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USDA farm census shows county ag on the rise

The number of farmers working and living in Snohomish County increased 6 percent while land farmed increased 12 percent, according to the recent agriculture census conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Between 2002 and 2007, the period profiled in the latest national agriculture census, nearly 100 new farms were added to the more than 1,500 already operating in Snohomish County. An additional 8,200 new acres of land was placed in production, bringing the total in 2007 to almost 77,000 acres.

The average size of farms also increased 6 percent from 44 to 46 acres per farm.

“These increases are the positive results of collaboration between Snohomish County government and local farmers during the past few years,” Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon said. “Ensuring that farming remains an economically viable livelihood was a top priority of my first term, and it remains a top priority this term.”

“The growth in new crops and new marketing opportunities for new and existing farmers in Snohomish County is beneficial to everyone in the agriculture industry,” said Mark Craven, vice chairman of the county’s Agricultural Advisory Board.

The increases are mostly above similar percentages for Washington state. Nurseries and dairies account for the largest commodities in terms of overall sales, however, the county’s market value related to production dropped by 1 percent between 2002 and 2007, mostly attributable to a continued drop in milk prices.

The Agriculture Census bolsters Snohomish County’s own farmland mapping work completed last year as part of Reardon’s 2007 Focus on Farming Initiative, which has led to permit reform for agricultural activities, farmland preservation programs, farmland mapping, Fall Farm Festivals and the start of a biofuel crop industry. The mapping project also showed farmland production was on the rise.

“While Snohomish County is comprised mainly of smaller family farms, their impact on the local economy is something that cannot and should not go unnoticed,” Reardon said.

The federal farming census is published by the USDA every five years and is the only source for comprehensive county-by-county agricultural information. It is this in-depth look that takes time to complete and publish.

Snohomish County continues to look for innovative programs and opportunities that support agriculture and the economic, social and environmental benefits farming provides. The 6th annual Focus on Farming Conference will take place in November and will again be full of valuable workshops, great speakers and incredible local food.

Additional information on the 2007 Agriculture Census can be found at www.agcensus.usda.gov.

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