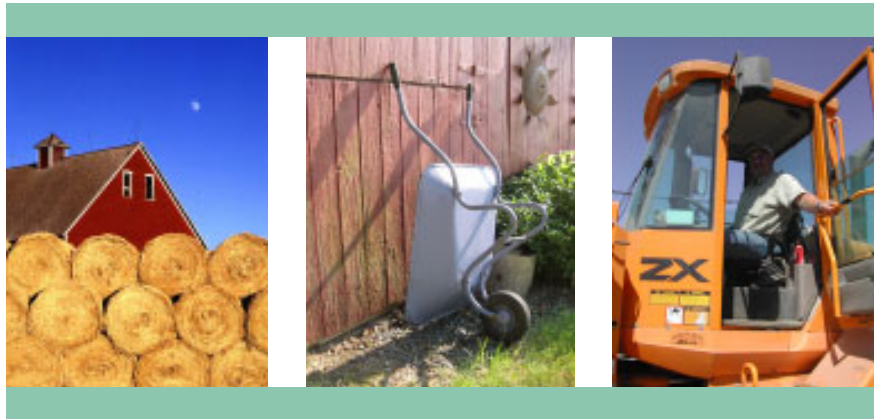


Department of Planning and Development Services, Public Works and Parks Work Program



In Response to the Executive Order
for the Snohomish County Agriculture Action Plan

July 2005



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Executive Summary

On March 17, 2005, County Executive Aaron Reardon unveiled the Agricultural Action Plan at Twin City Foods in Stanwood. This Plan is the blueprint for the actions that Snohomish County government will take, or facilitate, to meet the needs of the agricultural community to remove obstacles to farming and provide opportunities for the growth of the industry. In addition to the Action Plan, Executive Reardon also issued Executive Order 05-43, establishing a policy for preserving and enhancing the agricultural economy in Snohomish County.

This Executive Order is designed to implement the action items contained in the Snohomish County Agriculture Action Plan and is directed to the quick implementation of thirteen policies from the Action Plan to ensure maximum responsiveness to farmers, ranchers and growers.



Executive Reardon pledged that the actions will be carried out to ensure service delivery thereafter.

Executive Reardon welcomes participants to the 2004 Focus on Farming Conference, the launch site for his economic development initiative for local agriculture.

This response document was prepared by the Directors of the Planning and Development Services, Public Works, Parks and Finance Departments. It sets forth a work program to implement the specified actions, or alternatives acceptable to the Snohomish County Executive, for achieving the desired outcomes. The County Agriculture Implementation Team (established by the Executive Order) will make the final assignments of each task.

Farm Regulation Reform

Executive Order Action Item #1

“Establish a permit assistance center for staff to work directly with farmers at the front end of the application process in order to simplify the permitting process and eliminate redundancies.”

Background

Farmers and ranchers have indicated that when they want to undertake regulated farming activities on their property, they experience a great deal of discomfort and confusion in understanding the permitting process. More specifically, while they may know where to go in order to obtain a permit, they do not have the understanding of specific permit requirements, review timelines, engineering and/or architectural plan submittals, and costs associated with the process, both in fees and hiring of outside consultants, that are required to make the submittals complete.

In various settings in which the County Executive engaged in discussions with farmers, they have asked him to develop a system that will allow them assistance to comply with the requirements. They believe that the goals of regulations should be to reach the desired result in as few steps as possible. It would be desirable once a development idea is conceived that the farmer would have an opportunity to contact a permit coordinator to assist in identifying the basics steps to get started and be available at any time during the process to help them understand other process requirements. They indicated that in many cases they have spent money developing plans that later turn out to be unnecessary, or have developed plans that address issues incompletely. Right now they believe there is unpredictability for them that they would like to see changed.

Finally, many of the agricultural industry development activities are time sensitive. When planting crops, daylight and weather are the critical factors in having a successful crop. With the County designing a system that would be filled with staff familiar and aware of the issues farmers, ranchers and processors encounter, there is a better chance that not only the submittal process will be effective and helpful, but there will be fewer denials and fewer appeals. Regulatory reform must focus on achieving outcomes, not bureaucratic processes.

