

# SKAGIT COUNTY 2020 AGRICULTURAL YEARBOOK



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## *Dear Skagit County Community,*

This is Skagit County's first ever "Skagit County Agricultural Yearbook." The goal is to highlight the coordination, partnerships and synergy that keep Skagit County agriculture thriving in our beautiful valley. This report was produced as part of the Voluntary Stewardship Program's five year reporting effort.

Skagit County government has been a pioneer in adopting progressive policies to protect agricultural and natural resource lands. Establishing its first comprehensive plan in 1965 and established the first zoning ordinance in 1966, these early actions have proven to be successful in preventing urban sprawl.

In 1973, Skagit County passed a "Large Acreage Lot Size" ordinance establishing a 30-acre minimum lot size on agriculturally zoned lands. In 1979, Skagit County increased that lot size to 40 acres, and to 20 acres on agriculture reserve zoned lands, with a desire to close loopholes in the previous ordinance.

In 1980s, Skagit County added a section to the ordinance to prevent "castling" (locating a large home on agricultural land in such a manner that land is taken out of agriculture production) requiring that all buildings be constructed within 200 feet of the front property.

These measures replaced a "1-acre" minimum lot size and have had a significant impact on preserving thousands of acres of the most fertile farmland in the United States.

Other Puget Sound counties have sat back and watched their farmlands disappear. Advocacy groups in Skagit County and the many elected officials, past and present, have weighed in to make sure Skagit County agriculture remains robustly healthy.

In addition to progressive planning and zoning policies, Skagit County has actively pursued farmland preservation through the Farmland Legacy Program. Since 1997, more than 13,000 acres of prime farmland has been preserved from future development by purchasing conservation



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easements, which has benefits to the community of preserving open space and protecting the floodplain from additional development.

To make sure agriculture stays a linchpin sector of Skagit’s economy, the Skagit County Government has invested more than \$11 million over the past five years to help fund the preservation of farmland, Washington State University Extension and research, dike and drainage districts to preserve critical infrastructure, and to assist critical programs through the Skagit Conservation District and other organizations. All of this is possible because of tax dollars and the support of Skagit County residents like you.

In addition, under Current Use Farm and Ag, a state property tax classification program under RCW 84.34 is designed to provide tax relief to farms producing agricultural products to benefit the citizens of Washington State. Valuation under this program is applied to 4,778 parcels in Skagit County providing tax relief in excess of \$4.6 million in 2020.

Skagit County sent out a questionnaire to our partners in promoting the long-term viability of agriculture. The following contains each response. Thank you to all the agricultural organizations that contributed to this report.

Sincerely,  
Board of County Commissioners



Lisa Janicki, Third District

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lisa Janicki".



Peter Browning, Second District

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Peter Browning".



Ron Wesen, First District

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ron Wesen".

# Friends of Skagit County Aims to Preserve Lands and Support County Partners

President: Randy Good  
FRIENDS OF SKAGIT COUNTY

agent for a community grant from the Project for Public Spaces and NY to the Mount Vernon Farmer's Market.

**ABOUT/OVERVIEW:** Friends of Skagit County (FOSC) is a non-profit membership organization that works to manage growth, stop urban and suburban sprawl, and protect farms, forest and natural resources to create livable cities and towns in Skagit County, Washington. Since 1991, FOSC has worked at the policy and legislative levels to monitor comprehensive planning updates, county policies, and codes. Preservation of land for agriculture is at the heart of this work and FOSC continues to be committed to enforcement of the Growth Management Act (GMA) requirements to identify and protect all natural resource lands. Preservation of these lands is vital to Skagit's way of life.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:** Skagit County's soils are in the top 1-2 percent of yield per acre in the world, FOSC believes that converting any of these soils to any use other than food or fiber production will cause undue harm to the Skagit County economy and the food security of the Northwest Region. By continuing to enforce GMA principles, FOSC protects Skagit's economic viability at large.

FOSC has also supported partners in a variety of projects over the last five years that improve economic conditions for farmers in Skagit. This includes writing letters of support for the Island Grown Farmers' Cooperative Meat Processing Facility, being the fiscal

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH:** Friends of Skagit County maintains a weekly list serve, newsletter and other publications to update the community on their work. This includes updates about progress, setbacks and legislative information related to Agriculture in Skagit County.

FOSC also regularly communicates with Skagit County and Statewide environmental organizations and agricultural producers on relevant land use issues including Skagit's Comprehensive Plan, the Shoreline Master Plan, County policies and/or code, Washington state law, and other policies. This dialog with both groups has improved over the last five years and FOSC continues to be a forum for both sides and the public at large to discuss the preservation of prime soils, diversification of crops, and viability of Skagit's farm economy.

**FUTURE CHALLENGES:** The number one challenge facing Skagit agriculture is the conversion of farmland to other uses. Any farmland taken out of production needs to be mitigated for. Maintaining total available acres of farmland in production is key to future food security in the Northwest region.

**COVID-19 IMPACTS:** FOSC has been unable to hold community meetings, board meetings or other events in person throughout 2020 due to COVID-19.



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# Northwest Agricultural Business Center Brands “Genuine Skagit Valley” to Bring Awareness to Locally Produced Products

Executive Director: David Bauermiester  
NORTHWEST AGRICULTURAL BUSINESS  
CENTER

**ABOUT/OVERVIEW:** The Northwest Agricultural Business Center (NABC) is a 501 (C) 3 organization and was established in 2006 to “bring the farm to market”. Their primary goal is to connect Northwest Washington growers with retailers, wholesalers, food service operators, food manufacturers and consumers. NABC does this by delivering practical financial assistance to clients in areas like business development, accessing financing, value-added product development

and marketing. Additionally, NABC works to develop the regional market and create new opportunities for growers in their own backyard.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:** NABC provides direct technical assistance to private businesses to help them grow and thrive in Skagit County. This includes helping private business source capital, including publicly funded grants, for projects such as improving drainage, building additional infrastructure or creating a new value-added product.

NABC is also the managing entity for the Genuine Skagit Valley brand, developed in



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conjunction with the Port of Skagit and the Innovation Partnership Zone. Genuine Skagit Valley is a registered certification mark, which denotes agricultural products grown in Skagit or process products with 75 percent or greater of their defining ingredients originating in Skagit Valley. Producers, agriculture service providers and influencers can now distinguish their products and businesses as truly local for a small membership fee. This helps capitalizes on the over half of consumers who are known to prefer a locally grown product.

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH:** NABC is an invaluable, if niche presence in the agricultural community. In addition to one-on-one technical support, NABC offers a variety of workshops for local businesses. Over the last few years, they've had over 2,000 participants in their workshops.

NABC also helped create the Skagit Valley Innovation Partnership Zone or value-added agriculture, which lead to the creation of the Genuine Skagit Valley brand.

**FUTURE CHALLENGES:** Irrigation and access to continuous water supply is one of the largest challenges for Skagit agriculture over the next few years, according to NABC. Additionally, continuing to promote local agriculture and garner support for local agriculture in order to ensure that businesses thrive through even the toughest of times.

**COVID-19 IMPACTS:** NABC's staff has been working and conducting business remotely throughout the pandemic, with only limited interruption to services. However, many of their clients have faced immense challenges to respond to the pandemic. Farmers have had to deal with new health and safety issues for themselves, their workers and their families; changing market channels; disruption of markets and general instability. NABC has worked hard to assist farms in reacting and adapting to these changes by helping them access government assistance and garnering market support.

# Port of Skagit Provides Jobs and High Quality Public Service to County Residents

Executive Director: Patsy Martin  
PORT OF SKAGIT

**ABOUT/OVERVIEW:** Founded in 1964 and governed by an elected board of three commissioners, the Port of Skagit is an economic development agency for all of Skagit County. Their primary mission is to create good jobs for the Skagit Community, provide transparent governance and high quality public service at minimal cost to taxpayers. The Port operates four facilities: the Skagit Regional Airport, the Bayview Business Park, the La Conner Marina and the Sedro-Woolley Innovation for Tomorrow (SWIFT) Center, which the Port formally took over in 2018.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:** Economic development in Skagit County is impossible without emphasis on the agricultural sector. In the last five years, the Port of Skagit has developed a number of agricultural processing facilities for use by private businesses. Some of those businesses include Skagit Valley Malting, Gielow Pickles, Cairnspring Mills, Chuckanut Brewery, Garden Path Fermentation and the Washington State University Bread Lab. These facilities combined were an approximately \$10 million dollar investment by the Port of Skagit.

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH:** The Port of Skagit has been a critical partner in community outreach efforts and helping the community at large understand the role agriculture plays in the Skagit County community, economy and culture.



The Skagit Valley Value-Added Agriculture Innovation Partnership Zone (IPZ) is one of these efforts. Designated by Washington State Governor Jay Inslee on October 1, 2013, and re-designated in October 2017, this partnership program works to identify, capture, develop and promote the unique value, quality and unrealized potential of agricultural products in Skagit County by enhancing regional marketing, working to attract future funding and encourage collaborative partnerships.

