

# Skagit County Agriculture Advisory Board

## Meeting Summary – July 12, 2023

### Commissioners Hearing Room/MS Teams

#### Members in Attendance

Michael Hughes                      Terry Sapp                                      Nels Lagerlund                                      Steve Skrinde  
Murray Benjamin                      Steve Omdal                                      Justin Hayton

#### Proxy Designations

Steve Omdal for Michael Trafton      Justin Hayton for Tim Van Hofwegen                      Michael Hughes for Steve Wright

#### Members Absent

John Morrison                      Kraig Knutzen

#### Others in Attendance

Peter Browning, Skagit County Commissioner  
Jack Moore, Assistant Director Skagit County Planning & Development Services (PDS)  
Sarah Ruether, Skagit County Planning & Development Services (PDS)  
Kim Adams, Skagit County Planning & Development Services (PDS)  
Don McMoran, WSU Extension  
Kristen Ekstran, Member of the Public-Population Health Trust

#### Call to Order, Introductions

Michael Hughes called the meeting to order at 7 pm.

#### Approval of Meeting Summary

Murray Benjamin moved to accept the June 14, 2023, Meeting Minutes as amended, Justin Hayton seconded. Motion carried.

#### Guest Speaker

##### **Kristen Ekstran, Population Health Trust Food Security Project**

Kristen joined the meeting to discuss the Population Health Trust Food Security Project. They are trying to secure food with farmers, Gleaners, waste, schools, storage, and distribution. They are currently writing policies. She would like to learn and follow with what the AAB is doing.

- Has been doing more work on the legislative side, wants to really look into food security.
- She serves small scale farmers and they need more contracts for local foods to be in the food banks.
- Storage issues- there are foods going out of the county, they would like to keep more local farm food in Skagit County.
- Don McMoran spoke about freeze dried food; they are currently working with the food banks. Currently 30% of the foods are going to waste. When freeze drying food, it keeps 95% of the nutritional value.
- Have more local schools buy the local farm foods for their lunch programs. Sedro-Woolley and Concrete currently have very effective programs in place.

## New Business

### Docket Discussion:

- There was a presentation at the Planning Commission Meeting yesterday regarding LR23-01 Dunlap Rural Reserve Rezone.
- Zoning rules are complicated. There is currently a new energy code that is currently under review based on a California case.
- C23-7: Instream Flow Rules. Spoke to Jenna and she said it is just to make the code clear, AAB does not need to comment on that.

### VSP Update:

There has been 100 Million Dollars for the Voluntary Stewardship Program and Skagit County is the test ground. People pay more to protect the streams. Public Works is monitoring the funds. This is not a forced program, but you can get compensation now as the money is available to protect creeks, rivers, and streams. Currently leased land, the payments are going to the property owner and not the farmer and they are losing some land to farm.

### Drought Declaration:

- Currently abnormally dry. On the first stage of Drought. This is the 13<sup>th</sup> driest season since 1995 (May-July).
- 8" lower than usual rainfall.
- Issued a drought advisory on July 5<sup>th</sup>, once they declare a drought, funding becomes available for farms.
- July 18<sup>th</sup> the Board meets again.
- Skagit, Yakama, and one other County are extremely dry.
- Farmers will be moving their cattle out of the county.

### Don McMoran WSU Update

- Budget due August 15<sup>th</sup> Commissioners are requesting a Zero Budget increase this year
- WSU intends to submit the budget with staff increases in hopes they get approved
- Grants: Viva Farms, Agrability & Farm Stress and Suicide. There are three farm suicides this year.
- Hired a new intern, currently brining on a Mesteco Translator (start date July 18<sup>th</sup>)
- Workshops for next year: Ag Summit-February 2024

## Committee Reports

### Land Use – Terry Sapp (Chair), Kraig Knutzen, Murray Benjamin, Michael Trafton, Steve Omdal

Terry Sapp discussed the Seattle Times Article regarding the BESS Systems. The project proposed has become very controversial. Two are currently proposed in Skagit County. Once implemented there is no employees, the only concern is where they put them. They shouldn't be on Ag land. Three different companies only. One Special Use Permit has been applied for in Skagit and has been deemed incomplete. They have not resubmitted as of yet per Jack Moore. California is not currently allowing these BESS Systems.

Agritourism: SEPA Notification, the Planning Commission is currently taking comments for the code recommendations. The meeting on the 25<sup>th</sup> at 6 pm is for public comment, each person is allowed three minutes. Michael has prepared a follow up letter to send to the Planning Commission prior to their meeting on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Motion to send the letter as prepared, Terry Sapp and Nels Lagerlund seconded, Motion carried. Kim will send the letter to the Planning Commission. Really encourage going to the Planning Commission Meeting and speaking.

### Economic Development- Don McMoran

Skagit Valley Malting have not filed yet but will be declaring bankruptcy. Big loss to the AC and the Port. There may be potential buyers, and this may allow for more economic growth that wasn't available previously. Port owns the facility and they need to relinquish the lease back to the port. A lot of grain being stored right now. They may be filing Title 7 or 11 this next week.

Dairy Industry struggles: May be out of business next year. Producers may be leaving Skagit County. High interest rates and leading to too much debt. The Organic market is not the same anymore.

Draper Valley- Prior Commissioner trying to find more chicken farmers.

Split zone parcel- rezone to Light Industrial East of the fire station, corner of the property maintain normal requirements. Just unifying the parcel. Watershed Ag Park.

**Critical Areas** – *Nels Lagerlund*

Nothing at this time.

**Flood, Drainage & Irrigation** – *Kraig Knutzen (Chair), Nels Lagerlund, Steve Wright*

Nothing at this time.

Old Business

**Next Meeting:**

Adjourn

Nels Lagerlund moved to adjourn; Murray Benjamin seconded. Meeting adjourned at 8:25 pm.

Next meeting is August 9, 2023, at 7 pm.