Action Plan Executive Order Work Plan Items

1. The County Departments will develop a process identifying a team to work with the agricultural community on the permit process. The primary goal of the Agricultural Permit Team will be to find outcome solutions for people in the agricultural community seeking permits.

This team will consist of: a Permit Coordinator who will be available to answer any permit process questions or to provide assistance with another agency such as the Snohomish County Health District; an expert in Shoreline and Flood Hazard requirements; a Grading and Drainage Expert knowledgeable in the Right-to-Plow ordinance; a traffic and right-of-way expert; and a Surface Water Management expert.

Each of these experts will be trained in farming issues and activities. They will be solution-oriented and available to the farmers outside of normal processes.

THIS ITEM WILL BE COMPLETED BY
OCTOBER 31, 2005.

Farm Regulation Reform

Executive Order Action Item #2

“Create an alternative way to process agricultural permits separate and unique from residential and commercial permits.”

Background

Comments received during the Focus on Farming Conference indicated that when farmers, ranchers and growers are contemplating expansion of their business operations, they are required to obtain County permits under traditional residential, commercial, or land use processes. They have contended that these tracks are not appropriate for the agricultural industry. Farmers have indicated that they are often asked to make improvements or conduct permit reviews that are unnecessary for compliance with the permit in relation to the subject farming activity. Putting them in those tracks is asking the agriculture industry to conform to standards without the unique needs of the farmers being taken into consideration.

The Agriculture Action Plan calls for the creation of a third category for permit tracking – an agriculture permit. Farmers believe that, if the County would develop an agriculture permit track, it could be tailored to the needs of the industry in light of the County permit requirements. This would lead to a permit review process that would have less frustration in processing and obtaining permits accomplished within a collaborative environment.

Action Plan Executive Order Work Plan Items:

1. PDS will perform a survey of the Agriculture industry community seeking their input on what elements of an agriculture permit track would be most acceptable to the industry.

THIS WILL BE COMPLETED BY
SEPTEMBER 30, 2005.

2. PDS will present a preliminary draft of the agriculture permit track at the Focus on Farming Conference.

THE CONFERENCE PRESENTATION WILL BE HELD
ON NOVEMBER 17, 2005.

3. PDS will establish a program for an agriculture permit track.

PILOT TO BE ESTABLISHED BY MARCH 30, 2006.

4. Feedback mechanism will be developed to assess effectiveness of the agriculture permit track.

FEEDBACK MECHANISM TO BE DEVELOPED BY
MARCH 30, 2006 with first report due by
October 31, 2006.

Farm Regulation Reform

Executive Order Action Item #3

“Educate county staff and department heads about critical agricultural issues through a series of comprehensive workshops. These issues include, but are not limited to, current and future infrastructure needs; transportation; and flood protection.”

Background

Prior to the beginning of the County Executive’s agricultural initiative, many opportunities arose for disputes between County staff and farmers over the activities that occur in traditional farming operations. There has been an increasing amount of environmental legislation during the past 15 years in a necessary attempt to save a variety of endangered species as well as preservation of the water and resource lands that border the agriculture land use areas. Farmers and others had the impression that government believed if they would crack down on the polluting farmers, the environment would be saved.

Whether that was true or not, farmers wanted the Snohomish County leaders and staff to understand that agriculture was the mainstay of the Snohomish County cultural and economic base for over 100 years. Farmers wanted the County to make it more visible that we were an “Ag” county. In addition, the increasing growth demands and their associated impacts from urban and suburban areas with drainage, traffic, and code complaints put more strain on farmers who are having a tougher time making a living. This is especially true for impacts of upland areas where increased runoff from clearing of trees has had a significant impact.

In addition to the many environmental challenges, the farming population was aging.

Their younger family members wanted no part of the long days and low pay future, and began to seek employment outside of farming. This meant that in order to enable farm recovery for farms whose families would not continue to work the land, a new work force would be needed.

This Agricultural Action Plan revealed that we cannot change the County government’s response to the needs of our farming community unless the County leadership and staff understand the importance of keeping these lands and people involved in agriculture. The Executive believed that to achieve this we needed to develop an Ag curriculum that would “agritize” County employees.

