Focus on Farming turnout shows importance of county agriculture

Executive Aaron Reardon welcomes more than 500 people at Thursday's Focus on Farming Conference

Snohomish County’s eighth annual Focus on Farming on Thursday drew more than 500 participants for the third straight year.

Farmers, producers and agriculture support specialists gathered at the Comcast Arena in Everett to discuss ways to improve and expand agriculture in Snohomish County as well as across the region.

Focus on Farming, which began eight years ago at the county’s fairgrounds, has grown into a regional event with national support.

Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon opened Thursday’s conference, titled “Harvesting Opportunity,” and thanked local farmers for their willingness to work with the county to continue building relationships and to improve the state of agriculture here.

“For the past eight years, we have transcended politics to create new
policies that are increasing farming here in Snohomish County,” Reardon said. “I’m grateful to the farmers who believed we were serious when we first met eight years ago.”

The initial Focus on Farming Conference helped lay the foundation for new policies and plans designed to promote, protect and preserve agriculture in Snohomish County. With farming having been on the decline, that work paid off, as highlighted by the 2007 USDA Agriculture Census, which showed an increase in farmers, crop production and land used for farming in Snohomish County for the first time in decades.

“We have reversed a 40-year trend through the cooperation of the county and farming community,” Reardon said. “I expect this to continue.”

Conference keynotes ranged from serious to humorous Thursday with attorney Bill Marler, who has been a major force in food-safety policy in the United States and abroad, discussing ways to make farming safer, while local chef and James Beard Award winner Tamara Murphy and the “Galloping Gourmet” Graham Kerr discussed their life’s work in and out of the kitchen.

Participants also were treated to a gourmet lunch made wholly from locally grown and raised food – including country style beef and pork roulade, rainbow carrots, and pear mousse with spiced pumpkin – and an evening wine-and-cheese tasting featuring local vintners and cheese makers.

In addition, Focus on Farming also included a 17,000 square-foot trade show, offering farmers the chance to shop for everything from a new tractor to greenhouse supplies, from farm insurance to feed and fertilizer.

County receives federal safety grant for rural roads

Snohomish County has received a federal safety grant to address road safety issues on roads in rural areas, primarily the problem of vehicles drifting out of lanes or off the road.

About $1.7 million of a $2.5 million grant will allow the county to apply Methyl Methacrylate (MMA) striping along the centerlines and edges of several rural roads within the county. The remainder will be used for intersection improvements.

“These funds will allow us to continue improving the safety of our road system for drivers, passengers and pedestrians,” said Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon.
MMA striping has a raised profile and provides a rumble effect when vehicles stray out of their lanes. A national study in 2008 found that 60 percent of all traffic fatalities were caused by vehicles leaving the edge of the roadway or veering into oncoming traffic. The raised profile is also more reflective at night than painted markings, and delineates more clearly the centerline and edges of a road.

MMA striping also has a longer life expectancy than paint and is very resistant to snow-plow damage. The project will include the application of this special striping along approximately 38 miles of road to replace painted lines.

The county will target roads with a history of accidents where vehicles have strayed off the edge of the roadway or crossed the centerline. Portions of the following roads will receive the MMA striping: Jordan Road, Ben Howard Road, 311th Avenue Southeast, Pioneer Highway, Forty Five Road, and 67th Avenue Northeast.

Application of the striping is currently planned for the summers of 2012 and 2013.

About $800,000 in grant money will be used to pay for three additional traffic safety improvement projects. The county will make traffic signal modifications at the 128th Street Southwest/4th Avenue West intersection and the 164th Street Southwest/35th Avenue West intersection as well as improve the sight distance at the 67th Avenue Northeast and 132nd Street Northeast intersection.

### National alert test not a 911 emergency

Snohomish County residents should be aware that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the National Weather Service (NWS) will conduct the first-ever national-level test of the Emergency Alert System (EAS) on Wednesday, Nov. 9.

The test will take place at 11 a.m. and may last up to three and a half minutes but is more likely to be in the 30-second range.

While the test is similar to the way local emergency alert system tests are conducted, this will be the first nationwide test expected to be broadcast simultaneously over all communication service providers including television stations, cable television, broadcast radio stations, and satellite radio systems across the United States.

This national test may look like regular local EAS tests that most people
are already familiar with, but there will be some differences in what the public will see and hear. The audio message will repeat “This is a test” but any accompanying video message scroll may not indicate “This is a test.”

Residents are reminded that this broadcast is only a test and that no emergency exists.
At times, residents have mistaken EAS tests and called 9-1-1 concerned about their safety and well-being.

Calls to 9-1-1 to inquire about the test could overwhelm the telephone network at emergency call centers and delay the county’s 9-1-1 centers from receiving calls from citizens reporting real emergencies. Only call 911 if you have an actual emergency requiring a police, fire or medical response.

Calls to 9-1-1 to get information about this test should not be made. For more information about the national test, click here.

In Snohomish County, 9-1-1 service is provided by different agencies, including SNOCOM and SNOPAC, both emergency communication centers.

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If you would like to send me your comments and feedback, or if you would like to unsubscribe, simply reply to this message.

You may also contact me directly by phone at 425.388.3460.