One effort to come out of IPZ collaboration is the Genuine Skagit Valley brand. In 2013, the Port of Skagit worked with the Northwest Agricultural Business Center (NABC). Market research has shown that the over half of typical consumers are willing to pay more for an organic and/or local food product. Genuine Skagit Valley branding allows value-added agricultural producers to officially designate their products as primarily local to Skagit Valley,

capitalizing on this consumer preference. The Port of Skagit acts as the certifier of the Genuine Skagit Valley products. All products identified with the Genuine Skagit Valley logo are either 100 percent locally grown, or in the case of processed food items, 75 percent of the defining ingredients are from Skagit Valley.

**FUTURE CHALLENGES:** The Port of Skagit has identified a need for increased and evolving innovation to support growers and producers through the next five years. By supporting continued innovation, the community can help insulate growers and producers from economic slowdowns and other crisis.

**COVID-19 IMPACTS:** COVID-19 has affected many Port of Skagit tenants, as fewer people are visiting retail locations. This has been the most difficult for value-added producers at the Port of Skagit, who rely on heavily on individual consumer purchases rather than wholesale.

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# Skagit Cattleman's Association Works with Partners to Determine Economic Viability of Ranching; Educates Ranchers on Field and Herd Management

Director: Dennis Allison  
SKAGIT CATTLEMAN'S ASSOCIATION

**ABOUT/OVERVIEW:** The Skagit County Cattleman's Association (SCCA) represents Skagit's ranchers and strives to improve Cattleman's profitability and stewardship by providing information on beef marketing, food safety, environmental and political issues, water quality testing and best herd management practices. Since 2000, Skagit Cattleman's has worked with water quality scientists to provide water sampling and monitoring and provide feedback to landowners where appropriate.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:** In addition to SCCA's work with their own membership to create greater economic opportunity for Skagit's ranchers, SCCA has been supporting the Island Grown Farmer's Cooperative in their effort to build a new processing facility. This processing facility with greatly increase local capacity for meat processing- a huge benefit for the SCCA membership.

SCCA also works with the Skagit Farm Bureau on advocacy efforts related to the economic viability of ranching in Skagit. SCCA regularly testifies at public hearing both in Skagit County and in Olympia. Most recent issues of concern have been damage due to Elk



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intrusion. The upriver elk herd, affecting over 107 farmland owners in Skagit County, has caused an estimated \$1.4 million in intrusion damage.

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH:** SCCA's outreach efforts are focused within their organization. SCCA hosts educational conversations on best field and herd management practices, and other issues of concern regularly for their membership at the monthly meetings. SCCA also spends a lot of energy educating local, state and federal elected leaders on their membership's issues of concern.

**FUTURE CHALLENGES:** Conversion of agricultural land is the largest threat to agricultural viability, according to SCCA. SCCA encourages the use of science based, field-tested best practices to ensure wildlife and habitat restoration are successful with the most limited impact possible to Skagit agriculture.

**COVID-19 IMPACTS:** SCCA has been unable to hold meetings due to the COVID-19 pandemic. \_

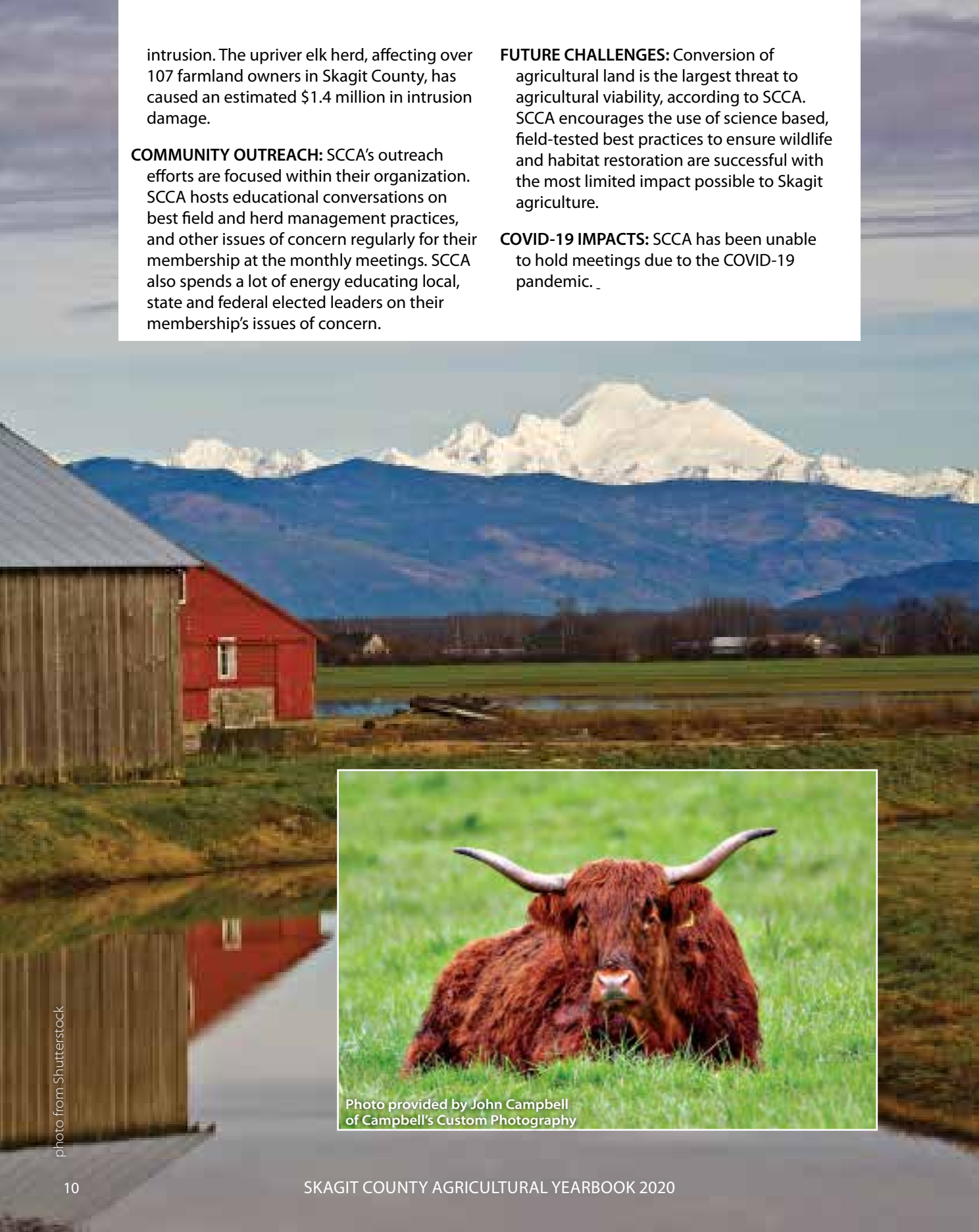


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# Maintaining Renewable Natural Resources is Conservation District's Mission

Director: Bill Blake  
SKAGIT CONSERVATION DISTRICT

**ABOUT/OVERVIEW:** Skagit Conservation District (SCD) is dedicated to maintaining Skagit's renewable natural resources through voluntary, incentive based conservation programs that support both working landscapes and conservation. As legal subdivisions of the Washington State government, Conservation districts are self-governed by a five member volunteer board that establishes local priorities and sets conservation district policy. The Skagit Conservation District's board is composed of local farmers, landowners and concerned citizens.

SCD works directly to preserve agricultural land by working with landowners to create best management practices for their specific situation, and help fund the efforts necessary to keep the working land in pristine condition. SCD is also the primary organization in Skagit County that works with the United States Department of Agriculture National Resource Conservation Service to establish conservation easements, preserving resources. SCD also provides direct technical assistance, education and funding for the Voluntary Stewardship Program and related efforts.

Over the last 5 years, SCD has spent or is in agreement to spend approximately \$50,000 in VSP funding for various projects. Additionally, SCD has received around \$1.3 million from Skagit County's Clean Water Program funds over the past five years.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:** By providing technical assistance to help farmers meet environmental goals, SCD is a critical, though often unsung, component of economic development of the Agricultural sector. Farm plan development, irrigation systems and cost share programs all make navigating confusing environmental regulations and laws easier on landowners and growers in Skagit County. Further, small farm and pasture management workshops help both commercial and private farming operations learn new techniques and access critical designs and funding.

In addition to VSP, SCD has helped farmer's access programs including CREP, Conservation Easement Funding through NRCS, and implementation of Best Management Practices (BMP).

SCD has managed to preserve around 600 acres of land in the last five years, directly associated with VSP funding support, and restore and additional 150 acres of land to its natural condition through direct habitat

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restoration and best farming practices. This is critical to the continued viability of agriculture in Skagit County and the economic development of the agricultural sector.

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH:** In addition to direct technical assistance to farmers participating in their programs, SCD has provided dozens of workshops and classroom presentations that support landowners and growers. Their pasture management classes, for example, help both private and commercial farmers learn best management practices for their lands and unique situations. Further, SCD staff sit on a number of boards and provide insight to groups such as:

- Skagit Watershed Council.
- Puget Sound Partnership.
- Local Agricultural Leaders Group, run by WSU Extension- Skagit.
- Puget Sound Conservation District Caucus.

SCD staff also participate in events such as the Skagit County Fair or Skagit Valley Farms days, where they host a booth and answer questions. Due to COVID-19, many of these workshops and meetings have transitioned to an online format for 2020.

