – explore issuing permits online. The comment was “you can get divorced on line now”, you should be able to get a permit.
- Centralize contact with County
- Better extension outreach on regulations
- County transfer some regulatory issues to Conservation District (CD)
- Move farm plans out of CD
- Resource clearing house for useful information
- Renew government commitment to diking and drainage districts
- More positive approach to inspection. How can I help you do it right?
- Education of general public on drainage issues
- Economic impact analysis of regulation should be required

Summary from facilitators to conference participants

Four big ideas surfaced from the presentations by the farmer panel and during the discussion:

1. One goal for the Agricultural Advisory Board should be that when all is said and done, the total number of regulations is less.
2. A suggestion was made to create an Agricultural Code Review Commission to specifically look at these regulations.
3. Another suggestion was to formalize the process with clear instructions for all participants.
4. The Farm Panel suggested reviewing the assumptions that underlie the regulations; this relates to the concept expressed in the discussions that the role of the county offices should be the protection of farming, not just its regulation.

A key issue that came up multiple times is the need to connect with other stakeholders involved in land uses of the county. For example, the small wood lot owners and corporate and state timber owners of uplands need to be part of this ongoing discussion because of the consequences for the lowland farmers. Second, there is a need for other regulatory agencies, such as public health, ecology, and others, to participate in these workshops, conferences, and planning activities.

Breakout Group C: Crops: New Keys to Success?

Question #1: How can the county help farmers develop niche markets and specialty crops?

Implement Ag.

Strategic Plan

Surveys/recommendations

- Look into letting public know cost of production, food is better cheaper
- Consider letting rent of farm equipment/interchange with available land owners
- Look at alternative uses for marginal land
- Consider carbon credits to reduce pollution
- WSU Extension – expand it
- Proactive noxious weed
- Master Gardener Program
- Not sure County should help with marketing
- How can County help promote niche products?
- Help educate public about ways County touches public
fair, tax mailings
- Use for consumer education
- Educate public on costs to farm
- Help facilitate land and equipment leases/exchanges
- Alternative uses of land (12 yr. rule)
- Carbon credits
- County needs to have role
- Ag liaison assemble knowledge, grant, marketing help
- More proactive in noxious weed control, being ignored
- Expand, not cut back Hort program Extension
- Not sure County needs to be in marketing, should be kept in horticulture, Master Gardener
- County doesn't
Farmers can come up with but question is how to promote

Question #2: How should “agriculture” be redefined for regulatory purposes?

Should it include more?

On-site farm stands

Stables

Ball fields

Not impervious surfaces

- Agriculture doesn't need to be redefined, slippery slope already defined
- Follow USDA def - \$2,000 income from ag practices
- Redefine agrictourism to be defined as ag practice
- Law is or interpretation defining
- How can make clear to code enforcers what yo
Farmers not problem
- For reg. purposes should include farm stands, rec. fields?

- Land use/\$ value
- Reduce to allow wider degree of farms
- Broaden definition – smaller operations
- “Locally grown crops are our source for healthy, nutritious food.”
- Doesn't need redefining
- How should reg. agencies be re-defined to support agriculture?
- Follow USDA definition - \$2,000
- Add agri-tourism to definition
 - wineries, on-farm activities
- Law or interpretation of law?

Question #3: How can the County assist farmers with their marketing efforts?

- Example – Pumpkin Fest
 - interns – WSU help
 - marketing; non-profit; promotion
- Signage Regulations – change to identify crops, etc. – uniform
- Ag-tourism brochures
- Concern with County getting involved with marketing
- Success example: Pumpkin marketing
 - intern recruitment
 - non-profit formation
 - leverage intern for marketing
 - assist. Of WSU Extension did it
- Allow signage for farms
 - seasonal
 - uniform, generic, use tree, pumpkin
 - direct to farms
 - concerned with County involvement use Extension instead
- Big key
 - get behind regional products
 - assure quality – fixes idea in buyers mind
 - create branding

Question #4: What new types of farm products and activities could be successful in the County?

- Bike Sundays – close roads, sell consumables
- CSA's – suggest to pop.
- Partnership with arts community gallery “drive” hosted
- Festival of family farms (ex. Skagit)
- Bicycle event for farms (1,000 people)
 - transport purchases for customers
- Nursery products – wide variety
- Organics
- Livestock (WSDA/USDA)
- Eggs/Veggies
 - high quality

- Bicycle Sundays/close roads
to “taste” and shop – with “Sag Wagon”
- CSA;s – encourage more
- Partnerships with Arts community
- Festival of Family Farms

Question #5: What are the keys to success for local crop farmers?