Action Plan Executive Order Work Plan Items:

1. Snohomish County will draft a Curriculum, approved by the County Executive, to be used to train and inform Snohomish County staff, and other regulatory agencies, about the value of agricultural activities and lands. The Curriculum will include a piece on farming history as well as a presentation of the current state of agriculture, and how the County codes, regulations and policies will influence the survival and sustainability of the agricultural industry.

Materials prepared for the trainings will be prepared in a manner that can be used at the Focus on the Farming event in November.

DRAFT TRAINING PLAN WILL BE COMPLETED BY
SEPTEMBER 30, 2005.

more...

Farm Regulation Reform

Executive Order Action Item #3 cont.

2. PIE will work with appropriate staff in each Executive Branch department to schedule sessions for presentations to staff.

SCHEDULING AND PRESENTATIONS WILL BEGIN BY FEBRUARY 15, 2006, AND BE COMPLETED BY OCTOBER 30, 2006.

3. All County Departments involved with Farm Recovery will designate staff who will be available to attend local agriculture industry meetings and events.

THESE POSITIONS WILL BE DESIGNATED BY JULY 15, 2005.

Farm Regulation Reform

Executive Order Action Item #4

“Maintain an agriculture website with information on regulatory issues that could affect the agricultural community, dates for public input and County contacts. The website will also keep current Agricultural Advisory Board agendas and minutes from meetings.”

Background

Farmers generally work long hours, especially during the growing season when workdays can last from sunup to sundown. Most government offices work the standard workday, Monday through Friday, 8 – 5. The County Executive wanted to ensure that our local farmers have full access, in one stop, to information about farming and agriculture in Snohomish County government codes and policies. In addition he wanted to include other information on the site that farmers have indicated would be beneficial for farmers, growers and ranchers. To that end he established the Focus On Farming website in June, 2004.

In response to the farmers needs and constraints, the County Executive would like to expand the content of the website to contain all information from each Executive Department that pertains to agricultural sites and activities. In essence he is asking Departments to join forces to centralize the access to information to the farming community.

Action Plan Executive Order Work Plan Items:

1. The County will expand the current website to include more information on regulatory issues that could affect the agricultural community, dates for public input, and County contacts. The website will also keep current Agricultural Advisory Board agendas and minutes from past meetings.

WEBSITE PLAN TO BE DEVELOPED BY
SEPTEMBER 15, 2005.

2. An annual survey will be held with the agricultural community to determine the effectiveness of the website. In addition, the agricultural community will be given the option of other features that might be useful or desirable.

FIRST SURVEY TO BE COMPLETED BY
SEPTEMBER 30, 2005, AND AT THE SAME TIME
EACH YEAR THEREAFTER.

Farm Regulation Reform

Executive Order Action Item #5

“Provide adequate communications to farmers and landowners who may be affected when the County proposes changes and designations to land use zoning.”

Background

Many people living, working and operating businesses on agricultural lands have indicated that regulations and policies are proposed and enacted without adequate participation from the community. Snohomish County primarily relies on the Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB) to receive input on many regulatory changes. The AAB has expressed dissatisfaction with the follow-through of their input in the adoption of regulations which ultimately affect the farming community.

In addition, the farm community has also expressed the desire to enhance the operation of the AAB.

Snohomish County Executive departments will need to review procedures for seeking input on proposed legislation.

Action Plan Executive Order Work Plan Items:

1. The County will review noticing and comment procedures with appropriate staff in Executive Departments, suggest changes and enhancements and discuss results with the Snohomish County Agricultural Advisory Board. Recommendations will be forwarded to the Agricultural Implementation Team, who will then work with appropriate Departments on implementation of changes and budgetary implications.

THIS ACTION WILL BE COMPLETED BY
MARCH 30, 2006.

Farm Regulation Reform

Executive Order Action Item #6

“Review internal processes between County departments to clarify and streamline items such as traffic safety requirements for permits.”

Background

Agricultural permit applicants have indicated that the permit processes were too complex and restrictive to meet the needs of agriculture. The Snohomish County Executive wanted to ensure that an internal process review takes place to be certain that the County is asking permit applicants only for requirements that are necessary for Health, Safety and Public Welfare.