**FUTURE CHALLENGES:** Intensified pressure from development is being faced by all natural resource industries, including agriculture. Climate change impacts such as flood, drought, sea level rise, salt-water intrusion and introduction of invasive species will continue to have increasing impacts on Skagit farmers over the next five years.

**COVID-19 IMPACTS:** Like all in Skagit County, COVID-19 has affected SCD's operations. Fortunately, with personal protective equipment, social distancing and remote computer tools, SCD has been able to continue providing most of their education programs and technical resources.



# Skagit Drainage and Irrigation Districts Consortium Works to Provide Drainage for 60,000 Acres of Farmland

Director: Jenna Friebel  
SKAGIT COUNTY DRAINAGE AND IRRIGATION  
DISTRICT CONSORTIUM

**ABOUT/OVERVIEW:** The Skagit County Drainage and Irrigation Districts Consortium (the Consortium) was founded in 2018 to support the 12 Dike, Drainage and Irrigation districts (the districts) in Skagit county. Dike, drainage and irrigation districts are volunteer run junior taxing districts, which maintain dikes, ditches, levees and other infrastructure necessary to keep water off of agricultural fields and provide irrigation. A number of complex regulatory regimes govern districts' work. The Consortium provides technical support and assistance in lobbying when necessary to help district's complete their vital work.

Much of the Consortium's work is governed by the Tidegate Fish Initiative (TFI). The districts are signatories to TFI, and two district commissioners are on the TFI oversight committee. The Consortium participates in

the TFI Technical Work Group and support the districts with environmental compliance and reporting. The Consortium also represents the districts on the Joint Legislative Task Force for Skagit Water Supply.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:** Agriculture can't happen if farmers can't control water. The Consortium's 12 member districts provide drainage for approximately 60,000 acres of farmland in the Skagit Valley. Without the Consortium and the districts, agriculture on those lands would be next to impossible.

Maintaining drainage and related fish infrastructure is costly. The Consortium has worked with districts to complete several projects, including:

- Replacing tide gate infrastructure at the mouth of Joe Leary Slough with a side-hinge gate. The total project cost was approximately one million dollars.

- Doing maintenance cleaning in the lower portions of Joe Leary Slough.
- Replacement of 2,700 feet of aging drainage pipe along the south side of McLean Rd.. The total project cost was approximately \$500,000.
- Replacing aging tidegate infrastructure at the mouth of Big Ditch with a side hinge gate. The total project cost was approximately \$500,000.
- Repairing a breached section of the Samish River Levee. The total project cost was \$50,000.

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH:** The Consortium’s outreach is done primarily on behalf of the Districts. The Consortium is a participant in Flood Awareness Week each year, which in part highlights how critical drainage infrastructure is to agriculture and preservation of property in the Skagit. The Consortium also meets with government agencies and officials to pursue fixes to regulatory concerns brought forward by the member districts.

**FUTURE CHALLENGES:** Land use pressures from development and new impervious surfaces (such as concrete) are increasing runoff and have significant impact on district drainage infrastructure. The Consortium is concerned that over the next few years, development will drastically change water flow throughout the valley and make it difficult for member districts to maintain infrastructure. The Consortium hopes to engage the County and other key partners in discussion on how to develop with water runoff in mind.

Related, large capital investments are needed to replace aging infrastructure such as pump stations and tidegates. A significant financial investment is needed to bring all of the Valley infrastructure back up to functionality.

Finally, the Consortium agrees with many in Skagit County that access to water and consistent ability to irrigate is one of the primary challenges faces by Skagit farmers.

**COVID-19 IMPACTS:** Due to the essential nature of the work, neither the Consortium nor the 12 member districts have been significantly impacted by COVID-19.

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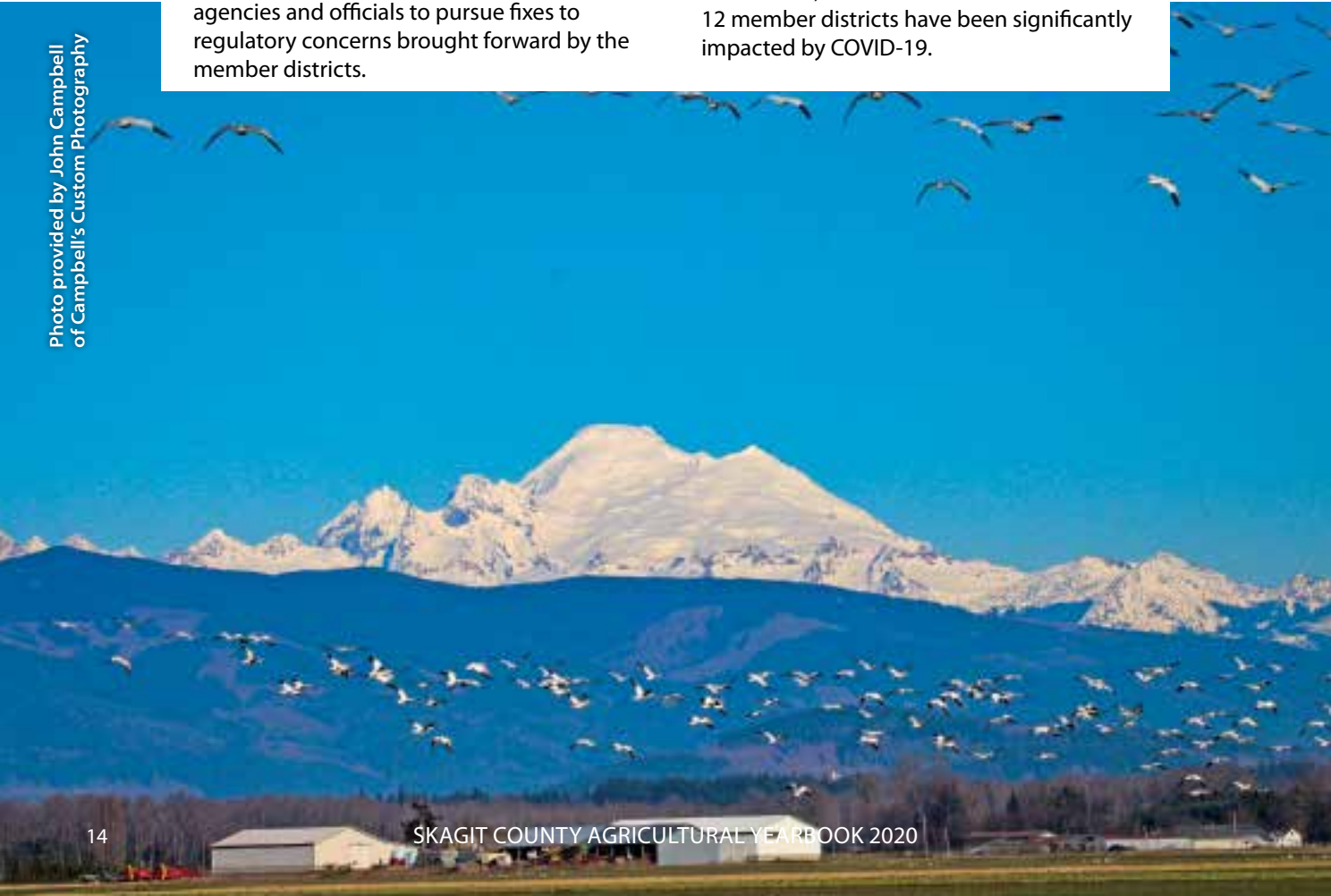




