

## **Media Advisory – Oct. 7, 2008**

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### **County protects farmland through PDR pilot program**

Snohomish County has preserved more than 50 acres of farmland in the Tualco Valley near Monroe through its Purchase of Development Rights pilot program.

In particular, the county has successfully purchased permanent conservation easements restricting future development on 52 acres of land owned by the Broers, long-time Snohomish County farmers.

In 2004, Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon recommended creating the grant-funded Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) pilot program so as to save prime farmland from increasing development pressures. The County Council approved the plan, which allows for continued farming of the land once easements are purchased.

“We must balance growth with protecting our agricultural heritage – not only the farmland itself, but farming as a family livelihood,” Reardon said. “Preserving the Broers’ farm, which has been used by this family for four generations, is a step toward keeping a diverse and prosperous agricultural industry.”

Agriculture is a \$127 million industry in Snohomish County. Today, there are approximately 1,600 farms in Snohomish County. About 70 percent of those farms are family or individually owned.

The Tualco Valley near Monroe was selected as a target area because it traditionally has been a highly productive agricultural area in Snohomish County. Yet, market forces recently have made land there more valuable for residential and commercial development than for farming.

“The PDR program is proving to be a useful tool in preserving Snohomish County’s farmland,” said Dave Remlinger, a Monroe-area farmer and chairman of the Snohomish County Agricultural Advisory Board. “Despite the current economic situation, pressure to convert farmland to non-farm uses will continue.”

Funding for the project comes primarily from grants awarded to the county by the state Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) and the federal Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

For the Broers’ Organic Berry Farm – which grows strawberries, raspberries, thornless blackberries, marionberries and blueberries – the county will spend \$465,430 in grant

money to purchase the development rights to three parcels, making this the second purchase under the PDR program.

In 2005, Chester Hoberg agreed to sell the development rights on his 40-acre farm to the county for \$542,850. Half of the funding for the purchase came from a federal grant and the other half came from Conservation Futures Property Tax funds.

The county is in negotiations with several other farmers and hopes to have at least one more conservation easement purchase finalized before the end of the year.

“Through programs such as PDR, we can help keep farming an economically viable industry,” Reardon said.

To be considered for the PDR program, properties must meet certain eligibility criteria. For example, they must be in private ownership, have more than 50 percent prime farmland and be within the Tualco Valley eligibility area.

The purchase price of the easements is based on the difference in land value between the current agricultural use and what the land would be worth if it were subdivided and developed.

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