- #1 maintain infrastructure/drainage of soils
- Access to capital
help to start
- Marketing expertise
(Ext. personnel, those in biz/)
- Personal property tax
(equipment owned 20 yrs)
consider ½ of time
- Commercial grower assist. Needed in Snohomish County
disappearing
technical problem asst.
disease problems
- Help each other (areas other than marketing)
hard to get veg. growers together (Snohomish., Skagit, Whatcom Co.)
- Non-commercial infest., compounds problem for orchards
- New farmer help needed – info.
How to use equipm.
- Mt. Vernon new facility not easy to get to
- Weed control with inmate labor
(willing to pay when most needed)
- Access to WSU Extension for all farmers – including commercial growers.
Technical assistance (disease control)
- Farmers to share expertise – County to facilitate
- Help for new farmers
- Use Snohomish instead of Skagit WSU – Cooperative Extension
- Weed control – use inmates to help?
Would be willing to pay if County helps arrange

Breakout Group D: Livestock and Dairy: New Keys to Success?

Question #1: How can the County help farmers develop niche markets and specialty products?

- Find producers/locations
- Future = on-going/changing
Don't depend on obsolete
- : Education (High School Students)
- Values – appreciation

- Workshops – outreach of information
- Collaborate with industry and agencies
- Ag in the classroom
- Need to support
- Market resources
 - How to and where
- Updated Research
- Economics
- Procedural
- Post on website
- Buidelines – specialty items
- Review documents from other resources
 - Open-minded approach
- Market-driven packaging
- Pooled ideas – access for others to review
- Economic Development specialist
- Support a statewide initiative for an ag and resource-based industries development corporation (to provide no-and low-interest loans, seed money for new enterprise development, etc.)

Question #2: How should “agriculture” be redefined for regulatory purposes?

As in flood plain

- Allow necessary structures needed for successful business
- Rules should not exclude an industry
- Rules should allow Agriculture to prosper
- A lot county reg that state and fed. regulated – need to lobby state leg. & Congress to change rules
 - e.g. long distance hauling of cattle
- County has been helping with grass fed beef
- Profitability is basis for longevity
- Flip the questions: How should regulations be redefined for agriculture?

Question #3: How can the county assist farmers with their marketing efforts?

- County is not a marketing agent
- Everyone should market their own product
- County should help with permitting
- Assist farmers to establish farmers market
- County helping farmers getting hold of manure
- Design layout/planning of farms for BMP
- Photo and Carbon Credits to farmers
 - (adopting USDA farmland as untouchable)
- Signage and advertising to promote marketing
- Online availability for notes from today’s sessions

- Ability to post additional comments on line and network
- County to promote farmers markets
- Remember not all farmers are large scale
- Farm policy should be scale appropriate
- For new and existing reg. goals don't mandate methods mandate results
- We need options for creativity
- Provide a resource guide to every mail recipient in the County, directing them to sources for local foods and ag products
- Help develop CSA's
- Provide an economic development specialist with expertise in marketing development to producers who can not only help them develop the marketing piece, but can develop the marketing pieces for the producers

Question #4: What new types of farm products and activities could be successful in the County?

- Generation transfer
- Different expectations
- Choice remains with new generation
- Organics – new direction
- Puget Sound Fresh
- Individual marketing efforts
- CSA's
 - Subscription service
 - Advertising sites
- “Pumpkin County”
 - Tourism outreach
- Recreational leases
 - Hunters, etc.
- County promotion of agricultural products

Question #5: What are the keys to success for local dairy and livestock farmers?

- Bottom line, need to be profitable
- County can provide tools to succeed
- Some rules not relevant to Ag.
- County rules and regulations should not exceed EPA, FIMA, DOE
- Speedy process in decision making
- County should not slow decision process
- Rules should not dictate survival with the farm
- Right to plow good and should be implanted with the understanding so they can survive.
- Need a profit
- Special needs for livestock
 - Maryville's livestock auction
 - County's help to maintain the auction – somewhere!