Photo provided by John Campbell of Campbell's Custom Photography

# Skagit County Farmers and Ranchers Get Representation from Skagit Farm Bureau

President: Bill Schmidt  
SKAGIT FARM BUREAU

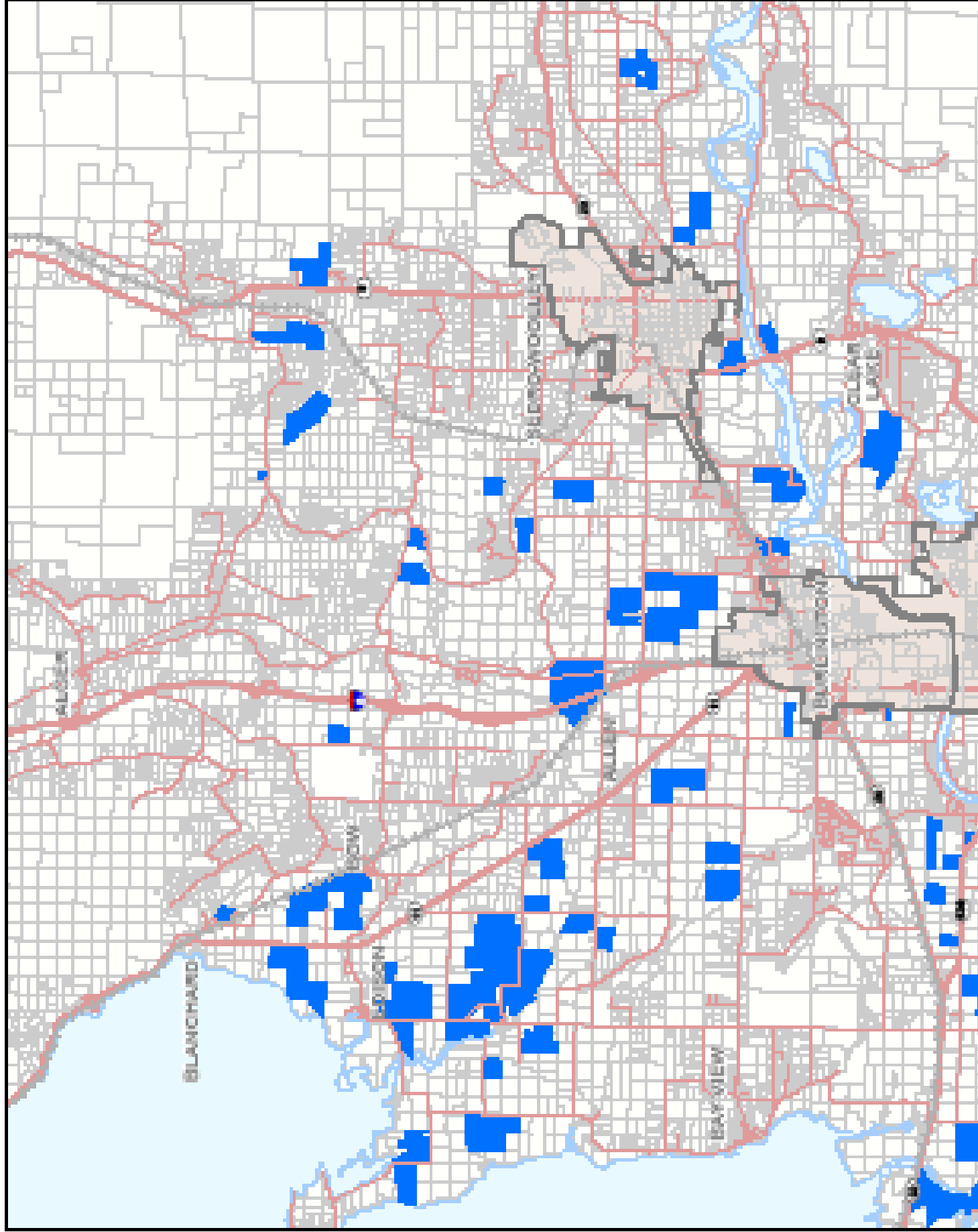
**ABOUT/OVERVIEW:** Skagit Farm Bureau, a chapter of the Washington Farm Bureau, is an independent, non-governmental, voluntary organization representing farmers and ranchers in Skagit County. Skagit Farm Bureau has approximately 200 agricultural and business members, along with over 1,100 supporters. In addition to local advocacy, the Skagit Farm Bureau works to bring policy issues in the agricultural community to the forefront of conversation with State and Federal elected officials.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:** Skagit Farm Bureau promotes business through its advocacy work. This year, to help businesses in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Farm Bureau distributed 35,000 masks and 4,850 gallons of sanitizer to 65 farms representing 4,450 employees. This effort was supported by Washington State Farm Bureau, Conway feed and other partners in the Community.

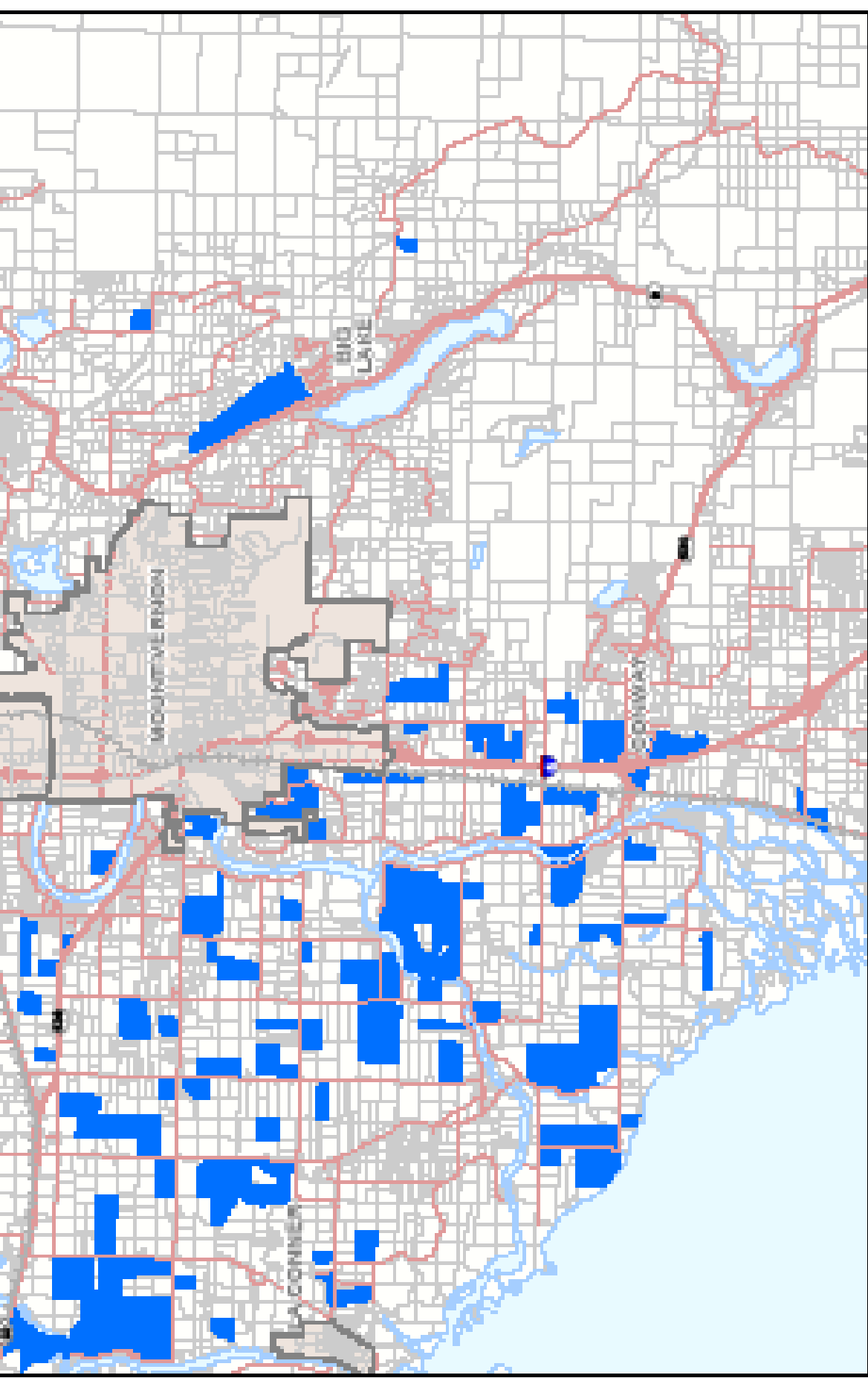
**COMMUNITY OUTREACH:** supports \$3,000 worth of scholarship for local college students, and provides \$10,000 in funding for local 4-H and FFA programs annually. These programs help local students experience the agricultural sector in ways they might not otherwise have the opportunity too, as well as building strong connected Skagit citizens.

**FUTURE CHALLENGES:** Skagit Farm Bureau sees that water, and consistent accessibility of water for irrigation purposes is one of the largest challenges for the agricultural economy in Skagit County over the next five years. Additionally, Skagit Farm Bureau is continuously advocating for improvements to wildlife management practices- particularly with upriver Elk herds- that would allow wildlife and commercial or personal use agricultural to exist more harmoniously.

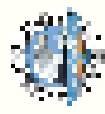
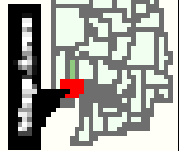
**COVID-19 IMPACTS:** Skagit Farm Bureau has not seen any impacts to their organization from COVID-19, but have spent considerable time this year supporting member businesses and community members in their efforts to harvest food amidst a health crisis.







