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
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 John Wylie expanded his farm. His children and grandchildren, including Dallas Wylie, have continued what John started. The family has tripled their agricultural production from上世纪30年代中后期的农业产量。2006年到2015年，他们已经从100万英亩增加到了300万英亩。DFP使用公共和私人资金购买开发权，以保持土地的农业用途。

Richard Smith: Skagit County has more than 750 farmers. Our family has farmed in the Conway area since 1940 and has tripled our land base. We have managed to keep 3 of these farms, thanks to the Farmland Legacy Program. Our family has been able to keep all of our land in agriculture, and still keep our farmland values in reach for our business.

Derrick Morrison: As a co-owner of Morrison Farms, the farm is committed to using sustainable farming practices. We believe that preserving farmland is essential for our community. We have been able to keep our farm in agriculture, and still keep our farmland values in reach for our business.

Richard Smith: The Skagit County Farmland Legacy Program continues to be one of the most modeled voluntary purchase of development rights programs in the U.S. Our family has had the opportunity to keep land in agriculture, and still keep our farmland values in reach for our business.

Derrick Morrison: As a co-owner of Morrison Farms, the Farm is committed to using sustainable farming practices. We believe that preserving farmland is essential for our community. We have been able to keep our farm in agriculture, and still keep our farmland values in reach for our business. The Farmland Legacy Program is a win-win for both families in this case.

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.
How many acres have been preserved?

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.

More than 11,000 acres of fertile Skagit Valley farmland protected from future development

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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.

Farmland Legacy Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FLP Enrollment</th>
<th>91 owners with conservation easements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Acres Protected</td>
<td>11,026 acres in Farmland Legacy Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extinguished</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pending Easements</td>
<td>1,156 acres; 28 development rights</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 |
2017 ANNUAL FARMLAND LEGACY REPORT

PROTECTED FARMLAND IN WESTERN SKAGIT COUNTY

Farmland Legacy Protected Properties

Map Print Date: October 27, 2016
Property owners within Ag-NRL zoning are eligible to apply

Lot of Record Certification
This process, completed with the Skagit County Planning and Development Services, determines the amount of development rights available to the landowner.

Application Ranking
The Conservation Futures Program Advisory Board completes a ranking of the application. Ranking criteria includes soil quality, size of farm, proximity to other protected lands, etc.

Leveraged Funds
Program staff apply to various appropriate funding partners in an effort to leverage local funds to the greatest extent possible.

How do I enroll in the FLP?
Take the following easy steps:
• Fill out an application. Applications are available online or at 360-416-1447. Leave your name and address and we will send you one.
• Meet with the coordinator to discuss your property characteristics and owner options.

Farmland Legacy Program Application
The program’s application is available by mail or online. Program staff will guide the applicant through the process.

Conservation Easement Valuation
Program staff commission an appraisal for the proposed enrollment. A before and after appraisal is completed which compares the value of the land before the easement and after the easement. The program’s offer to the landowner is the difference between the before and after values.

Finalize Conservation Easement
Skagit County, funding partners, and the landowner review a draft of the conservation easement. The County’s base conservation easement is available for review on the FLP website. Once the easement is complete, Skagit County places funds in escrow, and those funds are disbursed when the conservation easement is recorded with the Auditor’s office.

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

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
Two major companies, Day Creek in the nation for egg production. Washington State is ranked 19th for chickens and eggs: 18 million in County revenue estimated 300,000 visitors and $65 million in County revenue. 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.

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.

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 Scurf, 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.

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, 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 totaling $6.8 million from vegetable seed crops. Eight vegetable seed companies call Skagit Valley home: Sakata, D&D, Rijk Zwaan, Schaefer, Seed Services, Syngenta, Universal and Vikima Seeds USA.

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.

Cauliflower Broccoli
All Skagit County Brussels sprouts, cauliflower and broccoli are grown for fresh market. Head quality is exceptionally high in this region. Approximately 60 to 80% of the Brussels sprouts, broccoli and cauliflower grown in Skagit is consumed in Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia. Skagit farmers grew about 2,000 acres of Brussels 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.

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 than 50 percent of the 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.

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.

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 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.
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.