

SKAGIT COUNTY

FARMLAND LEGACY PROGRAM

2017 ANNUAL REPORT



The Skagit County Farmland Legacy Program (FLP) 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. Program funding comes from the local Conservation Futures Fund and often leverages additional federal, state, nonprofit, and private donation funds.

PROTECTING LAND

Purchase of Development Right (PDR) programs have been established in many locations across the country as a way of protecting farmland for long-term agricultural use. 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.

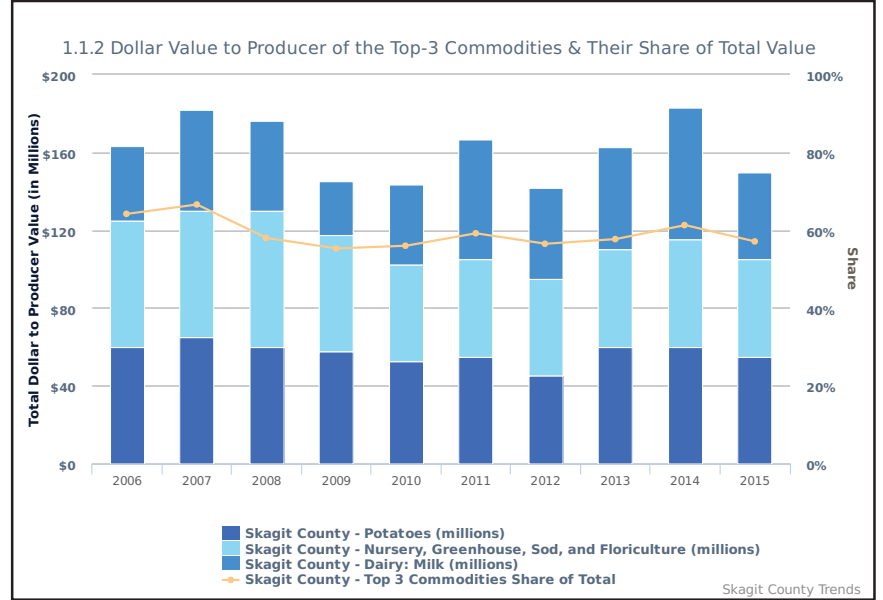
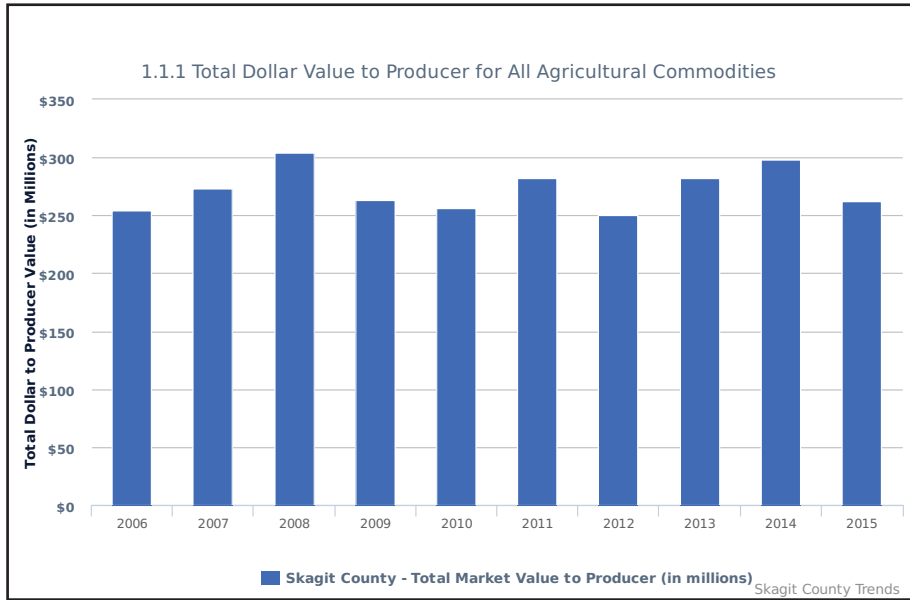
The easement places permanent restrictions on future use and development of the land in order to protect its agricultural character and productivity.

GOALS OF THE PROGRAM INCLUDE

- Preserving and enhancing a critical mass of farmland
- Targeting key properties that are under pressure of conversion to non-agricultural uses
- Closely coordinating with other agricultural protection programs locally and regionally
- Maintaining open space and rural character of the County
- Leveraging other public and private funds to the maximum extent possible
- Providing for ongoing monitoring and enforcement
- Contributing to agricultural economy



FARMERS SHARE THEIR STORIES



WSU Agricultural Statistics, USDA: National Agricultural Statistics Service, and Skagit County Trends by Eastern Washington University

CONSERVATION FUTURES ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Established in 1996, the Conservation Futures Advisory Committee is a diverse group of farmers and conservationists who oversee and implement the Farmland Legacy Program. Reporting to the Board of County Commissioners, the committee establishes priority agricultural areas that are under pressure for residential or commercial development. Through a tax-based fund, coupled with federal and state grants and donations, the committee acquires rights and interests on these voluntarily offered lands to prevent their conversion to non-agricultural uses.