**PROTECTED FARMLAND IN WESTERN SKAGIT COUNTY**



Farmland Legacy Program (FLP)



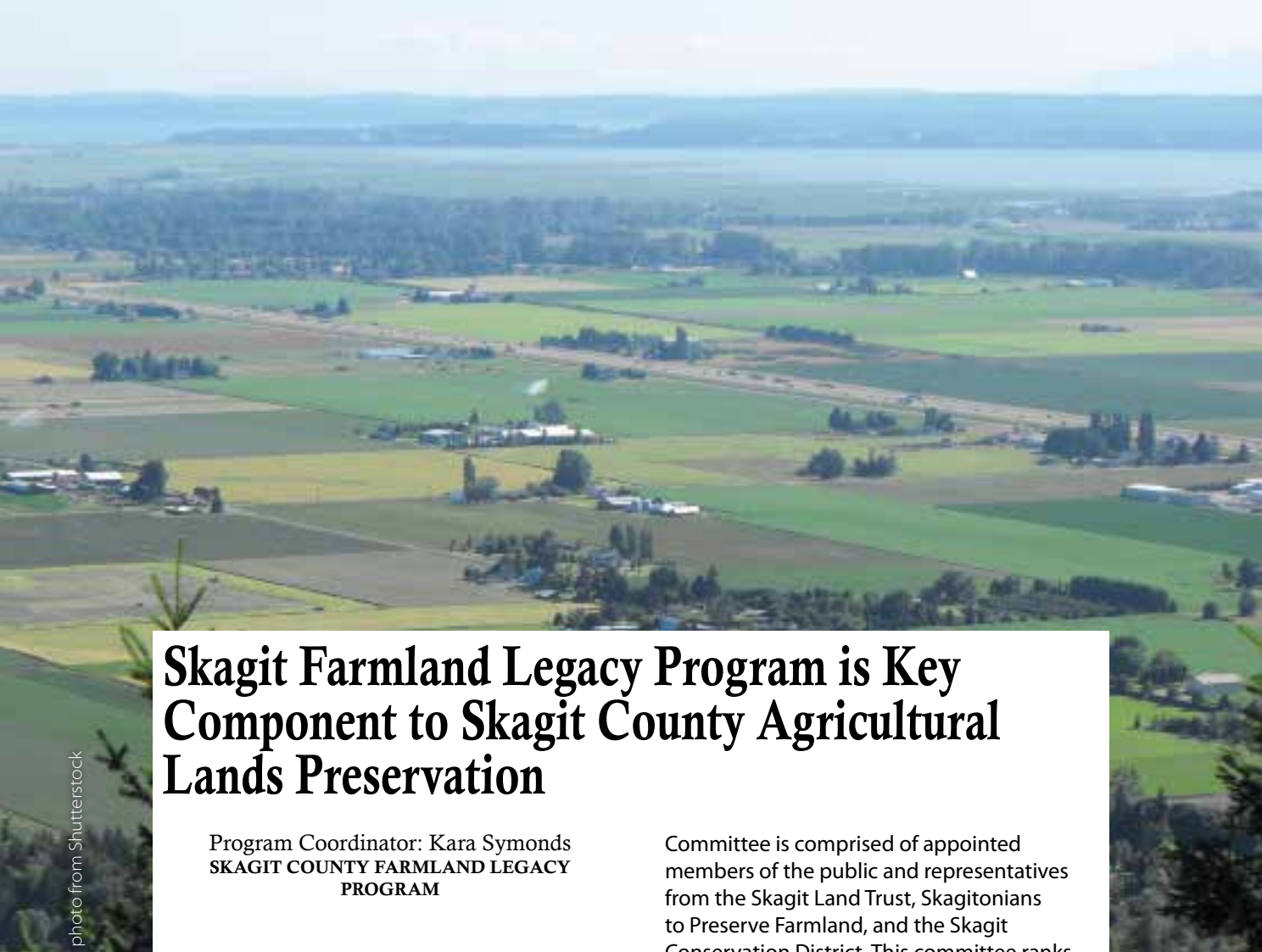


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# Skagit Farmland Legacy Program is Key Component to Skagit County Agricultural Lands Preservation

Program Coordinator: Kara Symonds  
**SKAGIT COUNTY FARMLAND LEGACY PROGRAM**

**ABOUT/OVERVIEW:** The Skagit County Farmland Legacy Program is a county initiative that purchases development rights and places perpetual conservation easements on agricultural lands. The Program also works to support policies, programs, and plans that enhance the protection of farmland within the County. The Farmland Legacy Program is a key component of agricultural land preservation in Skagit County, preserving over 12,880 acres and eliminating 247 development rights since its inception in 1996. This is a voluntary program that enables property owners to sell their development rights to the County while retaining fee-simple title to their land and continuing to farm.

The Conservation Futures Advisory Committee oversees this Program. This

Committee is comprised of appointed members of the public and representatives from the Skagit Land Trust, Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland, and the Skagit Conservation District. This committee ranks all incoming applications and advises the Board of County Commissioners on Program components.

Program staff also work closely with Skagit County's Planning and Development Services Department. This Department oversees the preparation and execution of Natural Resource Land Easements and Conservation Easements under the County's Agricultural Land Preservation code. These easements are incorporated into the Farmland Legacy Program database. All easements are monitored for compliance annually. In addition, Program and Planning staff work closely on proposed construction projects on lands protected by conservation easements and also lot certifications that are being completed as part of a Farmland Legacy Program application.



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**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:** The Farmland Legacy Program works directly with landowners to compensate them for development rights. The landowners, in turn, use the funding in a variety of ways, such as to: reinvest funds into equipment, reinvest funds into additional land purchases, aid in farm succession planning efforts, and supplement farm income.

Additionally, in the County's Comprehensive Plan, the Conservation Futures Advisory Committee is charged with, in part, formulating strategies for improvements to agricultural production, marketing, processing, and farm labor practices. The Committee also seeks to develop and maintain programs which offer financial and other incentives to farm owners to preserve farmland for agricultural uses and to reduce their reliance on subdivision of land to raise operating capital. This is realized in a variety of ways, through interpersonal communication between Committee members and members of the agricultural community and through marketing. For example, the 2017 annual report that was widely distributed as a newspaper insert. This insert covered testimonials from Program participants, the history of agricultural land protections, the importance of drainage for agriculture, a market summary, and milestones of the enrollment process.

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH:** The Farmland Legacy program interacts with a variety of community groups to conserve agricultural

land, develop marketing strategies and generally work to forward policies that benefit agriculture in the Skagit Valley. For example, Farmland Legacy Program staff participate in regional farmland preservation meetings that are coordinated by the Washington State Conservation Commission's Office of Farmland Preservation. Those generally in attendance include staff from Purchase of Development Rights Programs across the state, Washington Farmland Trust, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and other local Land Trusts. This group has met quarterly for the past four years.

Staff and Committee members also attend the Skagit Agricultural Summit, Agricultural Advisory Board meetings, WSU quarterly presentations, statewide food policy forums, and other regional and nationwide farmland preservation strategy sessions.

**FUTURE CHALLENGES:** Major challenges for agriculture include conversion of agricultural lands, the loss of agricultural reserve zoning designation, program availability awareness, program marketing, staffing levels, increased parity between land values with and without development rights, and education of landowners who seek to develop on property protected by a Conservation Easement.

**COVID-19 IMPACTS:** Farmland Legacy Program functions have moved to virtual formats due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Other than some brief delays, there hasn't been any programmatic impacts.



# Eradication of over 100 Noxious Weed Species is Task for Skagit County Noxious Weed Control Board

Program Coordinator: Joseph Shea  
SKAGIT COUNTY NOXIOUS WEED CONTROL BOARD

**ABOUT/OVERVIEW:** On December 4, 1979, the Skagit County Board of Commissioners activated the Skagit County Noxious Weed Control Board (SCNWCB). Initially, the Board’s activities were directed at informing the public about one weed: tansy ragwort. Today, SCNWCB’s goal is to eradicate noxious weed species and minimize their effect on natural resources, including agricultural crops, managed forests and livestock. Recently, with the help from various partners and funding from WSDA, SCNWCB has been able restore some of Skagit’s lands by drastically decrease and eradicate *Spartina Angilca* and control Japanese Knotweed, two species which degrade riparian habitat and native vegetation.

SCNWCB also identifies and eradicates toxic and harmful plants in all of Skagit County. In the last five years, SCNWCB has identified two human poisonings and two livestock fatalities due to toxic or harmful plants.

There are currently over 100 noxious weeds identified on the current noxious weed list. SCNWCB is dedicated to eradicating them for the environment and for the continued viability agriculture.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:** Nearly any agricultural product can be impacted by noxious weeds. This includes crops and livestock, but also the forestry industry, the shellfish industry and fisheries. SCWNB promotes economic development and viability by identifying and controlling noxious weeds before they can have an adverse impact on agribusiness in Skagit County.

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH:** SCNWCB serves a vital education role in the community. SCNWCB spends much of their outreach time teaching community members and farmers how to identify noxious or toxic plants and best management practices. SCNWCB provided educational tabling at:

- ☐ The Skagit County Fair.
- ☐ Mount Vernon Science Night.
- ☐ The Skagit River Salmon Festival.

- ☐ The Master Gardener's meet a Gardener Day.
- ☐ Washington State Home and Garden Show.
- ☐ The Skagit County Home and Garden Show.
- ☐ The Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group Earth Day Event.
- ☐ Skagit Farmers Supply Recertification class.
- ☐ Cape Horn Community Group.
- ☐ Steelhead Lane Community Group.
- ☐ Washington State Conservation Corps Training.
- ☐ Skagit County Cooperative Weed Management Area Group annual meeting.
- ☐ Washington State Invasive Plant Council EDRR training.
- ☐ Salish Sea Stewards Conference lecture.
- ☐ Samish Island Garden Group.
- ☐ Skagit/ Snohomish Backcountry Horseman club.

**FUTURE CHALLENGES:** SCNWCB, like many other organizations, sees water rights and water quality as the largest future concern for the agricultural community. Additionally, SCNWCB has concerns about consistent, adequate funding for weed control activities and rights for chemical usage for weed control.

**COVID-19 IMPACTS:** SCNWCB saw both positive and negative impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Of course, with the pandemic, SCNWCB has been unable to participate in many of their usual educational venues and events. SCNWCB is now shifting to virtual educational benefits, especially since the summer has ended and many of their projects are completed for the year. Virtual attendance, so far, has been promising.