USDA slaughter house
County to relieve regulations to allow the slaughter house!
How should "Freedom" be redefined for reg. purposes
Maybe County should reform the regulation to be serve farmers
Slaughter house allowed only a rural-Industrial zoning,
Should allow slaughter on farm
No use IRS definition of a farming operation
Wet lands ordinances
Turn farmlands into wetland for duck habitat
County should look at this
Developer use Snohomish County farmland to swap with dev.
land elsewhere for wetland mitigation – needs to be looked at
Marysville auction site
7 sites lost already
COOL – need to support mandatory participation
Need to assess industry and set benchmark goals
Monitoring on natural resource regulations
Bank mitigation
Need better communication between each other and
Government
See County help in permitting purpose to repair flood damage
County should take a lead role in reduce flooding rather than
Assessing
Profitability
Access to markets
No ballfields!

Breakout Group E: Nursery, Greenhouse and Sod Industry: New Keys to Success?

Question #1: How can the County help farmers develop niche markets?

- Cooperative website
 - Communicate and process, post codes
 - Source for growers re: markets
 - Centralized information
 - % of building to landscaping
- Promotion
 - products
 - consumption
- Incentives
 - sustainable ag
 - new crops
- Promote local products to local consumers

- Promote gardening and landscaping in general (i.e. Leavenworth, LaConnor)
- Tax incentives for new crops
 - (promote diversification)
- Alternative crops
 - perennials
 - cut flowers
- Incentives for sustainable production
 - (zoning preference)
- Develop cooperative structures so growers can capture bigger markets
- Vegetation solution to waste water management (Biofiltering)
- Distribution of information through website – cooperative of many growers.
- Centralized information source
- County identify overseas markets and communicate to growers. Provide expert incentives.
- Tax incentives – viable for County?
- Native plants in landscapes
 - tough to find some – Tiger lily bulb example
- Requirement of % of landscape around new buildings – like arts % for public buildings
- How do tax incentives get out to farmers? Application form. You commit to staying in ag.
- Allowing % of land to get tax discounts. Ag, forest,...within the same legal parcel

Question #2: How should “agriculture” be redefined for regulatory purposes?

- More flexible definition to include supporting enterprises
- Training of staff
- Flexibility in building code for ag buildings
- Training to County staff for Ag permit processing (Ag is different then normal permittee)
- County should post building codes applicable to agriculture on website
- Links on website to other places (counties) doing same things
- Preference in permit process for sustainable Ag
- Smith Gardens just went through permitting process for a new facility. Met with County. Granted farmer “exemptions”. Greenhouses not well defined in codes. County wanted urban building code things – fire suppression, etc. But easily corrected after talking again with County. Training of County employees. People that specialize in ag. Code more developed for ag structures (codes generally national)
- Website. People friendly. Pages that introduce you to process. Help get you through process.
- Too many definition for wetlands. County should have consistent answer.
- Old structures on farms. County should offer advice on how to preserve and remodel w/o tearing down building. Use of buildings change over time.
- Wild trees. Regs required to dig up and replant before they can consider as a farm. Advice was to cut it all down to start the farm.

-Not allowed to be a nursery person and a landscaper. As landscaper, can work out of warehouse in industrial area. County code issue. Needs to be addressed.

Question #3: How can the County assist farmers with their marketing efforts?

- Buy local campaign
- Better signage rules
- Central full time farmers market
- Better regs for off premises signs for marketing purposes
- Radio/newsprint ads to promote local growers and products and educate public about importance of Ag
- Campaign to support local farmer. Buy local. “Supply local growers”

Question #4: What new types of farm products and activities could be successful in the County?

- Related complimentary uses:
 - Dairy – compost
 - Nursery – installation (landscape)
 - B & Bs, ecotourism
- More educational programs in schools about Ag
- Change negative image of Ag as dirty and smelly
- County needs to alert industry of important changes. Post on website
- County should allow diversification of farm enterprise to keep it viable
- Market research
- User friendly products. Many people associate dirt and smells. 4-h and schools – youth education on how to grow.
- Allow more “incidental use” with farms. Landscaping, composting, etc. Amount of compost produced restricted.

Question #5: What are the keys to success for local “green” industry producers?

- Education in schools about agriculture
- Diversification of farm enterprise and value added products
- Diversified farms allowed. Keep farm intact.