Action Plan Executive Order Work Plan Items:

1. The Ag Action Plan Implementation Team (Ag Team) will perform a review of internal processes related to processing of ag permits to ensure that these processes are efficient, effective, and void of redundancies.

THIS REVIEW WILL BE COMPLETED BY
OCTOBER 31, 2005.

2. The Ag Team will provide recommendation to Directors of Departments of Planning and Development Services, Public Works, and Parks on changes to procedures for processing of ag permits.

THIS RECOMMENDATION TO BE FORWARDED BY
NOVEMBER 1, 2005.

Executive Order Action Item #7

“Provide customer service comment opportunities to farm-permit applicants to generate feedback on the County’s quality of service.”

Background

An organization that provides customer service needs to provide regular opportunity for the customers to provide comment on the quality of the service. The Snohomish County Executive wanted to make sure that we did not miss this vital step.

Action Plan Executive Order Work Plan Item:

1. PDS will develop a customer service feedback form for use at the Customer Service Center. The form will be reviewed by the Agricultural Advisory Board for their input. The final feedback form will be approved by the Agricultural Implementation Team.

THIS FORM WILL BE DEVELOPED AND ACTIVATED
BY AUGUST 1, 2005.

2. Managers of the Planning and Development Services Department and the Department of Public Works Customer Service Centers will present an annual report on service comments and changes to the Agricultural Advisory Board.

THE FIRST REPORT TO THE AGRICULTURAL
ADVISORY BOARD TO BE JULY 2006.

Farm Regulation Reform

Executive Order Action Item #8

“Create a task force with farmers, local, state and federal agencies to discuss permitting obstacles and opportunities and report options for discussion at the next Focus on Farming Conference.”

Background

While Snohomish County Departments will be undertaking a review of the permitting systems and processes to assist farmers in understanding regulatory requirements, there still remain other regulatory issues beyond the control of Snohomish County that are impacting agricultural endeavors.

Legislation at the State and Federal levels is bringing new challenges to counties to comply with changing needs relating to preservation of the environment and accommodation for growth and infrastructure such as transportation and drainage. Executive Reardon has made a commitment that he would direct County staff to name a task force of leaders from the Ag community, as well as leaders from local state and federal levels to address these issues.

Executive Reardon recognized that only by assembling the effected parties in a working group can solutions be found. The purpose of this task force will be to identify what the obstacles are, as well as discussing history of the various pieces of legislation, and discussing potential options for code compliance and environmental safeguards that will allow farmers, ranchers and growers more opportunity for successful farm operations.

Action Plan Executive Work Order Plan:

1. The Department of Planning and Development Services will organize a task force comprised of County Departments, the Health District, and appropriate State Agencies.

THE TASK FORCE WILL BE CREATED
BY AUGUST 1, 2005.

2. The Task Force will issue a report detailing options for discussion at the 2nd Annual “Focus on Farming” Conference.

THE REPORT WILL BE DELIVERED AT THE
CONFERENCE ON NOVEMBER 17, 2005.

Farm Regulation Reform

Executive Order Action Item #9:

“Establish an internal implementation team to monitor the progress of the agriculture plan.”

Background

Snohomish County Executive Reardon realized that the Agriculture Action Plan addresses many issues that will impact how Snohomish County Departments deliver services to the Ag community. Executive Reardon believes that the changes in service delivery will not only be beneficial to the community but are also in keeping with his goals of redefining how Snohomish County Government operates. As with the actions associated with the Citizens Cabinet Economic Development Report of 2004, the Agriculture Action Plan will guide a work program that will use benchmarks and outcomes to measure success and progress.

To monitor the progress of implementation of the Agriculture Action Plan, and to provide assistance in county departments working cooperatively in new processes and procedures establishment, Executive Reardon has named a multi-departmental implementation team (Ag Team). Team members will include staff from the Executive Office, Departments of Planning and Development Services, Public Works, Parks, Finance, as well as personnel from the Washington State University Extension Program and the Snohomish Conservation District.