One positive, however, was that with more people staying home more of the time, SCNWCB has received more calls from landowners. People have had more time to survey and notify their land this year. SCNWCB was able to complete their 2020 treatment season with properties added.

Additionally, SCNWCB members regularly give educational lectures. Their recent venues include:

- ☐ Azusa Nursery.
- ☐ WSU Livestock Advisory Class.
- ☐ WSU Country Living Expo.
- ☐ WSU Forestry Class Hosted by DNR.

# Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland's InFARmation Programs Aim to Reach Audience County Wide

Executive Director: Allen Rozema  
SKAGITONIANS TO PRESERVE FARMLAND

**ABOUT/OVERVIEW:** Since Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland's (SPF's) founding 1989, SPF has worked to protect farmland in Skagit County and the livelihood and lifestyles that come with it. SPF exists to ensure the continued viability of agriculture and the required infrastructure. SPF works in many different ways including advocating on policies, regulations, development projects and other relevant topics that would require the conversion of farmland for other purposes. SPF is also a land trust and holds agricultural easements on over 400 acres of land.

Since 2008, SPF has partnered and collaborated with Skagit County's Farmland Legacy Program in order to better access and allocate available federal and state dollars for farmland preservation. SPF raises private philanthropic dollars to match and support public funds secured and utilized by the Farmland Legacy Program. This unique partnership has led to a lot of success in the Valley, including over \$600,000 of private funding for farmland preservation projects representing over 465 acres protected within the SPF's priority area. SPF has also raised an additional \$265,000 to preserve another 500 acres of farmland that are set to be finalized in the first quarter of 2021.

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH:** SPF takes on extensive community outreach annually through their

InFARmation Programs. SPF's InFARmation Programs are a comprehensive collection of educational and information activities designed to reach a wide audience and promote sustainable agriculture, connect the general public to local farming and share the need to preserve farmland in the Skagit region. InFARmation programs include:

- Spring, Summer & Legislative Farm Tours connects residents and local elected and appointed officials from local, state, federal and tribal agencies with farmers and special purpose district managers for tours of farming operations throughout the Skagit region. Tour guides educate attendees on what it takes to sustainably operate an economically viable farm in the Skagit Valley. These are arguably some of SPF's most popular programs.
- InFARmation Radio, which is a program that consists of small, remote controlled highway advisory radio transmitter along the I-5 corridor between Cook Road and Starbird Hill- the only scenic Agricultural Corridor in Washington State. InFARmation Radio is updated regularly to inform travelers about what is happening seasonally in Skagit agriculture.
- Crop Identification Signs, which helps motorists in the Skagit region identify

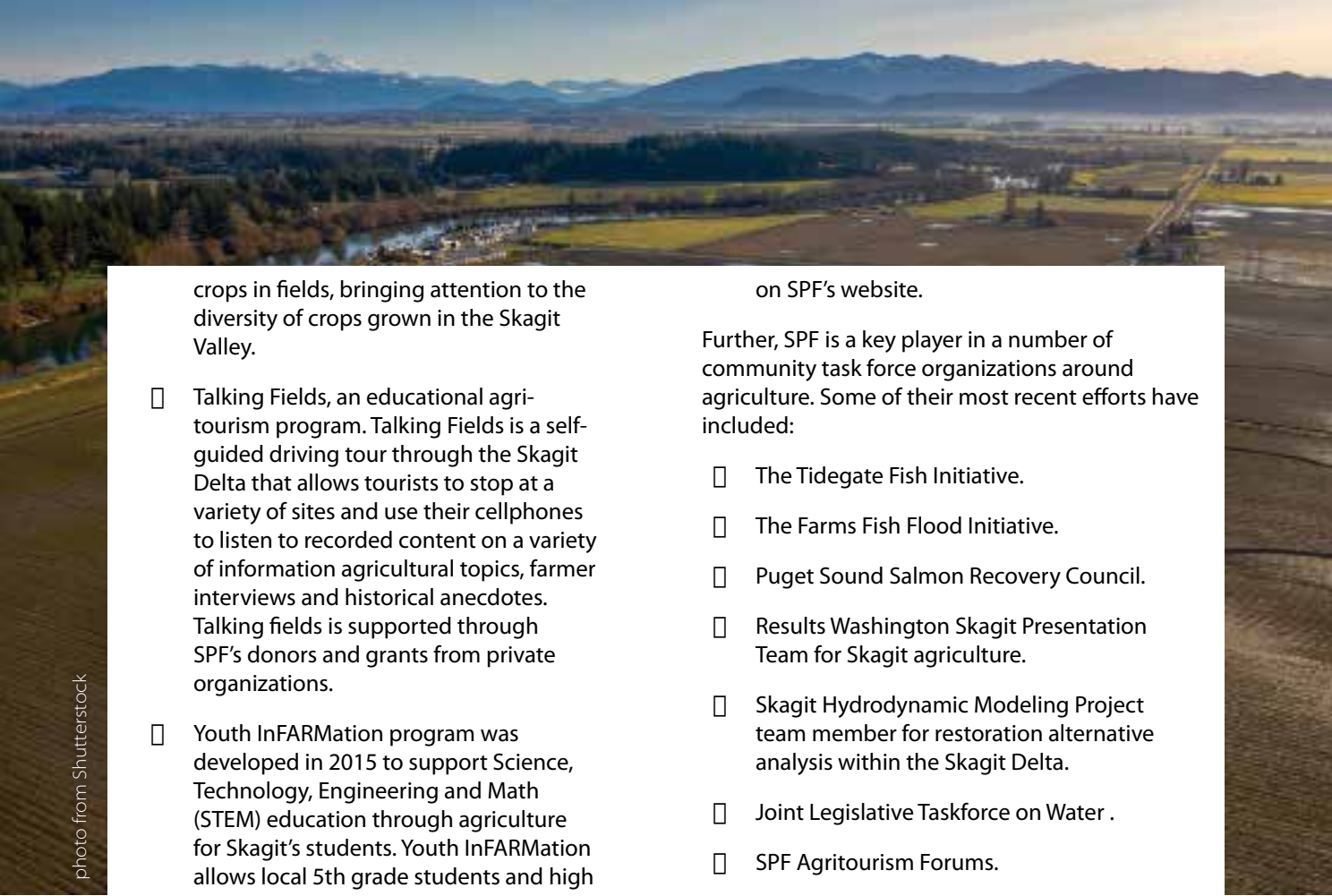


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crops in fields, bringing attention to the diversity of crops grown in the Skagit Valley.

- Talking Fields, an educational agri-tourism program. Talking Fields is a self-guided driving tour through the Skagit Delta that allows tourists to stop at a variety of sites and use their cellphones to listen to recorded content on a variety of information agricultural topics, farmer interviews and historical anecdotes. Talking fields is supported through SPF’s donors and grants from private organizations.
- Youth InFARmation program was developed in 2015 to support Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education through agriculture for Skagit’s students. Youth InFARmation allows local 5th grade students and high schools hands-on learning opportunities in agriculture and makes clear what a thriving, groundbreaking industry agriculture in the Skagit Valley truly is.
- Our Valley Our Future Awards Breakfast is an annual event that began in 2015 to bring the Skagit Farming community together. Our Valley Our Future celebrates and recognizes the ingenuity, optimism and legacy of hardworking farmers in the Skagit, who grow the best crops in the world. Along with other awards, SPF awards a ‘Future Achievement in Agriculture’ scholarship to one local high school senior who shows promise in the agricultural field.
- The Dirt Blog.
- Meet a Farmer Series, which was launched as a result of COVID-19 to bring the farm and farmer directly into your own home. You can find both the meet the farmer series and the Dirt Blog

on SPF’s website.

Further, SPF is a key player in a number of community task force organizations around agriculture. Some of their most recent efforts have included:

- The Tidegate Fish Initiative.
- The Farms Fish Flood Initiative.
- Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Council.
- Results Washington Skagit Presentation Team for Skagit agriculture.
- Skagit Hydrodynamic Modeling Project team member for restoration alternative analysis within the Skagit Delta.
- Joint Legislative Taskforce on Water .
- SPF Agritourism Forums.
- Skagit Agricultural Leaders Roundtable.
- Skagit Agricultural Water Advisory Group.
- SPF Land Protection Advisory Council.

SPF’s full scope and reach into the community is nearly immeasurable, but it’s clear that they are a leading point of contact for agricultural leaders and the community at large.

**FUTURE CHALLENGES:** SPF has identified a number of challenges for Skagit’s agricultural industry over the new few years including population growth (sprawl), affordable workforce housing, labor, land costs, land access, climate change and long-term water security for agriculture.

**COVID-19 IMPACTS:** SPF has seen a number of adverse impacts from the pandemic. Decline/reduction of funding and cancellation of physical events and meetings (including InFARmation programming) have been particularly difficult.