Additional Input from Attendees

ECONOMIC

Extension efforts (4-H) focus primarily in rural schools which encourages future producers. What really needs to be ensured is a market place for local products. Education efforts in urban schools where greater populations exist will ensure future markets. Nutritional programs exist in current curriculums and it should integrate sustainability of local food production.

Improve infrastructure: State and County Transportation plans should include improvements to accommodate farm machinery. Widened shoulders or ag-equipment trails.

Widening/ensuring markets: Educate urban sector citizens about importance of local farm investment and security in a time of globalization. Stress the opportunity to save this economic sector for our towns, cities and future generations.

The County has helped by developing Puget Sound Fresh and the local downtown farmers market in Everett. Can the County be involved in educating the public with actual promotion of local agriculture? Consumers need to know the benefits to them of local produce, i.e., better quality, often cheaper, best for the environment locally and elsewhere, food security, etc.

If Government is willing to “invest” 30M to support NASCAR, why not invest it instead into ag infrastructure? It is better for the environment and the community. NASCAR tracks are NOISY!! I want to hear the birds and sounds of my animals in distress so I can come to their aid. The noise from a race track would drown in out.

Honor Farm facility should be renovated into locally labeled meat and dairy facility/auction barn combo.

How about promoting “Small Farm Days” where urban families could join a farm family and share in chores, adventures, etc.

Maybe a Bed & Breakfast situation - one family at a time. Education-based program.

I don't know how this could be done here. A planned rural farm with several families using the same equipment. Each family would have a small part of the whole operation. Rotational use of barn, pastures, etc. All families would need supplemental income, but share land and equipment. (Diagram)

Build complex of farmers market, slaughter facility, etc. with plenty of parking on site. Island Crossing site (Dwayne Lane's) or in vicinity of proposed race track.

Additional research for corn silage “seed” product in Western Washington. Most Pioneer, Dekalb, research is done in the mid-West.

Hopefully, PDS, County Council and the Executive will work together and help Snohomish County agriculture be the best, and we could, if need be, support everyone within our County. Processing products within our County would produce quality and jobs. We cannot depend on foreign or world food. We must be able to support our own.

I believe if we can allow more flexibility for certified kitchens - would greatly help the value-added food products become more available. Allowing residential certified kitchens; flexibility with stainless steel, use other, less expensive options? Or community certified kitchens that can be used by many farmers. If there is already a program for these kitchens, please let me know.

Tax cuts, organic farms, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), farm stands, urban permaculture marketing labels for community products, encourage new farms.

The challenge of changing industry:

- 1) Infrastructure: Work with tourism bureau in expanding, growing and developing agri-tourism. Need help in cost of promotion.
- 2) Well advertised common location, centralized location to advertise our agricultural base in County.
- 3) Advertise within this County and King and Pierce Counties.
- 4) Agri-tourism: list all the locations

Nursery: List nurseries and locations

Beef: Where to buy

Dairy products: Where to buy

Farm gate sales require innovation and changes on the farm, we need to accept these changes and make that type of development a streamlined process.

Need capital available from financiers. Many banks are taking a dim view of the future of Western Washington Ag. in the long term. A strong Pro-Agriculture voice in the county will help to protect bank funding for the future.

Obstacle: Marketing.

Obstacle: Need to keep local cattle auction.

Obstacle: Dairy pricing.

Obstacle: Financing for operations and debt reduction.

Obstacle: Financial support.

Obstacle: Low prices / high costs.
Labor issues – smothered with paperwork – reports
Taxed on farm entertainment provided for customers.
No local canneries available.

Obstacle: Cost of infrastructure.
High interest rates.

Obstacle: Lack of food processor for livestock producers.

