

## **Media Advisory – April 11, 2008**

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### **Reardon proposes changes to farm-protection program**

Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon today proposed a series of changes to the county's Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program.

Under the proposed changes, the county would have more flexibility to create areas set aside for farm preservation. Specifically, TDR protects farmland from economic pressures to convert to non-farm uses and focuses development in designated urban areas.

The new policy would begin with a review of areas currently slated for farmland protection near Arlington, part of a Snohomish County TDR pilot program. In addition, the county would begin working with landowners to create optional protection and development zones without having to amend the county's Comprehensive Plan through the docketing process.

No longer reliant upon the docketing process, which only occurs once each year, the county will be better prepared to respond to market pressures in both the farming and housing industries throughout the county.

This would be a step forward in the creation of a countywide TDR program and enable the county to make the Arlington program more enticing to farmers and builders alike.

"TDR is just one component of a robust strategy to preserve farmlands and improve the economic outlook of farming in Snohomish County," Reardon said. "By preserving our valuable farmlands we help secure the future of scenic open spaces and fresh, healthy, locally grown foods."

TDR is part of the county's Focus on Farming Initiative, spearheaded by Reardon in 2004, which promotes strategies to preserve farmlands and improve the economic viability of farming in Snohomish County. The county also operates a successful purchase-of-development-rights program, where development rights are bought from landowners in the Tualco Valley – a fertile farming area near Monroe – to protect future farming there in perpetuity.

"Through our efforts to transfer and purchase development rights from our farmlands we are able to reduce the economic incentive for the conversion of farmlands to other uses," Reardon said. "This is an important goal that helps preserve our valuable farmlands and the viability of local farming for future generations."

Snohomish County also is working with farmers to create new opportunities to return local agriculture to profitability. For several years, the county has worked with farmers to test crops that can be converted to biodiesel and then sold throughout Washington state as well as internationally. The county also has held numerous workshops and hosted programs geared toward the economics of farming, the most successful of those being the annual Focus on Farming conference held each November.

The Focus on Farming events draw participants from across the United States and have increased annually since beginning four years ago.

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