# Agriculture and Hospitality Industries Benefit Annually from Tulip Festival Draw

Director: Cindy Verge  
SKAGIT VALLEY TULIP FESTIVAL

**ABOUT/OVERVIEW:** Every April since 1984, the Skagit County Tulip Festival brings hundreds of thousands of visitors to Skagit County to see the famous tulip fields in bloom. Tulips have been grown in the Skagit Valley since the 1930s, and more tulips and daffodil bulbs are produced here than in any other county in the U.S. The Tulip Festival builds on this impressive industry and hosts an amazing assortment of events including art shows, a gala celebrations, concerts, tours and industry open houses each April to bring tourists to the beautiful Skagit County.

Tulip Festival operations, including traffic control, are supported in part by Skagit County's lodging tax fund. In the last five years, support from this fund has totaled roughly \$175,000

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:** Agro-Tourism is growing industry that helps farmers augment

market sensitive products with other revenue sources, promoting the long term viability of agriculture. The Tulip Festival brings attention to Skagit's massive agricultural sector (\$261 million worth of crops, livestock and dairy products are produced every year on 93,000 acres and promote local agricultural products even beyond tulips. An estimated \$65 million in revenue is brought into the Skagit community each year as a result of the Tulip Festival. This additional revenue not only supports agriculture, but the restaurant, retail and hospitality industries as well.

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH:** The Tulip Festival provides an accessible and beautiful juncture into Skagit's agricultural industry for many. In fact, in 2019, the Tulip Festival had visitors from all 50 states and more than 85 foreign countries!

The Tulip Festival is a tradition for many families and it helps garner support for preservation of agricultural land and industry. It helps celebrate Skagit's robust agricultural history and the variety

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of crops, bulbs and products that are grown each year. The impact of this welcoming and celebratory environment on public sentiment is profound.

**FUTURE CHALLENGES:** Skagit's tulip industry and festival are in jeopardy. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 tulip festival was cancelled. The Tulip Festival depends on sponsorship dollars from area businesses to remain viable and many small businesses are unable to afford sponsorship for 2021.

Further, as financial pressure on family owned farmers continues to grow the likelihood that agricultural land is sold out of agriculture increases. Family farmers need to make decisions for their and their families' financial wellbeing, and their needs might not always align with agricultural preservation goals. This is largely

problematic and particularly concerning for the Tulip Festival when looking at the two tulip farms in Skagit- no tulips, no festival. Protecting and supporting these small growers is vital to agricultural viability.

**COVID-19 IMPACTS:** The Tulip Festival has been greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Business revenue declines throughout the Valley has put many sponsorships that the festival typically relies on at risk. Further, the cancellation of the 2020 Tulip Festival due to COVID-19 created further economic hardship both for the festival, their support businesses and the tulip growers themselves. Frankly, if the pandemic continues on it's course through April 2021 (as is currently predicted) it will be difficult for the tulip festival to survive without assistance.



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# Taylor Shellfish Proves Industry is Thriving; 130-year Family Owned Business Provides Oysters Throughout Puget Sound

Owners: Bill & Paul Taylor, Jeff Pearson  
TAYLOR SHELLFISH

destination in Skagit County. As a result, retail sales have doubled and Taylor Shellfish has been able to add five full time equivalent employees.

**ABOUT/OVERVIEW:** In addition to seed production, tulips, berries and produce growers, Skagit County also has a thriving shellfish industry. One such grower is Taylor Shellfish. Taylor Shellfish is a family owned business founded in 1890 in the Totten Inlet near the southern end of Puget Sound. In recent decades, Taylor Shellfish has expanded beyond the Olympia Oyster to grow geoduck, mussels and a variety of half-shell oysters. Taylor Shellfish operates three locations- a Capitol Hill retail front in Seattle, Washington; the Shelton Shellfish Market in Shelton, Washington and the Samish Oyster Bar and Shellfish Market off Chuckanut Drive in Bow, Washington. The Samish location is connected to several acres of tideland shellfish beds in Skagit County’s Samish Bay.

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH:** Taylor Shellfish takes water quality seriously, and has undertaken a number of efforts to educate the community on the importance of clean water and quality agricultural practices for the health of the watershed.

In addition to the economic/retail improvements made at the Samish location, Taylor Shellfish took on a number of educational improvements including:

- Adding a culture demonstration plot that is tourable at low tide, to help educate patrons on how their shellfish are grown.
- Installed informational kiosks with panels on dock farming practices, the history of shellfish, the shellfish lifecycle and ecosystem services provided by shellfish
- A Talking Fields signs at the retail entrance.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:** Taylor Shellfish employs over 500 people throughout the Puget Sound. In the last five years, Taylor Shellfish has made significant improvements to their Samish Bay location. These improvements include facility remodeling, septic upgrades to handle food service, and the addition of food, beer and wine service. These improvements cost around \$140,000, and has elevated Taylor Shellfish from a unique farm stand to a true tourist food

Taylor Shellfish also serves on a number of leadership boards, including:

- Washington State Department of Ecology Agricultural Water Quality Advisory Committee (currently Co-Chair).
- Clean Samish Initiative.
- Alliance for Puget Sound Natural Resources, particularly focusing their efforts to help secure \$9 million in the United States Department of Agriculture's Regional Conservation Partnership Program.
- Washington State Department of Agriculture Dairy Nutrient Advisory Committee.
- Puget Sound Partnership Ecosystem Coordination Board.

Water quality will remain a top priority and focus for Taylor Shellfish throughout the life of their business. Taylor Shellfish is particularly thankful for the collaborative efforts of the Clean Samish Initiative partners, and all the investments farmers and other landowners have made on their properties, as well as homeowners who have upgraded their septic systems.

**FUTURE CHALLENGES:** In addition to labor and riparian area protection, water quality in the Samish Bay continues to be a concern for Taylor Shellfish, and other shellfish growers in Skagit County.

Additionally, for the last decade the European Union has banned the importation of shellfish from United States' growers. The Food and Drug Administration has been working with their European counterparts (the European Medicines Agency) to establish equivalency of their shellfish public health programs. Shellfish trade between the U.S. and E.U. is slated to resume at the end of 2020, but unfortunately, the E.U. will only accept shellfish growing in waters classified as approved. Until Samish Bay is upgraded from its current status of conditionally approved to approved, Shellfish from the bay cannot be exported to Europe. Working to get Samish Bay approved would help support growers and provider for additional agricultural viability and development in Skagit County.

**COVID-19 IMPACTS:** COVID-19 has significantly affected Taylor Shellfish's business throughout 2020, particularly at their retail locations. During Governor Inslee's mandated shutdowns, Taylor Shellfish has largely been unable to operate their bars, and has had to offer dining at a reduced capacity (and no one really wants oysters to go...). With a major reliance on domestic and international food service for sales, companywide revenue dropped about 25 percent of normal by mid-April 2020. Taylor Shellfish went from a high of over 700 employees at the end of 2019, to just 175 by mid-April. As of October 2020, Taylor Shellfish has 500 employees, and sales are back to roughly 90 percent of 2019's total.

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# Western Washington Agricultural Association Provides Support for Land Preservation and Sustainable Development

Executive Director: Brandon Roozen  
WESTERN WASHINGTON AGRICULTURAL  
ASSOCIATION

**ABOUT/OVERVIEW:** The Western Washington Agricultural Association (WWAA) was founded in 1944 by vegetable farmers who needed a collective body to negotiate their contracts with vegetable processing companies. While this is no longer the primary work of WWAA, the mission remains the same: represent agriculture by providing services to the entire agricultural community. To fulfill this mission, WWAA is committed to engaging with economic, environmental and regulatory pressures on agriculture, interacting with County, State and Federal legislators on topics of interest, supporting pest and nutrient management and control, networking with and supporting agricultural research community and seeking out and developing opportunities and technology for agriculture.

WWAA has a direct management role in several governing documents that impact all of Skagit County agriculture and agricultural land preservation. WWAA created the Skagit Comprehensive Irrigation District Management Plan (CIDMP), the Skagit Delta Tidegate and Fish Initiative (TFI) and the Skagit County Drainage and Fish Initiative. All three of these governing documents seek to create a balanced framework between agricultural land preservation and sustainable development in the Skagit region. The documents also bring clarity on regulatory and permitting frameworks to special purpose district and landowners, making it easier to complete vital maintenance work in the Skagit Delta. Skagit County's VSP plan specifically recognizes DFI and TFI within it,

making WWAA a key partner in VSP.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:** Wherever land is in agricultural production, WWAA strives to keep it that way. WWAA uses the Salmon Recovery Plan, DFI, TFI, VSP, CIDMP and other voluntary programs to protect the agricultural community and industry from unnecessary conversion of agricultural lands, and unneeded additional regulation. It is difficult to quantify the impact of these efforts, but without a doubt WWAA's work has changed the landscape of agriculture in Skagit immensely over WWAA's lifetime.

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH:** WWAA's primary function is outreach. Through a variety of forums, WWAA is in near constant communication with farmers, non-profit agencies, regulators and local, state and federal elected officials on issues of importance to the agricultural community. WWAA has also specifically included collaborating and coordinating with community leaders on environment. Agriculture and environmental restoration can harmoniously exist, but with ever increasing pressures to improve and restore historical and/or critical habitat, WWAA spends increasing time advocating for agricultural needs in restoration projects.