- Obstacle: Maintain the right to direct farm marketing.
- Obstacle: Maintain the right to direct farm marketing.
- Obstacle: To better help and promote farmers, the county could put farms, farmers markets and farm stands in the Visitors Guide and other free publications. Put together an area like Pike Place Market that local Snohomish County farmers could market their products in and attract business to the area. Allow free use of fair grounds for Farmers Market. Use yearly fair to teach and promote farms in the area. Low milk prices.
- Obstacle: Taxes
- Obstacle: Cash, taxes, cost of increments electric rates.
- Obstacle: Low milk prices – high cost of production. Health care for self-employed individuals.
- Obstacle: Direct marketing of products.
- Obstacle: Nutrient holding facility needs to be built – is permitted, but monumental task, don't have massive funds to accommodate. (Needs to use honor farm lagoon in the interim.) Water rights issue, bank won't loan under this black cloud from D.O.E for the last two years plus – no resolution.
- Obstacle: Affordable farmland.
- Obstacle: Keeping up with minimum wage increases (pay employees and bills, no money left to go back into the operation). Why should I stay in the business if I can't afford to? (Running in the red is not easy for extended periods of time).
Receiving bank loans for purchasing machinery or cattle for capital. It's hard to get an agricultural loan especially in the hard times.
- Obstacle: Certified kitchen for value-added products.
- Obstacle: Low milk prices.
- Obstacle: Local processors & slaughterhouse.
- Obstacle: Need a USDA-approved process facility in Snohomish County. A large area available for a Farmers Market with available parking.
- Obstacle: Time and money.

Obstacle: Excessively volatile milk prices impinge long-term planning.
Loss of processors.
Loss of supply infrastructure.

Obstacle: Price of product.

Obstacles: Rising expenses, especially fuel and electricity.
Capitol investment in equipment & livestock.

Obstacle: Consistent and profitable markets.
Higher labor costs.

Obstacle: Need land to farm.
Need tools to farm.
Need water to use.

REGULATION

The link between Government and the farming community is, in most cases, the “regulator” and the “enforcer” who often interprets law policy. A very high percentage of these public employees, paid by our tax dollars, have an obvious agenda in opposition to what farmers and farming represent. They are too often close-minded and offer little or no help and “interpret” regulations as they see fit, usually excessively restrictive, or slanted towards “their” agenda and personal beliefs. Most of them are given too much power and not always consistent special interests/big business bias.

Improve infrastructure: State and County transportation plans should include improvements to accommodate farm machinery - widened shoulders or ag.-equipment trails.

County to take lead in flood reduction.

Lower taxes to reflect citizen wants of open space-for open space. Lower permit fees or eliminate them.

Zone requirement as it was when agricultural land was purchased.

“Slaughter facilities” are only allowed in “rural industrial” zones at this time. Rather than requiring a re-zone, it seems that this activity is appropriately placed on ag-zoned property, or define livestock slaughter as “ farm product processing” which is an allowed use.

Ball parks need to be in neighborhoods, not on ag land, period.

Double traffic fines in ag zones!

County-wide permit for dike maintenance and repair so there is no delay for diking districts to do the work.

Permanent grading fee exemption for dike repairs.

The State of Washington and Snohomish County will put thousands to millions of dollars to keep Boeing here and to bring NASCAR here. You give these and other companies tax breaks and incentives. Why do you not give farmers the same consideration? If you want farmers to stay, you, as the County Government, need to listen to what the farmers need to stay in business

Several farmers are on small acreages in areas not zoned agriculture and don't have the support through R5 that they need to produce crops. Some plan needs to be made to protect other zoning for agriculture as well.

When the "public good" requires a farmer to not use his/her land, the public should offer true market value to keep that land for fish, etc.

Public-owned land could be leased to beginning farmers. Lets acquire the lowland around Island Crossing to preserve as green space, to prevent flooding downstream.

My concern is stream setback. We all want healthy streams, but anything more than 100 feet setback is a waste of land.

Regulatory rules need to be clarified. Stop using the "broad brush" for agriculture. There clearly are "farmers" that are impacting negatively our communities' resources. These aspects of our agricultural community should, at the very least, not be encouraged through "lax" regulations. Those aspects of our agricultural community that are enhancing our communities' resources should be encouraged. These aspects, as before, can be provided "the fertile ground" they need to grow through "lax" regulations.

Tax cuts, organic farms, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), farm stands, farm outreach, financial incentives for protection of community resources, encourage "upland" farming, urban permoculture marketing labels for community products, small farm zoning, encourage new farms.

It would be helpful if the County stood behind the Right to Farm affidavit. Farmers are still being harassed by new neighbors moving in even though they've signed the Right to Farm agreement. A farmer should be able to have someone from the County step in to help them mediate or whatever needs to be done.

Need to prioritize the fact that a key function and value of ditches and other water courses is drainage.

Environmentally protective "best available science" is always used to update SMP and CAO codes. Not enough weight is put on the economic implications of the codes. No/limited studies are done.

