



Snohomish County
Office of the Executive
Aaron Reardon
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Focus on Farming Conference draws record turnout

Lynnwood, WA – November 29, 2007 – *From Soils to Sales*, the fourth annual Snohomish County Focus on Farming conference, got underway at 8 a.m. today at the Lynnwood Convention Center. The conference, which drew 600 participants, featured nationally recognized agricultural leaders and a broad range of subject-specific breakout sessions, a 35-exhibitor trade show, a plated lunch and a wine and cheese tasting featuring locally grown products.

“Farming is a way of life and a passion for many, but it’s also a business,” said County Executive Aaron Reardon. He thanked farmers for investing in their future by participating in the conference, and the government officials in the audience for their willingness to learn about the issues that farmers face. “At the end of the day, protecting our local farms means increasing opportunities for farmers to pay the bills and put food on their own family’s table.”

During the morning session, Congressman Rick Larsen gave an update on the status of the federal farm bill. “For the first time, it looks like our federal farm policy is going to make a serious investment in helping Washington’s specialty crop producers thrive,” said Larsen. “This bill will also make other important investments to help Washington producers compete down the road and around the world.”

In addition, Washington State University President Elson Floyd gave an engaging talk about the importance of regional agriculture.

“Our partnership with farmers across the county and the region has been productive,” said Steve Pottle, Manager of Snohomish County’s Office of Economic Development, who also served as the conference emcee. “Sustainability remains at the center of our effort, and the growing awareness of local agriculture will go along way to ensure our farmers and growers can continue to be entrepreneurs and innovators.”

Morning keynote Chad Kruger, who serves as the Director of Outreach for the Climate Friendly Farming™ Project at Washington State University, presented the latest information and a set of strategies that farmers can implement based on climate change and energy issues. He suggests that changing practices now will ensure competitiveness in the future. The Climate Friendly

Farming Project is researching agricultural practices and technologies that reduce agricultural greenhouse gas emissions, sequester carbon in soils, and provide renewable, biomass-based substitutes for fossil fuel-based products.

National speakers included lunchtime keynote Dr. Fred Kirschenmann from Iowa State University's Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture; Charles Kuperus, New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture; Dave Rob, General Manager, Tuscarora Organic Growers and Susan McCoy, Garden Media Group, both from Pennsylvania; and California's Julia Wiley, owner of Marquita Farm, one of the oldest Community Supported Agriculture programs in the U.S. From Canada, Greg Wilkes and Jack Habina told the success story of the Calgary Farmers Market, and Vancouver Island's Michael Doehnel talked about small-scale grain production.

A \$45,000 check was presented to County Executive Reardon by the USDA's Jon DeVaney and Congressman Rick Larsen. The grant will cover a feasibility study and business plan for an agricultural business organization, a project that was recommended by the Snohomish County Agriculture Economic Development Action Team (SAEDAT). The organization would serve a broad-range of agricultural activities, from improving agency-wide communication to training, marketing, and business development.

The annual conference, initiated by Executive Reardon and Snohomish County farmers in 2004, has experienced growing attendance and participation from a broad sector, including new rural residents with an interest in farming, government agencies, and individuals interested in food and sustainability and other advocates for regional agriculture. That first conference launched Executive Reardon's Agriculture Initiative, which includes the recently announced Agriculture Sustainability Project.

Chef Russell Lowell, of Russell's Restaurant & Bar in Bothell and RDL Catering, created the main course – a Northern Italian lasagna made from all local ingredients – grass-fed Ninety Farms beef, Lopez Island Farms sausage, Samish Bay cheese, egg noodle pasta from Cucina Fresca (made from local eggs), and vegetables. Chocolatier Autumn Martin, from Seattle's award-winning Theo Chocolate, created a special creamy confection using fresh local mint that conference participants found at their lunchtime place settings.

“Our farms are a key component of Snohomish County's quality of life and the successful diversification of our economy,” said Reardon. “By combining our local commitment and the expertise of national leaders, the fourth annual Focus on Farming Conference took one more step to invigorate and sustain our farm economy.”

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For information, contact Laura McLeod, Snohomish County, 425.388.6465 or visit www.focusonfarming.org.

The Focus on Farming Conference, launched by Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon in 2004, is a project of Snohomish County's Office of Economic Development. Presenters and key sponsors include King County, Washington State University Snohomish County Extension, Northwest Agriculture Business Center, and Flower World, Inc.