In addition to monitoring the implementation of the Agriculture Action Plan, the Ag Team will develop a work program for items contained in the Agriculture Action Plan. The work program will identify current County activities that effect agricultural services delivery, and will identify staff time and resources currently expended in delivery of those services. The Ag Team will also make a recommendation of prioritization for implementing action items

contained in the Agriculture Action Plan, and provide a recommendation for appropriate delegation of responsibilities to County departments for implementing provisions of the plan. Finally, the Ag Team will recommend achievement goals and timelines for specific accomplishments in implementing action items, provide regular reporting on implementation results and provide an update on progress at the Focus On Farming Conference in November 2005.

Action Plan Executive Order Work Plan Items:

1. The Agriculture Action Plan Implementation Team will develop the countywide work plan which coordinates the Action Plan action items and goals defined in the Snohomish County Executive's Agriculture Action Plan, using benchmarks and outcomes to measure success and progress.

THE WORK PLAN WILL BE DEVELOPED BY
JULY 15, 2005.

2. A reporting mechanism will be developed to inform the Ag community and County staff on the work plan implementation progress.

THE REPORTING MECHANISM WILL BE
DEVELOPED BY AUGUST 1, 2005.

3. The Agriculture Action Plan Implementation Team will provide an update on Plan progress at the 2nd Annual “Focus on Farming” Conference.

THE UPDATE WILL BE ON NOVEMBER 17, 2005.

Economic Development

Executive Order Action Item #10

“Name an advisory group to propose agricultural economic recovery and expansion strategies. The advisory group will be comprised of a wide variety of agricultural disciplines, members of the financial community, operators of infrastructure businesses and appropriate agencies, and shall make reports to the County Executive.”

Background

The Agriculture Action Plan Sections on Economic Development, Outreach and Education and Cultural Heritage will require a great deal of input from the private sector for successful outcomes to occur. In addition to addressing regulatory issues that can present roadblocks to success, the Snohomish County Government can be a partner and a facilitator for economic recovery by implementing the items identified by participants at the “Focus on Farming” Conference.

The Action Items contained in the Economic Development, Outreach and Education, and Cultural Heritage Sections of the plan are essentially a wish list of items the Ag community feels would provide the economic incentive and viability for the preservation and sustainability of agriculture for many years and generations to come. As we move forward with the Plan, some items will not prove to be viable and other opportunities will come on the list. However, all these items need to be woven into a “blueprint” after much discussion about how we move forward in an intentional manner to achieve goals that are reached by consensus after collaboration among the effected parties.

Snohomish County Executive Reardon believes that by bringing together this wide variety of agricultural disciplines, members of the financial community, infrastructure business operators and other appropriate agencies, there will be an advisory group that can build that blueprint. They can recommend priorities, help to build alliances and partnerships, and recommend solutions as problems and obstacles arise. This is not something that can be accomplished overnight. This is a solution that will occur only with thoughtful and meaningful research, discussion and planning.

Executive Reardon’s expectation is that the County will facilitate the formation of this advisory group and, once formed, will meet with him periodically to discuss issues and progress, and file regular reports to inform him of items that will need our collective efforts. In addition, this group should also address messages to the community and region informing them of the value and importance of the contributions of the Ag community and the dangers to us all if this industry continues to suffer.

Economic Development

Action Plan Executive Order Work Plan Items:

1. The County will meet with appropriate leaders of the Ag Community and other organizations and agencies to determine needed industries and disciplines to form a private sector agricultural advisory group. In addition, the County will seek names of appropriate individuals that would be valuable contributors to this group and forward a draft list of participants to Snohomish County Executive Reardon.

DRAFT LIST OF PARTICIPANTS TO THE
SNOHOMISH COUNTY EXECUTIVE BY
JULY 15, 2005.

2. The Agricultural Advisory Group will develop a purpose, goals and procedures associated with successful operation of the Group.

ADVISORY GROUP TO HOLD FIRST MEETING BY
AUGUST 15, 2005.

3. Advisory Group to present update at 2nd Annual "Focus on Farming" Conference.

ADVISORY GROUP PRESENTATION AT 2ND ANNUAL
"FOCUS ON FARMING" CONFERENCE
ON NOVEMBER 17, 2005.

Outreach and Education

Executive Order Action Item #11

“Seek grant funding to support outreach and educational efforts by agricultural organizations in the county.”