Many environmental studies underplay or overlook the value of well-managed agricultural operations on water quality.

Farm gate sales require innovation and changes on the farm. We need to accept these changes and make that type of development a streamlined process.

Obstacle: Restrictions on drainage, unnecessary.

Obstacle: Restriction on necessary filling.

Obstacle: Need to look into wetland regulations.

Obstacle: Take a new look at regulations for dike replacement.

Obstacle: Drainage taxes.

Obstacle: Difficulties; restrictions associated with lot status boundary line adjustments, code regulations and enforcement as we tried to stay solvent and in preparation for estate planning.

Obstacles: Multiple layers of regulation that conflict with each other
Health Department and DOE regulations that are not cost effective to comply with.
Permits required that are cost prohibitive to get because of the technical detail required.

Obstacle: Understanding County regulations.

Obstacle: Buffers, regulations.

Obstacle: Floods, regulations.

Obstacle: Not understanding all the regulations and how they impact our operations.

Obstacle: Flooding.

Obstacle: We are threatened by the next major flood cutting our farm in half. We are a successful dairy operation and have always been able to repair erosion sites. Now we cannot repair what the Army Corps of Engineers, the state, and the county constructed in 1958. Could the county help us get a permitted structure in place?

Obstacle: Building permits for expanding operation in a flood plain.

- Obstacle: Government regulations, specifically land use! Anything that encumbers or restricts my private property rights, prevents me from wanting to expand operations in Snohomish County.
- Obstacle: Granite Falls & development wanting to encroach in Ag land.
- Obstacle: 1) Flooding, getting upland water off the fields quickly- like to see upland residents financially responsible for flood land upkeep.
2) Keeping communities around farming rural.
- Obstacle: Regulations. Lack of vision by regulators.
- Obstacle: Ag land lost to flooding wetlands because of new laws restricting removal of silt build up (from upland development) in drainage ditches and streams. Making a reasonable profit; unreasonable increase in assessed land valuation and property taxes and environmental regulations.
- Obstacle: Dealing with cluster housing encroachment in my area – Masses of people added to my area will not only change the “ruralness” but bring in urban type problems I don’t have time, energy or money to deal with. Not a win-win situation!
- Obstacle: Cleaning ditches
Wetlands
- Obstacle: Potential loss of usable land through Critical Areas Regulation.
- Obstacle: Urban sprawl and development.
Co-existence with non-farm neighbors.

COMMUNICATION

Extension efforts (4-H) focus primarily in rural schools which encourages future producers. What really needs to be ensured is a market place for local products. Education efforts in urban schools, where greater populations exist, will ensure future markets. Nutritional programs exist in current curriculums and it should integrate sustainability of local food production.

New generations: Better connections between urban schools and rural farms. Farmers come into schools in after-school programs to teach about planting, harvesting, nutrition, etc. In addition to bringing in/contracting with local food cooperatives to cook and supply local lunches.

Please put on-line all the suggestions written by Mike Hackett and Brad and others today. Contact all of us to tell us where to find them.

Needed: Better communication and coordination between groups to educate folks about farming.

WSU Extension - Master Gardeners, 4-H, livestock advisors, teacher education, etc. Many doing something in education. Better coordination would better use resources.

Students are taught about math, science, Shakespeare and U.S. History - and are rigorously tested on these. What needs to happen is the urban student needs to be immersed in applied math and business ag.-related, applied science (nature of farming), applied reading and writing and the history of Ag. and where it is headed. This can also be supported at the County level. Informed consumers with appropriate local nutritional lifestyle changes, and an appreciation of the farming community can help preserve farm land. All needs to be preserved.

Maybe provide a match-up service through the EDC.

Farm outreach.

Thank you for such a great conference. Snohomish County has taken a huge step towards a great partnership with their farmers. Aaron Reardon and staff are to be commended! We appreciate the ear of the County. We only want to be included and asked our opinion. Please don't give up on ag. and turn Snohomish County into another King County. Farming has a lot to offer and there's a lot of potential to bring money to the County. Thank you again for listening to our needs!

Now we need to see a balance to help the quality of life our State was known for! We need to do this by better communication through e-mail, newspaper, announcements and notices of up-coming events, regulations and ordinances (pending or being proposed) to our area agriculture boards, farm bureaus, and other organizations involved with farming. Communication is the key - when the issues come up, not *after* they're voted on!