Members:

Owen Peth (district 1), Andrea Xaver (district 2), Scott DeGraw (district 3; Chair), Wendy Pare (Skagit Conservation District), Dr. Keith Wiggers (Skagit Land Trust), Steve Sakuma (Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland), Mike Hulbert (At-Large)

Norm Nelson Inc.:

There are two main areas where the Farmland Legacy Program benefits our operation. Selling development rights helps offset the increasing cost of land and makes the net purchase prices more manageable. The other very significant benefit is the limit of residential development on farmland. It prevents a house on every 40-acre parcel to farm around and reduces potential conflicts when new landowners move in and may not understand what living next to a farm entails.

Richard Smith:

Skagit County has been my home since 1936 when my mother, Josephine Hawley Smith, a teacher, married a farmer, Henry Burkland – and thus I was introduced to farming. After graduating from WSU with a degree in horticulture, and then serving in Korea, I came home to begin the adventure of “tilling the soil.” When I began my own farm, I was fortunate to have my brother, Robert Burkland, join me. Our business was known as Smith and Burkland, later known as S & B Farms. We grew cauliflower, peas, cucumbers, broccoli, and carrots, plus several seed crops. The valley’s farming changed as one by one the processors [canneries] left the area. We went on to begin growing potatoes as our primary crop.

I knew of the Skagit County Farmland Legacy Program throughout the years, and heard of its positive influence in saving Skagit county farms. A few years ago, my son, Brad, and I decided to put some of our land on Fir Island into this program, which has really helped the farm by providing extra cash for the purchase of more storage for spuds. We highly recommend it as an excellent program to help the Skagit Valley remain a viable farming area.

Dallas Wylie:

The Wylie family started farming in the Fir Island-Conway area in 1913 when John Wylie bought his first piece of land, and quit logging to pursue what he felt was his calling. Additional parcels of land were added over the years as 2nd and 3rd generations continued what John started.

As a family, we want to see the Skagit Valley continue in its rich agricultural heritage; and as a sign of commitment to this, we started our farms’ protection with one parcel along Interstate 5 near Conway. This was

accomplished with the Farmland Legacy Program along with Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland. Our family continued to preserve additional acreage in that area with more help from the Farmland Legacy Program. Our family properties in the Conway area will remain as farmland and not be covered with water for fish or asphalt for development.

Darrin Morrison:

As co-owner of Morrison Farms, the Farmland Legacy Program (FLP) has made it possible for our family farm to purchase adjoining acreage on which the previous landowner placed a conservation easement. When our neighbors had retired from farming, they worked with FLP to sell the development rights to this program – this transaction put some extra money in the neighbors’ pockets and kept the farmland values in reach for our business. Taking away the right to build or develop is a tough choice but it worked into a win-win for both families in this case.

As President of Skagitonians To Preserve Farmland (SPF), I am very supportive of the Farmland Legacy Program and still see it as the main tool for helping landowners keep their land in agriculture. The FLP uses public and private funds to purchase a development right for a fair price – this keeps the value of the farmland in a stable market while providing the landowner with the resources to invest back into the business, or as income for retirement. Placing conservation easements on your land is voluntary as a willing seller. And, FLP works out the details with you for approving the finalized easement. SPF is proud to have been a part of FLP’s success as we have collaborated together in some very important projects over the years and are looking forward to many more.

Randy Good:

The Skagit County Farmland Legacy Program continues to be one of the top modeled voluntary purchase of development rights program in the U.S. As a founding member of the FLP, dairy farmer for 35 years and now beef farmer near Hamilton, I am extremely pleased to witness the FLP’s continued expansion. This program preserves in perpetuity Skagit County’s valuable agricultural lands. I encourage other farmers to consider this option in their farm plans.

Andrea Xaver:

Over 100 years ago, both sides of my family bought land to farm in Bay View, and beyond the south end of Big Lake. Since then, family members have died and some land had to be sold. I have managed to keep 3 of these small, organic farms. Over the years, I have spent a lot of money and time to defend my farms from being rezoned to higher density uses - including Mount Vernon’s city limits; or other conversions, such as more fish habitat. All aforementioned attempts remain constant concerns for me. I could have sold my farms years ago to enterprises in California or Seattle and made a fortune; but I, like many other farmers in this county, have chosen not to. Most farmers here love our lands, work hard, want to keep farming viable, and would like to see all natural resources well-balanced and respected. However, since about 1940, Skagit County has lost almost half of its farmlands due to inappropriate re-zoning; yet since that time, the world’s population, and this county’s, has tripled. In 2007, the County Commissioners approved my application to join the Conservation Futures (Farmland Legacy Program) Board. It is an exceptional program that saves farmland, and its many benefits, in this county.