**FUTURE CHALLENGES:** WWAA supports comprehensive and programmatic plans that balance community priorities and natural resource objectives. It is vital that support for these balanced community priorities be maintained or increased. WWAA continues to see this as a tremendous challenge.

**COVID-19 IMPACTS:** Like many, WWAA's processes, funding and day-to-day work has all been dramatically altered due to COVID-19.

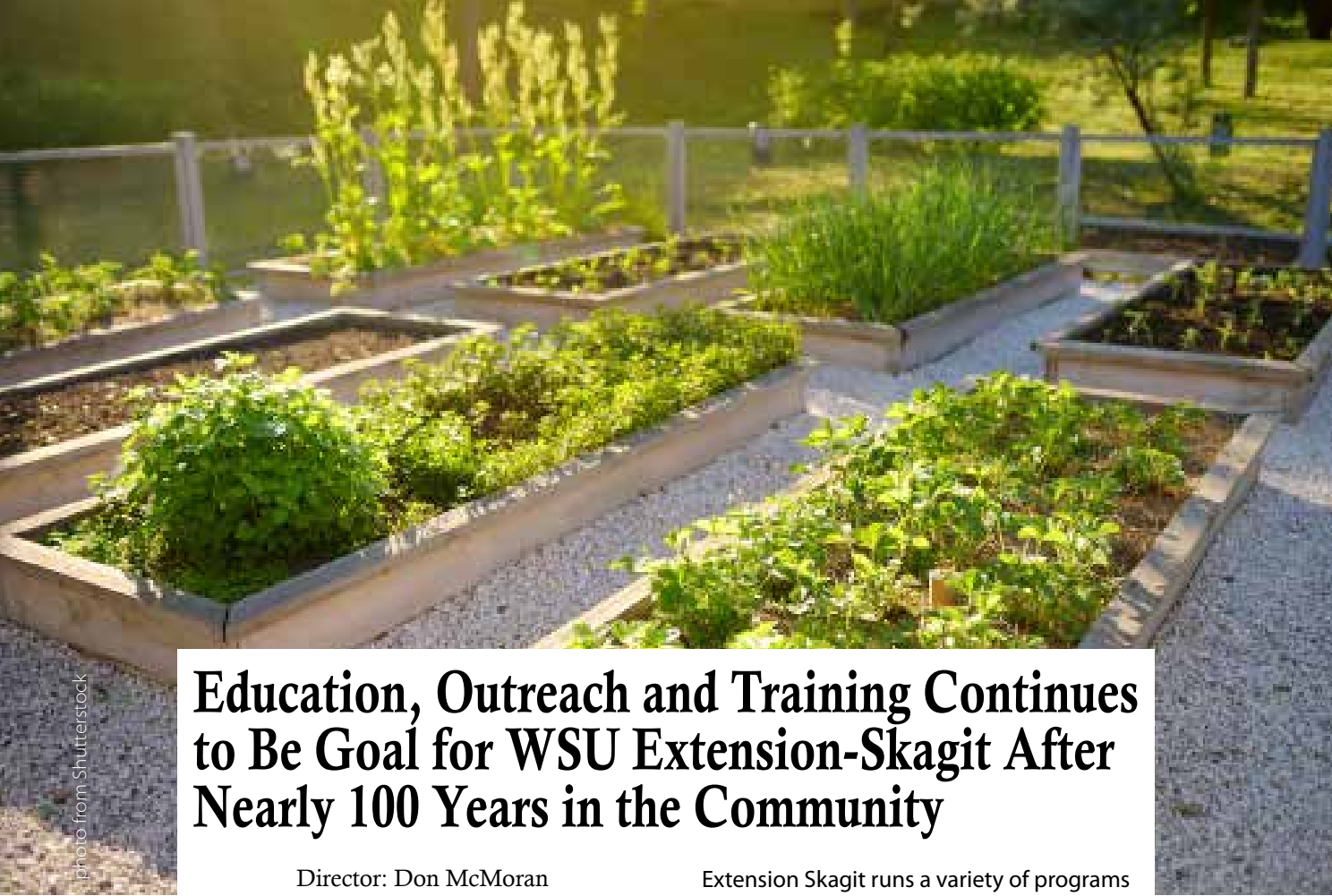


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# Education, Outreach and Training Continues to Be Goal for WSU Extension-Skagit After Nearly 100 Years in the Community

Director: Don McMoran  
WSU EXTENSION- SKAGIT COUNTY

Extension Skagit runs a variety of programs that support agricultural viability including:

WSU Extension- Skagit will celebrate its 100-year anniversary in 2022! Extension Director Don McMoran hopes it will be an in person celebration!

**ABOUT/OVERVIEW:** Washington State University has 39 locations throughout Washington State, including the Skagit County Extension, located in Burlington. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Extensions have served rural and agricultural communities by ‘helping farmers help themselves.’ Extensions, including Skagit, provide agricultural education, outreach and support as well as offering a forum for agricultural leaders to collaborate on the biggest issues of the day.

WSU Extension- Skagit receives roughly \$365,000 per year from Skagit County for operation and program management. WSU-

- SNAP-Ed, which teaches children and community members about how to grow food and nutrition requirements for healthy living.
- Livestock Advisory Classes, which helps livestock farmers learn about current best practices by sending volunteer teachers to farms to speak to groups of ranchers and dairymen.
- Master Gardener classes, which educate the public and enhance quality of life in Skagit by promoting sound gardening practices. WSU Extension- Skagit has over 135 Master Gardener volunteer teachers.
- Water Irrigation System Efficient (WISE) grant program, which

has saved more than 11 million gallons of irrigation water since its inception.

WSU Extension- Skagit is a valuable partner, working to forward all goals of the Voluntary Stewardship Program including stable and secure land use, proper operation and maintenance of drainage infrastructure, adequate access to water for irrigation, preservation of agricultural land, community and farmer education and the creation of a welcoming business environment.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:** WSU Extension- Skagit maintains the Local Food Access Map, which lists farmers market and farm stands to support local growers and value-added producers. The map has been accessed nearly 2,000 times between March 2020 and September 2020, with an average of 10 views per day. WSU Extension- Skagit has also partnered with the Genuine Skagit Valley Brand, created by the Port of Skagit and the Northwest Agricultural Business Center, increased farm visits in the summer of 2020 and piloted the Farm Fresh Food Box program to increase direct to consumer

sales for local growers. Finally, WSU Extension- Skagit partnered with Viva Farms to support their SNAP Community Support Agricultural (CSA) cost-offset produce box, which got local produce into the hands of resource limited shoppers.

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH:** WSU Extension- Skagit is the front door for many to the Skagit Valley agricultural community and Washington State University. On top of their livestock, master gardener, Family Living Program and snap-ed classes, WSU Extension- Skagit hosts a number of workshops and summits for the agricultural sector including:

- Western Washington Seed Workshop.
- Skagit Agricultural Summit.
- Country Living Expo.
- Western Washington Potato Workshop.
- Western Washington Berry Workshop.

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- ☐ Gearing up for Safety Program.
- ☐ Skagit Agricultural Leaders Breakfast (once monthly).

Staff from the WSU-Extension also serve on or work closely with several governing boards in Skagit including:

- ☐ Population Health Trust.
- ☐ Skagit County Agricultural Advisory Board.
- ☐ Salmon Festival.
- ☐ Skagit County Pest Board.
- ☐ Skagit County Weed Board.

It is hard to quantify exactly WSU Extension- Skagit's reach into the Skagit County community, but they are clearly a prominent organization at the forefront of education, training and outreach for agricultural producers in Skagit Valley. WSU Extension- Skagit is one of the most trusted places for information, and continues to be a great partner in forwarding Skagit County's agricultural preservation and

viability goals.

**FUTURE CHALLENGES:** Most of Skagit County would agree with the WSU Extension- Skagit that the biggest challenges in agriculture for the Valley continue to be accessibility of water for irrigation, labor force and economic viability. However, WSU Extension- Skagit has recently added farm stress and suicide prevention to the list- particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, WSU Extension- Skagit sees a clear need for additional processors in Skagit who are willing and able to buy from local growers.

**COVID-19 IMPACTS:** At the time of writing, WSU Extension- Skagit offices have been closed to the public since March 2020. This has forced staff to increase their ability to do outreach electronically, such as offering SNAP Ed classes online, assisting local school districts with produce procurement and hosting meetings and annual events virtually. The success of these practices has allowed learning, education and outreach to increase during this difficult period.

# THE FARMLAND LEGACY PROGRAM

is a county funded initiative that compensates landowners for development rights and places perpetual conservation easements on agricultural lands. Landowners retain fee simple title to their land and continue to farm while the easement places restrictions on future use to protect its agricultural character and productivity. The Program monitors over 13,000 acres of land in easements.

## Why do landowners apply to enroll in the Farmland Legacy Program?

- To aid in farm succession planning efforts
- To preserve land for agricultural production
- To reinvest funds into equipment
- To protect a critical mass of farmland

## What are the Program's benefits to the community?

- Preserves open space and rural character
- Supports local food production
- Limits development in the floodplain
- Contributes to the agricultural economy



More information can be found at [skagitcounty.net/farmland](http://skagitcounty.net/farmland) or call the Farmland Legacy Program Coordinator at (360) 416-1447