- Obstacle: Not knowing regulatory and other requirements.
- Obstacle: Understanding county regulations
- Obstacle: To better help and promote farmers, the country could put farms, farmers markets and farm stands in the Visitors Guide and other free publications.
- Obstacle: Traffic – fence damage & no support from officers who respond to accident where livestock are in the pastures.
- Obstacle: Accessing resources: as this pertains to the county: It will be incredibly helpful to have a contact person in the county government to provide guidance in the multiple business interactions a farmer has with the county. I believe that a designated position would help send the message that the county is, in fact, interested.

HERITAGE

To get the next generation into farming: Kids are forbidden to work until they are 16-years-old, EXCEPT farm work. How about a labor-share program where kids can work on a farm and get a scholarship to college; or reduced/subsidized wages so farmers don't have to pay full minimum wage out of pocket. It improves bottom line for farmers, exposes kids to ag. and encourages education.

I was touched to see so many ag. people. Often I feel like we are a dying breed. Today brought hope and a fresh new start.

This most likely will be off your focus, but people need to understand governmental pressures are not just regulations on farming. There is enormous pressure in public education to get rid of any programs that work differently from core academic classes. Agriculture education is under siege. Bush's plan is to get rid of it in schools-there will be a huge disconnect if Agricultural Education continues to be hit in this State in the name of academic rigor and high stakes testing. My students were asked what would happen if there weren't any plants anymore, and they responded with go to the grocery store. I'm serious! This is important. Make sure agriculture education is supported in this County.

Ag. land marketing service to potential farmers. Let's attract new, young, strong farmers when the older farmers are ready to retire and sell.

Maybe provide a match-up service through the EDC.

Public-owned land could be leased to beginning farmers. Let's acquire the lowland around Island Crossing to preserve as green space, to prevent flooding down stream.

Regulatory rules need to be clarified. Stop using the “broad brush” for agriculture. There clearly are “farmers” that are impacting negatively our communities’ resources. These aspects of our agricultural community should, at the very least, not be encouraged through “lax” regulations. Those aspects of our agricultural community that are enhancing our communities’ resources should be encouraged. These aspects, as before, can be provided “the fertile ground” they need to grow through “lax” regulations.

A simple look at the history of our civilization clearly shows that the health and success of a community is dependent on its respect for and preservation of agricultural soils. The current trend, though slowing, shows a disconnect from this wisdom. Implementation of farming, marketing, and education methods that reverse these trends are vital.

My children are fourth generation Western Washingtonians. We have seen our area grow incredibly fast. We have seen the farm land shrink. We have seen the dairy cows disappear from the Snohomish and the Snoqualmie valleys. We’ve seen the growth.

Look at participants in the WSU Livestock Advisors Program. These are second career people relocated from urban locations to rural locations and farms. Recommendation: Model a program like the small business administration program and workshops for new small businesses. A mentoring program for starting a new enterprise, like business incubators. Combine business development with Agricultural technology.

Question: How is agriculture and its careers presented in public schools and colleges? This benchmark could be used to compare our efforts to encourage young farmers and ranchers. We need to know where we’re starting from.

Obstacle: Next generation to take over farm. Good retirement funds without selling farm for housing.

Obstacle: No regard for the family farm wanting to remain (Granite Falls and developments).

MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS

Thank you for having a “Focus on Farming.”

Don’t let these “seeds be lost in the wind of time.”

Brings to “questions” more than “answers” which is the place to start.

Limit partnership of business with Government agencies.

Question of tort reform was not addressed. Insurance is an increasing issue. Third party lawsuits?

Forestry also needs to be addressed as they are also part of our “resource economy” and County land owner.

Don’t let our “food” become as dependant as oil and steel mills.

Increasing County in partnership with private enterprise. Example is city facilities, Everett marine area.

Help us help schools.

Networking organization - link the resources together.

Link environmental agencies to farming communities.

Convenience foods - make the products more accessible for a fast paced world. Example: Drive-thru farm food lunch.

Make farming more profitable.

This has been one of the best conferences I’ve been to in years.

Good job, folks! I’d like to see more of a joint effort of information between Fed, organic with County.

Great conference!

First of all, I want to thank everyone involved in putting on this conference!
It’s a very good start to get the farm community’s voice heard.