This report was produced by the Skagit County Public Works Department and funded by the Farmland Legacy Program.

Editor: Bronlea Mishler Pictures provided by Steve Berentson and Patti Chambers

Contributors: Kara Symonds, Steve Berentson

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HOW MANY ACRES HAVE BEEN PRESERVED?

Farmland Legacy Program	
FLP Enrollment	91 owners with conservation easements
Total Acres Protected	11,026 acres in Farmland Legacy Program
Extinguished Development Rights	216
Pending Easements	1,156 acres; 28 development rights

To view Title 14.16.86, visit <http://www.codepublishing.com/wa/skagitcounty/>

Partnerships	Contributions
The Nature Conservancy	\$250,000
Ducks Unlimited	\$148,000
Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland	\$530,800
U. S. Department of Agriculture	\$5,359,087
WA State Recreation and Conservation Office	\$2,927,880
Skagit Land Trust	\$104,000
Skagit County Conservation Futures Tax	\$9,170,431
Total spent to date	18,490,198



MORE THAN 11,000 ACRES OF FERTILE SKAGIT VALLEY FARMLAND PROTECTED FROM FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Skagit County's Farmland Legacy program has protected more than 11,000 acres of Skagit Valley farmland from future development. But how much land is 11,000 acres?

An acre is 43,560 square feet, and is about the size of a football field without the end zones. Thanks to the Farmland Legacy program, 11,000 football fields of farmland have been protected. Skagit County continues to maintain ongoing partnerships with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office, Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland and other organizations in an effort to leverage local Conservation Futures funding and ensure continued compliance with existing easements.

Interest in the current program continues to outpace budget capacity thanks to local farmers who are committed to maintaining the county's agricultural landscape.

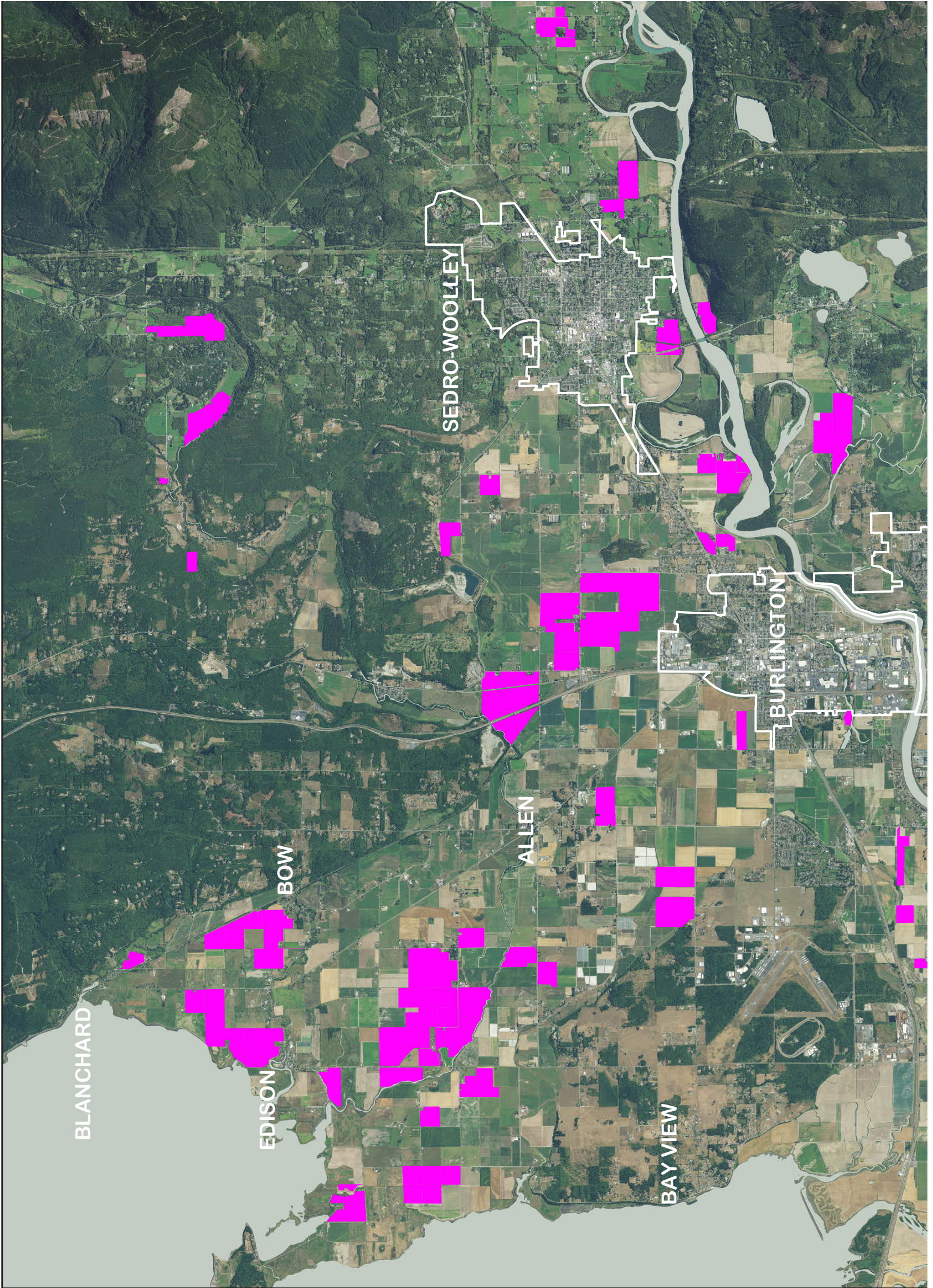
Protecting farmland is more than just guaranteeing the production of food as commodities. It also provides habitat for fish and wildlife, protects water from non-point pollution, and provides open space that is important to a rural lifestyle.

