



**Snohomish County  
County Executive's Office**

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**Aaron Reardon**  
*County Executive*

M/S #407  
3000 Rockefeller Avenue  
Everett, WA 98201  
(425) 388-3460  
FAX (425) 388-3434

[county.executive@co.snohomish.wa.us](mailto:county.executive@co.snohomish.wa.us)  
[www.co.snohomish.wa.us](http://www.co.snohomish.wa.us)

## Farmers cheer *Snohomish County Agriculture Action Plan*; will aid \$126 million-a-year local industry, Executive says

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*Reardon signs executive order that jumpstarts recommendations aimed at helping farmers; a great way to kick off National Ag Week and Agriculture Week in Snohomish County*

STANWOOD – Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon today released a far-ranging set of proposals aimed at boosting the \$126 million-a-year County agriculture industry.

To add weight to the *Snohomish County Agriculture Action Plan*, Executive Reardon took an additional step: He signed an executive order directing County officials to complete 13 action items identified in the proposal. They include the creation of a permit assistance center where County staff will work directly with farmers to simplify the permitting process and eliminate redundancies.

(To read the plan, go to [www1.co.snohomish.wa.us](http://www1.co.snohomish.wa.us), scroll down and click on the link [Snohomish County Agriculture Action Plan](#).)

The plan's release was a local kick-off for National Ag Week, which is being celebrated across the country starting Sunday, March 20. Executive Reardon proclaimed next week Agriculture Week in Snohomish County as part of the national festivities.

“Farming is a part of Snohomish County’s fabric and I am committed to its well-being,” Executive Reardon said. “It is a vital to the local economy – a \$126 million-a-year industry – that we must grow.”

Local farmers and agri-business officials participated in the development the plan, which was unveiled at Twin City Foods, Inc., in Stanwood. Twin City is Snohomish County’s largest agricultural employer with as many as 2,000 workers during the harvest season. With operations in three states, the company is consistently one of the top producers of frozen peas and cut corn in the world.

Executive Reardon committed County government to producing the plan after last November’s highly successful “Focus on Farming Conference,” in which more than 350 local farmers, ranchers and growers met to discuss obstacles and opportunities for local agriculture.

The Agriculture Action Plan addresses farm regulation reform, economic development, cultural heritage and outreach and education. The plan proves that Executive Reardon and the County is listening to their concerns, farmers say

“They’ve made the decision that they’re going to help agriculture,” said Hank Graafstra, an Arlington-area dairy farmer who employs 30 workers at his Country Charm Dairy. Dale Reiner, president of the Snohomish County Farm Bureau, added, “I think this is the most exciting thing that’s happened in ag in Snohomish County in many, many years.”

Executive Reardon said he wants the County to play a collaborative role with farmers. He stressed that the plan aims to find ways to reduce and eliminate regulatory redundancies that increase farmers’ costs. He also wants agriculture included in every economic development plan before the County.

In addition to creating a new agriculture permitting center, the executive order signed by Reardon also calls for:

- Creating an alternative way to process agricultural permits separate and unique from residential and commercial permits;
- Educating county staff and department heads about critical agricultural issues through a series of comprehensive workshops on infrastructure needs, transportation, and flood protection.
- Maintaining an agricultural website with information on regulatory issues that could affect the agricultural community, dates for public input and County contacts. The website will also keep current Agricultural Advisory Board agendas and minutes from past meetings.
- Providing adequate communications to farmers and landowners who may be affected when the County proposes changes and designations to land use zoning.

- Reviewing internal processes between County departments to clarify and streamline items such as traffic safety requirements for permits.
- Providing customer service comment opportunities to farm-permit applicants to generate feedback on the County's quality of service.
- Creating a task force with farmers, local, state and federal agencies to discuss permitting obstacles and opportunities and report options for discussion at this year's Focus on Farming Conference.
- Establishing an internal implementation team to monitor the progress of the Agriculture Action Plan.
- Naming an advisory group to propose agricultural economic recovery and expansion strategies. The advisory group will report to the County Executive and include a wide variety of agricultural disciplines, members of the financial community, operators of infrastructure businesses and appropriate agencies.
- Seeking grant funding to support outreach and educational efforts by agricultural organizations in the county.
- Convening an annual "Focus on Farming Conference" to bring agricultural groups, farm organizations and farmers together to provide educational forums on emerging topics, discuss issues and formulate policy recommendations to local and state government.
- Directing John Roney, the County's Agriculture Coordinator, to bring industry groups together within the next six months to discuss and identify challenges and opportunities.

Executive Reardon said he expects to issue a report creating a detailed work program by May 1.

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For additional information please contact:

Mark Funk  
Executive Management Analyst  
Snohomish County  
(425) 388-3623  
[mark.funk@co.snohomish.wa.us](mailto:mark.funk@co.snohomish.wa.us)