



Planning & Development Services

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Memorandum: Agritourism Code Amendments

To: Planning Commission
From: Jack Moore, Director
Robby Eckroth, Senior Planner
Date: September 23, 2025
Re: Agritourism Code Amendments

Recommendation

As the proposed amendment meets the consistency criteria listed in SCC 14.08, the Department recommends **approval** of this proposed amendment.

Summary

Planning and Development Services (PDS) is providing this staff report in advance of the September 16, 2025, Planning Commission work session. This report summarizes and analyzes the proposed agritourism code amendments (**Exhibit A**), as well as the process leading to their development.

On June 24, 2024, the Board of County Commissioners passed Resolution #R20240132 (**Exhibit B**), which remanded the proposed agritourism code amendments to the Skagit County Planning Commission and PDS for further study, public engagement, and refinement.

In response, PDS convened a Community Advisory Group to help develop recommendations that addressed the remand criteria. Drawing from the input of both the Community Advisory Group and the Agricultural Advisory Board, PDS has prepared a revised draft agritourism code amendment which is now available for public and Planning Commission review.

Background and History

The County began its agritourism initiative in 2021, starting with an agritourism study. In 2022, PDS developed three policy recommendations. In 2023, PDS worked through the legislative review process with the Planning Commission.

A full timeline of the agritourism initiative—from 2021 through January 2025—is included in **Exhibit C**, along with links to relevant documents.

Following the Board's June 2024 remand (Resolution #R20240132), PDS established a Community Advisory Group to develop policy recommendations in response to the remand criteria. An overview of this group's composition and meeting summaries are included in **Exhibit D**.

The Community Advisory Group submitted its recommendations to PDS in a letter dated July 29, 2025 (**Exhibit E**). The Agricultural Advisory Board also provided a formal response to the remand criteria in a letter dated June 16, 2025 (**Exhibit F**).

Based on input from both groups, PDS developed a rough draft of the revised code and shared it for further review. The Agricultural Advisory Board then submitted a second letter with additional recommendations on September 12, 2025 (**Exhibit G**). The current draft of the agritourism code amendment, reflecting feedback received throughout this process, is included in **Exhibit A**.

Overview of Proposed Amendments

The intent of the proposed amendments is to allow agritourism activities in areas zoned Agricultural – Natural Resource Lands and in other zones that allow agricultural production. The amendments are intended to allow farm owners and operators to conduct agritourism activities as a secondary use to agriculture, providing opportunities for supplemental income while preserving agricultural land and minimizing potential impacts on surrounding properties.

The proposed agritourism amendments introduce a clear definition of agritourism, identifying it as a variety of activities conducted by the owner or operator of a working farm that engage the public for the purposes of agricultural education, enjoyment, or recreation. These activities may also provide supplemental income for the farm operator.

The definition underscores that agritourism in Skagit County is intended to:

- Support the preservation of working farmland
- Diversify farm income
- Increase public awareness and appreciation of agriculture
- Enhance overall farm viability
- Prevent interference with surrounding farming operations and practices

The amendments establish general limitations and performance standards to mitigate potential impacts related to lighting, noise, traffic, road access, and parking. Agritourism activities must remain secondary to and directly related to an ongoing agricultural use. They must not result in the permanent conversion of agricultural land or interfere with surrounding farming operations and practices. Additionally, the amendments include enforcement provisions that allow for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of compliance. These provisions grant the Planning and Development Services (PDS) the authority to revoke special use permits for agritourism if the agritourism operation is violating the conditions of approval or other Skagit County Code requirements.

Agritourism uses are proposed to be allowed in the following zones:

- Agricultural – Natural Resource Lands (Ag-NRL)
- Rural Resource – Natural Resource Lands (RRc-NRL)
- Rural Reserve (RRv)
- Rural Intermediate (RI)

The code proposes **three tiers of agritourism uses**, based on intensity and required level of review:

Agritourism Type	Max Number of Guests Allowed	Max Number of Days Allowed
Agritourism 1 (Permitted Use)	50	10
Agritourism 2 (Administrative Special Use)	100	24
Agritourism 3 (Hearing Examiner Special Use)	As Conditioned*	As Conditioned*

The maximum number of guests and number of days allowed for an Agritourism 3 use will be based on the limits established in the conditions of approval of the Hearing Examiner Special Use Permit. The limits could be based on the number of agritourism activities proposed by the applicant, the property size and location, and could be used to mitigate impacts to roads and neighboring properties. Between March 15 and May 15, activities that are officially registered with the **Skagit Valley Tulip Festival** may run for 30-days in addition to the allowed days specified for Agritourism 1, 2, and 3.