Every time land is taken out of production, impervious surfaces and drainage issues increase, and farming becomes more difficult. Driving large farm equipment down roads to other locations, for example, becomes difficult with increased traffic from homes and commercial development. Outside markets already threaten the economic balance of Skagit County. Therefore, in order to maintain agricultural vitality, the goal is to protect as much farmland as possible.

Skagit County has a successful history in protecting agricultural lands through a series of progressive land use regulations dating back to the 1960s. The most notable efforts include:


- 1965 – Skagit County signs its first Comprehensive Plan
- 1966 – Skagit County passes a progressive zoning ordinance
- 1973 – Skagit County adopts the Large Acreage Lot size establishing a 30-acre minimum on agriculturally zoned lands, allowing a one-time division.
- 1979 – Skagit County eliminates the one-time division and increases the minimum lot size to 40 acres.
- 1991 – Skagit County becomes one of the first counties in the state to pass the "Right to Farm" ordinance protecting farmers from unreasonable complaints from neighbors.
- 1996 – Skagit County establishes the Farmland Legacy Program and begins assessing the Conservation Futures Fund



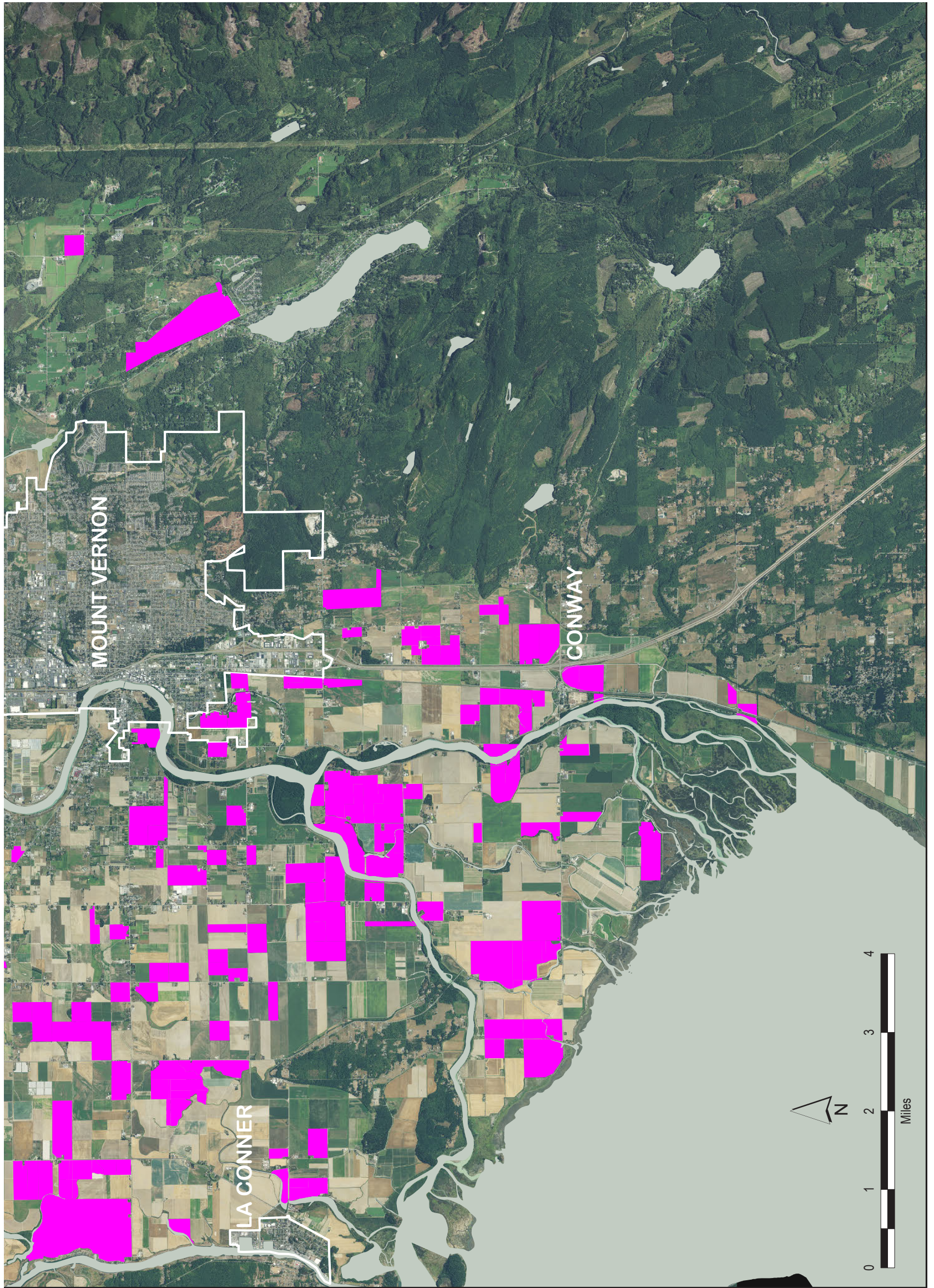


PROTECTED FARMLAND IN WESTERN SKAGIT COUNTY



 Farmland Legacy Protected Properties

Map Print Date: October 27, 2016



PROTECTED FARMLAND IN WESTERN SKAGIT COUNTY

Map Area

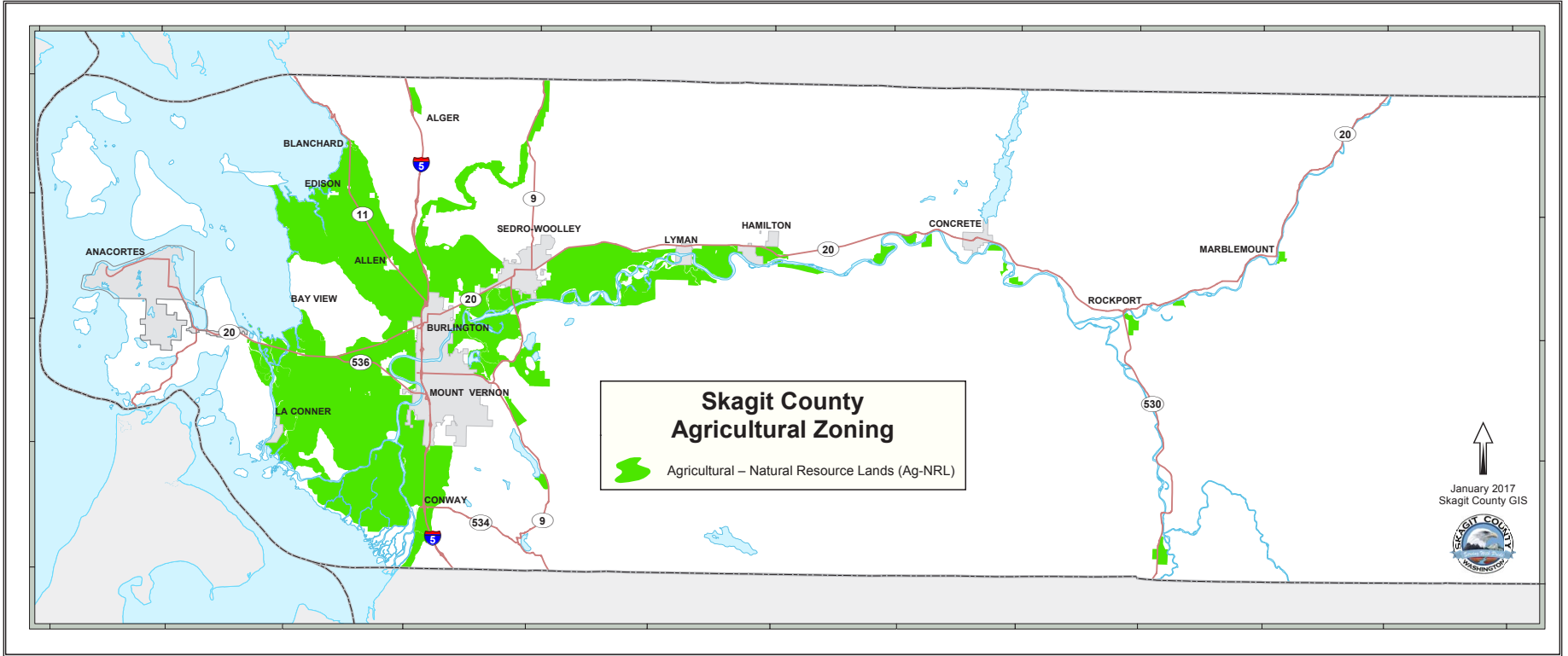


Farmland Legacy Protected Properties

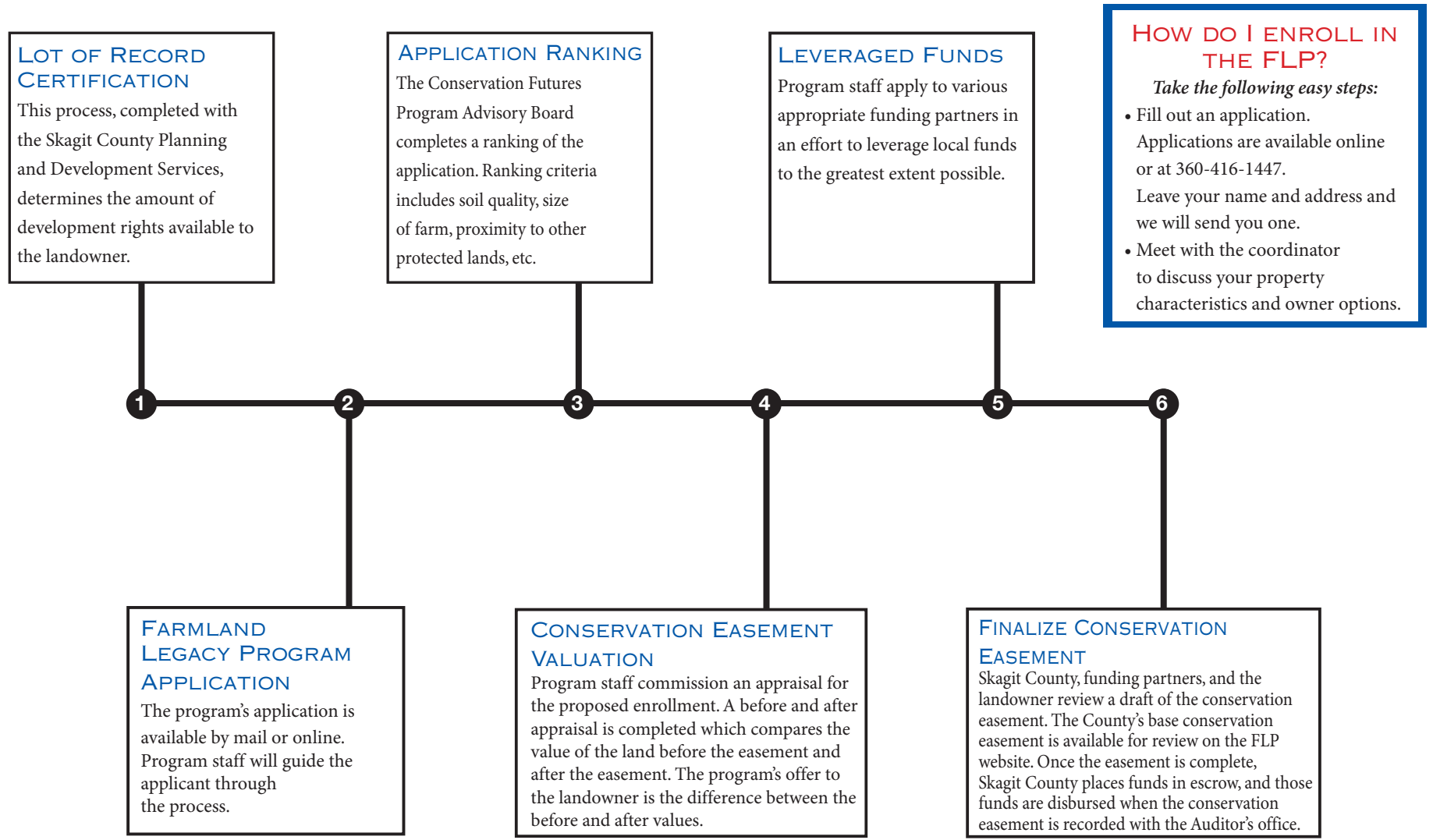
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PROPERTY OWNERS WITHIN AG-NRL ZONING ARE ELIGIBLE TO APPLY



MILESTONES IN THE ENROLLMENT PROCESS



WHY DO LANDOWNERS APPLY TO ENROLL IN THE FARMLAND LEGACY PROGRAM?

- To preserve their land for agricultural production in perpetuity
- To reinvest funds into equipment
- To reinvest funds into additional land purchases
- To aid in farm succession planning efforts
- To supplement farm income
- To reduce farm debt



BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

- Preserves open space and rural character
- Supports local food production
- Limits development in the floodplain
- Reduces urban sprawl
- Contributes to the agricultural economy
- Conserves soil for future generations



SKAGIT VALLEY AGRICULTURE

	Dollar Value to Producer (2015)	Crop Acreage
Apples ⁽¹⁾	\$100,000	75
Blueberries	\$1,500,000	3,500
Cucumbers (processing)	\$500,000	500
Field Crops ⁽²⁾	\$27,000,000	35,000
Grass Seed	\$780,000	800
Other Crops	\$18,000,000	4,000
Potatoes	\$55,000,000	14,000
Raspberries	\$2,500,000	500
Strawberries	\$2,000,000	400
Vegetable Seed ⁽³⁾	\$6,833,000	2,111
Brussels Sprouts	\$2,500,000	500
Dry Beans	\$750,000	500

