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Reardon unveils concept for premier ag market center

Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon announced Friday the creation of a 60,000 square-foot agriculture center that will house a full-time, year-round indoor farmers' market, commercial kitchen and processing facility as well as farm-product distribution hub.

The facility, on Grand Avenue between Hewitt Avenue and Wall Street in downtown Everett and near the Everett Public Market, will anchor a 180-unit housing project being constructed by Dargey Enterprises.

The Grand Avenue project is cutting edge in the world of farmers' markets and is unique in its features, which includes a large commercial kitchen that agricultural producers can use on site to make products to sell at the market or load on delivery trucks.

“This project will allow consumers to buy local, farm-fresh goods at a one-stop shop right here in Snohomish County – an effort we have been striving for to keep farming in Snohomish County economically viable,” said Reardon, who has led the region through the development of a sustainable agriculture action plan and vision.

“When you buy here – from salads to soups and from beef to beans – you will know where your food came from and have the opportunity to know the farmer who grew it,” he said.

Operated by the nonprofit Snohomish County Growers Alliance, the agriculture center will offer residents and shoppers farm-fresh and high-quality local meat, dairy and produce as well as value-added products created onsite solely from local farm crops.

The announcement for a marketplace comes less than a year after the creation of the Snohomish County Growers Alliance, a farmer-led initiative with support from County Executive Reardon.

The Alliance's top objective has been to create a farmers' market and distribution center for locally produced products. It's also a direct outcome of Reardon's 2004 Ag Initiative, the annual Focus on Farming conferences and last year's Ag Sustainability Project report, which called for the creation of a locally driven farmers' market.

Products at the market are likely to include fruits and vegetables such as strawberries, apples, pears, peas, beans, arugula; locally butchered beef, lamb and goat; dairy products such as milk, cheese, yogurt and ice cream; as well as more specialized products including fresh-cut and dried flowers, local honey, soaps, beer and wine.

Developed by Dargey Enterprises, the market is expected to open in the spring of 2012.

“I was a farmer in Tibet so I am very excited about completing this project,” said Lobsang Dargey of Dargey Enterprises. “I want to support the local farmers as well as the residents of Snohomish County.”

The marketplace is expected to offer 90 retail spaces to large and small direct-to-market farm producers. More than a dozen farmers already have asked to reserve a space.

“They’re anxious for the opportunity to move to the next level of growing and selling great food, and to supply their community with local, healthy products,” said Linda Neunzig, Snohomish County’s ag coordinator and a local farmer.

In addition, café-style and full-service restaurants will be strategically located throughout the marketplace.

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