Background

Growth pressures have, in many instances, caused successful farming operations to cease doing business. As development moves toward farmlands, nuisance complaints, and other issues associated such as traffic, drainage, and water availability put added strains on an already complex and difficult industry. In part, public understanding has diminished because agriculture curriculum in public schools has given way to more “core academic” classes. Agriculture’s educational efforts now focus primarily on rural schools instead of urban schools, where greater populations exist and where there is greater market potential for local agriculture.

If our farming industry is to become sustainable, certainly the central Puget Sound population will need to provide more support. They will not only need to purchase more of the locally produced products but will need to understand that we cannot move our growth lines to the edge of the farms and then complain because the farms are there. They will need to understand that by the increased traffic they bring, farmers have more hazards and less availability to move their equipment from field to field and products to market.

Finally, we need better communication between agricultural groups, boards, associations, agencies, clubs and other agriculture stakeholders so that limited resources are used more effectively on behalf of the whole industry.

Executive Reardon believes that Snohomish County can provide the expertise and effort to seek public and private sector grant opportunities that will effectively send a unified message to the larger Puget Sound community about the need to preserve the agriculture industry for today and further generations, as well the value of these products for good health, and the value of this industry as a viable mainstay of our economy.

Action Plan Executive Order Work Plan Items:

1. The County will prioritize the research and application for funding of farming assistance grants. Recommendations will be forwarded to the Agricultural Implementation Team for their input and a final recommendation to the Snohomish County Executive for approval.

MEETINGS AND SETTING OF PRIORITIES FOR GRANT FUNDING AND THEIR SOURCES WILL BEGIN BY AUGUST 1, 2005.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION TO BE COMPLETED BY AUGUST 15, 2005.

FINAL RECOMMENDATION TO SNOHOMISH COUNTY EXECUTIVE BY SEPTEMBER 15, 2005.

Outreach and Education

Executive Order Action Item #12:

“Convene an annual “Focus on Farming” Conference to bring agricultural groups, farm organizations and farmers together to provide educational forums on emerging topics, discuss issues and formulate policy recommendations to local and state government.”

Background

The 1st Annual “Focus on Farming” Conference was convened on November 18, 2004, to discuss the obstacles and opportunities for local agriculture. This conference was designed to provide a venue for healthy discussion between farmers and Snohomish County Government on issues vital to farming and agriculture.

The conference pointed out that the agriculture industry has lacked a cohesive voice to represent the industry as a whole in a range of regulatory, economic development, marketing and communication issues. Snohomish County Executive Reardon has promised that he would make this conference an annual event to provide educational forums on emerging topics, discuss issues and formulate policy recommendations to local and state government. In addition, Executive Reardon will be providing updates on the agricultural efforts that have occurred since the last conference.

Action Plan Executive Order Work Plan Items:

1. The County will establish a group from the County and the Ag communities to develop a draft plan for presenting the 2005 “Focus on Farming” Conference. The draft will be presented to the Snohomish County Executive for final approval.

THE GROUP WILL BEGIN PLANNING MEETINGS
BY JUNE 15, 2005.

FINAL APPROVAL OF AN AGENDA WILL BE
SEPTEMBER 30TH OF EACH YEAR

Outreach and Education

Executive Order Action Item #13

“Direct the Agriculture Coordinator to assemble industry groups together, within the next six months, to discuss and identify challenges and opportunities.”

Background

Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon has made a commitment to farmers, ranchers and growers that he will direct the Agriculture Coordinator to make regular efforts to meet with their individual industries. These meetings will be designed to bring farmers with like interests and needs together to share their experience, industry knowledge and a discussion about how they can be more successful within their operations.

In addition, Executive Reardon expects that the Agriculture Coordinator will bring back regular reports of these meetings and will alert County leadership about local, state, and federal regulations and policies that are negatively impacting our Ag community. Because there are such a diverse variety of farm endeavors, the Agriculture Coordinator will need to combine certain compatible groups together for joint meetings.

Action Plan Executive Order Work Plan Items:

1. The Agriculture Coordinator will organize industry group meetings to provide various sectors of the Ag industry an opportunity to share their experiences regarding their industry.

THESE MEETINGS WILL COMMENCE BY JULY 30, 2005, AND WILL CONTINUE AS OPPORTUNITIES EXIST UNTIL NOVEMBER 15, 2005.