- 1) Includes no nonbearing trees
- 2) Field Crops include alfalfa, barley, corn and grass silage, grass, oats, small grain, and wheat
- 3) Vegetable seed includes beet, cabbage, swiss chard, and spinach

*Figures shown are unofficial estimates based on input from processing companies, growers, agricultural organizations and agencies, field representatives, news articles, and Extension Agent experience. Crops grown by fewer than three producers are combined to protect confidentiality. Official agricultural figures are collected every five years by USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service. The last Census of Agriculture was collected for the year 2012 and can be viewed at the following web site: <https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/>. For state information, contact Washington Agricultural Statistics (360/902-1940).

With more than 89,000 acres of agricultural land and more than 80 different crops, Skagit County is rich in agricultural diversity. Skagit County is a major global producer of cabbage, table beet, and spinach seed; of the seven vegetable seed companies in the county, a majority markets their products worldwide. After expanding throughout the past 15 years, the potato industry has also developed into an important crop producing 15-20 tons annually. Skagit County also produces more tulip, daffodil, and iris bulbs than any other county in the United States and is the fourth largest dairy producer in Washington State. Other crops, including cole crops, vegetable seed crops, cucumbers, and small fruits contribute less in gross dollars, but are a critical component of Skagit's agricultural vitality.

APPLES:

The coastal climate allows Skagit County to grow a unique variety of apples that are not grown in the large apple-producing regions of central Washington. These apples include Jonagold, Gravenstein, Spartan, Akane, and Honey Crisp. While the quality of these apples is excellent, the lack of nearby apple processing facilities makes commercial production ineffective. Because of this, apple acreage is currently declining in Skagit County.



Farms entered the scene in 2016. Draper Valley Farms is the sole Washington-owned chicken processor in the state. Draper Valley Farms employs approximately 500 people, and has sales of approximately \$80 million.

DAIRY:

There are 30 commercial dairies in Skagit County; 11 years ago, there were 46. In the dairies started the year grossing an average of \$1.5 million per farm, producing a total of 287,906,784 gallons of milk for the year. The average income was 35 percent less than 2014, and was forecast to remain low throughout 2016. Loss of dairies negatively affects the agricultural community and county economy on many levels. Dairies not only provide natural fertilizers that are essential to soil health and nutrient needs for a variety of crops, but they also provide around \$1.5 million annually per farm. At current economic levels, it is feared that Skagit County dairies will continue to decline.



which are processed into juice, preserves, yogurt, bakery ingredients, and frozen products.

SEED CROPS:

Skagit County vegetable seed crops consist primarily of spinach, cabbage and beet seed. Skagit County is considered a world contributor, producing 8 percent of the world's spinach seed, 25 percent of its cabbage seed, and 25 percent of its beet seed. County vegetable seed acreage is below 5,000 acres due to the need to prevent cross-contamination and cross-pollination. Skagit County ranks first in vegetable seed production throughout Western Washington providing \$6.8 million from vegetable seed crops. Eight vegetable seed companies call Skagit Valley home: Sakata, D&D, Rijk Zwaan, Schafer, Skagit Seed Services, Syngenta, Universal and Vikima Seeds USA.



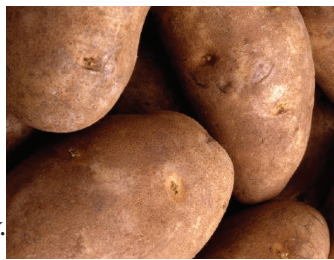
BLUEBERRIES:

Compared to the Midwest, the quality and production of Skagit County blueberries is exceptionally high. The Pacific Northwest is the fastest growing region of the blueberry industry in the U.S., and while Skagit County currently produces 30% of the state's total blueberry production, it is expected to increase as consumer demand and blueberry acreage continues to grow.



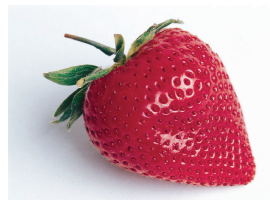
POTATOES:

Potatoes are Skagit Valley's most profitable crop, providing over \$55,000,000 annually. With 14,000 acres dedicated to their production, Skagit County potatoes are in great demand for their high quality. While late blight disease, Silver Scuff, and Flea Beetle threaten their production, Skagit farmers work with WSU Skagit County Extension to research and troubleshoot these issues in order to continue growing fresh market red, white, yellow, purple, fingerling, and chipping potatoes.



STRAWBERRIES:

Acreage is beginning to increase, thanks in part to a demand for local production. Skagit County continues to produce about 20% of Washington State's strawberries. With around 400 acres in Skagit County, strawberries provide roughly \$2 million annually making this crop an important part of Skagit County agriculture.