Applicants seeking approval for Agritourism 2 or 3 operations are required to meet the following additional criteria:

- **Verification of Ongoing Agricultural Use:** To ensure that agritourism remains a secondary use, the primary agricultural operation must have generated a gross income of at least \$500 per acre per year over the previous three years. Income must be verified by the Planning and Development Services (PDS) Director.
- **Agritourism 3 uses may not include farm-to-table activities:** This restriction is intended to prevent such uses from operating as de facto restaurants, particularly since Agritourism 3 allows greater flexibility in guest capacity and number of operating days.
- **Self-Certification:** The applicant of an Agritourism 2 and 3 use must comply with the annual self-certification requirements identified in SCC 14.51.080.
- **Agreement Required for Agritourism 2 and 3:** Prior to any application for an Agritourism 2 or 3 being granted, the applicant must sign an agreement, on a form provided by the Director, agreeing that they will comply with all the requirements of SCC 14.18.407.

Additional proposed changes include:

- **Renaming “Temporary Use Events” to “Limited Event Venues”:** PDS is proposing this change because “Temporary Use Events” currently allows up to 24 events per year, with permits that do not expire annually or require renewal. As such, the term “temporary” is misleading. The proposed name “Limited Event Venues” more accurately reflects the nature and frequency of these activities. The amendments also clarify that events at permitted uses such as churches, restaurants, grange halls, community centers, and parks are not regulated as limited event venues.
- **Clarifying Permitted Single Events Across All Zones:** The proposal specifies that Outdoor Public Musical, Entertainment, Amusement, and Assembly Events (Single Events), as defined in SCC

9.08, are permitted in all zones. SCC 9.08 has been part of the Skagit County Code since 1970. This amendment connects Title 14 with SCC 9.08 by explicitly stating that such single events are allowed countywide.

- **Prohibiting Certain Uses in the Agricultural-NRL Zone:** The proposal would prohibit Limited Event Venues, restaurants, and regularly occurring celebratory gatherings (e.g., weddings) in the Agricultural-Natural Resource Lands zone.
- **Removing Existing Tourism Language from Agricultural Accessory Uses:** The amendment removes the phrase “activities associated with tourism that promote local agriculture...” from the definition of Agricultural Accessory Use, as this concept is now replaced with the new agritourism definition and standards.

Consistency Review with Skagit County Code 14.08

1. Is the amendment consistent with the vision statements, goals, objectives, and policy directives of the Comprehensive Plan and the does the proposal preserve the integrity of the Comprehensive Plan and assure its systematic execution?

This amendment is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan as shown in the Natural Resource Lands Element:

Goal 4A Agricultural Resource Lands. Agricultural Resource Lands are those lands with soils, climate, topography, parcel size, and location characteristics that have long-term commercial significance for farming. Skagit County is committed to preserving and enhancing the agricultural land base and promoting economic activities and marketing support for a strong agricultural industry. The agricultural community faces significant challenges in preserving the agricultural land base and a viable agricultural industry, including: conversion of agricultural lands to development and inappropriate habitat restoration; conflict with neighboring residential uses; drainage impacts; and other disruption of agricultural lands functions and values. The following policies are intended to ensure the stability and productivity of agriculture in Skagit County.

Guiding Principles: Agricultural Resource Lands: Protect the agricultural land resource and farming in Skagit County; endeavor to minimize the loss of the resource; mitigate unavoidable losses; and replace lost resources whenever possible. These principles shall guide Skagit County’s actions to:

- Preserve agricultural land for agricultural uses;
- Limit new non-agricultural uses and activities on agricultural resource lands;
- Provide education and support services that maintain the farming industry and lifestyle;
- Promote the economic benefits of farming;
- Resolve conflicts between agricultural and environmental objectives; and
- Monitor the long-term achievement of the goals and policies

Goal 4A-3: Promote preservation of agricultural land for agricultural uses, minimize non-farming uses on agricultural lands; and develop incentive programs to promote farming.

