

Media Advisory – Nov. 20, 2008

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County's Focus on Farming Conference tops 500 attendees

More than 500 people attended Thursday's 5th annual Focus on Farming Conference at the Lynnwood Convention Center.

Early registration numbers already had surpassed last years' early registration numbers for the conference and walk-ins Thursday pushed numbers beyond 500 participants.

Titled "Breaking New Ground," this year's conference featured renowned speakers David Montgomery, author of "Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations," and Bob Gore, director of the Washington State Department of Agriculture.

Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon, who initiated the annual conference with local farmers in 2004, opened this year's conference with a state of agriculture in the county. He stressed the importance of protecting farmland and treating farming as a business.

"We must continue to build up farming as a viable economic opportunity in Snohomish County," Reardon said after the conference. "Today's attendance shows us how important the farm is to society and this community."

Gore said farming is always at risk of disappearing yet production in Washington increased by 23 percent in 2007 – the third record year in a row. Local and international demand continues to grow for Washington crops.

During the afternoon lunch, prepared with locally grown and produced food by top regional chefs, Montgomery spoke of the need to study the historical use of soils and how modern farming techniques are eroding good soil.

"We're doing the same things today that ancient civilizations did, which undercut their long-term viability," he said, adding that more money should be spent on subsidies for conservation practices such as no-till farming.

Montgomery, a 2008 MacArthur Fellowship winner, is a doctorate-level professor at the UW Department of Earth & Space Sciences, where he studies the evolution of topography and the influence of changing landforms on ecological systems and human societies. His most recent studies have taken him around the world, only to discover that humanity's most necessary natural resource is most likely its soils. Yet, current mechanized agriculture has eroded much of the land, putting humanity's future at risk.

Participants also enjoyed top-notch sessions on successful farming, new techniques and lucrative advice from regional experts, ending the day with a wine-and-cheese tasting featuring local vintners and producers.

The annual conference held each November continues to grow in attendance, and participation comes from a broad sector, including new rural residents with an interest in farming, government agencies and individuals interested in food, sustainability and regional agriculture.

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