BULB CROPS:

Skagit County's bulb industry averages about \$20 million in annual gross income, \$3 million of which constitutes bulb sales. With approximately 1,100 acres dedicated to bulb crops, Skagit County grows more tulip, daffodil, and iris bulbs than any other county in the nation. These flowers are sold as both bulbs and cut flowers which are then shipped throughout the U.S. and Canada. The Tulip Festival, established in 1984, brings an estimated 300,000 visitors and \$65 million in County revenue each year.



CHICKENS AND EGGS:

Washington State is ranked 19th in the nation for egg production. Two major companies, Day Creek Organic Farms, and National Foods produce the majority of eggs for the county. Wilcox

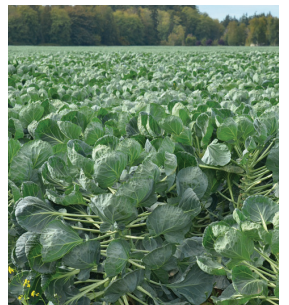
RASPBERRIES:

Skagit County produces about 3 percent of the state's raspberry crop. Washington State, in turn, produces about 75% of the nation's frozen red raspberries; 95 percent of this comes from Whatcom and Skagit Counties combined. Skagit County primarily grows Meeker berries,



CAULIFLOWER BROCCOLI

All Skagit County Brussel sprouts, cauliflower and broccoli are grown for fresh market. Head quality is exceptionally high in this region. Approximately 60% to 80% of the Brussel sprouts, broccoli and cauliflower grown in Skagit is consumed in Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia. Skagit farmers grew about 2,000 acres of Brussel sprouts, cauliflower and broccoli this year. Farmers in the Skagit Valley maintained acreages for these important rotational crops in 2016 largely for the nutrient and disease suppression that brassica crops provide.



All of the above information is provided by Washington State University Skagit County Extension. A full copy of the 2015 and earlier WSU Skagit County Agricultural Statistic reports are available at www.skagit.wsu.edu/Agriculture/.





DRAINAGE KEY TO AGRICULTURAL VIABILITY

A key component of the success of agriculture in Skagit County is a complex system of levees, dikes, tide gates and drainage ditches established more than 100 years ago to protect more than 67,000 acres of farmland from flooding and tidal inundation.

This critical infrastructure is operated and maintained by more than 24 dike, drainage, and irrigation districts. With more than 380 miles of drainage districts, 147 miles of dikes and levees, and 130 tide gates and flood gates, Skagit County's special purposes districts play a significant role in supporting the economy of this vital industry.

Farmers and other rural property owners assess themselves millions of dollars each year to maintain this intricate system.

Skagit County supports the special purpose districts and their goals of flood risk reduction and drainage conveyance through various measures. The County's Drainage Utility consistently collaborates with districts through Interlocal Cooperative Agreements in order to advance projects. County staff also participate in Drainage Fish Initiative meetings to understand the maintenance and project goals of the districts and to provide input on regulatory requirements.

HOW TO SEPARATE YOUR HOME FROM YOUR AG LAND

What if I have an existing residence in the agricultural zoning? Could I still preserve my agricultural land?

The County's Agricultural Land Preservation code is another avenue for landowners to protect farmland in Skagit County (Skagit County Code 14.16.860).

This code allows owners of an existing home (built prior to Sept. 11, 1996) in Agricultural-Natural Resource Lands (Ag-NRL) to create separate lots for the home site and for the agricultural land.

For example, if a landowner has a house on 40 acres in Ag-NRL, utilizing this code, the landowner can create two lots – a 1-acre lot for the home site and a 39-acre lot for the remaining agricultural land.

This code is commonly referred to as the 39 and 1 split, however, it applies to lots of any size within Ag-NRL or Rural Resource-Natural Resources Lands (RR-NRL).

The County allows the landowner to create these substandard lots in exchange for the landowner placing a conservation easement on the agricultural acreage. A substandard lot in the Ag-NRL or RR-NRL zones is any parcel under 40 acres.

This process does not increase the net number of development rights but does give a landowner flexibility if they'd like to keep the house and sell the farmland, or keep the farmland and sell the home.

Please contact the Skagit County Planning and Development Services Department for more information on this process at (360) 416-1320



"Protect an acre" of fertile Skagit County Farmland!



Join others to help save our fertile Skagit County soil by making a contribution to Skagit County's Farmland Legacy program! Donations are tax deductible.

Your donations help preserve farmland and help Skagit County leverage local, state, and federal dollars to preserve our agricultural heritage.

- \$25
- \$50
- \$100
- \$250
- \$500
- Other _____

Your Name _____

Mailing Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

Send contributions to "Skagit County Farmland Legacy Program," 1800 Continental Place, Mount Vernon, Washington, 98273.

For further information, contact Farmland Legacy Director Kara Symonds at 360.416.1447