Goal 4A-4 Land uses allowed on designated agricultural land shall promote agriculture, agricultural support services, and promote diverse agricultural industries.

Policy 4A-4.5 Special Events and Activities: Special events and activities on agricultural lands shall be conducted in ways that reduce potential impacts resulting from the activity. Those impacts include but are not limited to traffic, litter, trespass, and sanitation.

Goal 4A-5 Minimize land use conflicts and promote mitigation of conflicts on the lands adjacent to agricultural resource lands.

2. Is the proposal supported by the Capital Facilities Plan (CFP) and other functional Plans?

The proposed amendments do not change any elements of the CFP or other functional Plans. The goals and policies of the Capital Facilities Plan are incorporated directly into Chapter 10 of the Comprehensive Plan.

3. Is the proposal consistent with the Growth Management Act (GMA), the Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs), and applicable provisions of the Comprehensive Plan?

The following GMA Planning Goals are applicable:

RCW 36.70A.020(8) Natural Resource Industries: Maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries, including productive timber, agricultural, and fisheries industries. Encourage the conservation of productive forestlands and productive agricultural lands and discourage incompatible uses.

RCW 36.70A.177 Agricultural lands - Innovative zoning techniques – Accessory Uses: This statute addresses agricultural and non-agricultural uses and provides specific standards for preservation of all commercial agricultural lands. These statutes express that a county or city should encourage nonagricultural uses to be limited to lands with poor soils or otherwise not suitable for agricultural purposes. Accessory uses allowed shall be located, designed, and operated so as to not interfere with, and to support the continuation of, the overall agricultural use of the property and neighboring properties.

The following Countywide Planning Policies are applicable:

CPP 5.8: Agriculture, forestry, aquatic resources and mineral extraction shall be encouraged both within and outside of designated resource lands.

CCP 5.10 Lands within designated agricultural resource areas should remain in large parcels and ownership patterns conducive to commercial agricultural operations and production.

CPP 5.11: Skagit County shall conserve agriculture, aquaculture, forest and mineral resources for productive use by designating natural resource lands and aquatic resource areas, where the principal and preferred land uses will be long term commercial resource management.

CPP 8: Maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries, including productive timber, agricultural, and fisheries industries. Encourage the conservation of productive forest lands and productive agricultural lands, and discourage incompatible uses.

CPP 8.9: Skagit County shall conserve agricultural, aquatic based, forest and mineral resources for productive use by designating natural resource lands and aquatic resource areas where the principal and preferred land uses will be long-term commercial resource management.

4. Does the proposal bear a substantial relationship to the public general health, safety, morals, or welfare?

Yes. The proposed amendments will protect the safety and welfare of the public by ensuring agritourism uses do not result in the conversion of agricultural land and by mitigating impacts to properties surrounding agritourism uses from noise, lighting, traffic, and other impacts.

How to Comment

The public may submit written comments via email to pdscomments@co.skagit.wa.us (preferred) or via US mail starting **September 25, 2025**. All paper comments must be submitted on 8½" x 11" paper to the address below:

Skagit County Planning & Development Services
re: Comments "Skagit County Agritourism Code Amendments"
1800 Continental Place
Mount Vernon, WA 98273

All comments must be received by **October 16, 2025, at 4:30 p.m.** and include (1) your full name, (2) your mailing address. Comments not meeting these requirements will not be considered. You may also provide verbal comments at the Public Hearing. The public hearing is scheduled for **October 14, 2025, at 6:00 p.m.** in the Skagit County Commissioners Hearing Room at 1800 Continental Place, Mount Vernon, WA 98273.

If you wish to provide testimony via the online meeting option, please send an email to pdscomments@co.skagit.wa.us, with your name, phone number, and include a request to be added to the speakers list in the body of the email. Public hearing testimony is usually limited to three minutes, so written comments are preferred.

Exhibits

- **Exhibit A** – Proposed Agritourism Code Updates
- **Exhibit B** – Remand Resolution #R20240132
- **Exhibit C** – Agritourism Policy Timeline
- **Exhibit D** – Community Advisory Group Overview
- **Exhibit E** – Community Advisory Group Recommendations on Agritourism Remand Criteria
- **Exhibit F** – Agricultural Advisory Board Responses to Remand Criteria
- **Exhibit G** – Agricultural Advisory Board Recommendations on Rough Agritourism Code Draft