

FARMING IN THE SKAGIT VALLEY

With over 150 years of farming history, the Skagit Valley is now recognized as one of the most important agricultural valleys remaining in Puget Sound.

The Skagit Valley saw its first crop of cultivated potatoes planted in 1853 on March Point¹. In circa 1870 the first commercial production of oats was sent to markets in Seattle and by 1908 the Skagit Delta was producing more oats and hay per acre than any other place in the United States at the time.² Skagit farmland and farmers have been supplying the region, state and world with nearly every crop imaginable for over 150 years.

Today the Skagit Valley is supplying nearly 95% of the U.S. supply of table beet seed, 75% of the U.S. supply of spinach seed and approximately 8% of the spinach seed used throughout the world. Skagit Valley farmers are producing approximately 25% of the world's cabbage seed and 50% of the world's beet seed.³ More tulips, daffodils and iris bulbs are produced in the Skagit Valley than in any other county in the United States. Additionally, approximately 50 million cut flowers are grown in greenhouses and fields in the Skagit Valley and approximately 95% of the red potatoes grown in Washington State are from Skagit County.⁴

The value and importance of Skagit agriculture extends beyond the direct economic food and fiber benefits. The environmental goods and services provided by the agricultural lands include the relationship of farmland to climate control, flood control, water quality, biodiversity, wildlife habitat, open space and quality of life.

While other agricultural valleys in Puget Sound are being paved over, the farmland in the Skagit Valley is one of the reasons why the Skagit Valley supports one of the last watersheds in the United States that contain all five species of salmon.

- ◆ *The Skagit Valley hosts the largest chum and pink salmon populations in the entire lower 48, as well as the most abundant population of wild Chinook salmon in Puget Sound.*⁵
- ◆ *The Skagit Delta has one the largest and most diverse concentrations of wintering raptors on the continent.*⁶
- ◆ *The Skagit Delta supports 70% of Puget Sound's shorebirds during migration.*⁷
- ◆ *The Skagit Delta is one of the most important waterfowl wintering areas in the Pacific Northwest, supporting over 90% of the waterfowl wintering in western Washington.*⁸

1 Skagit County Historical Society. Chechacos All. The Pioneering of Skagit. Mount Vernon: Skagit County Historical Society, 1973.

2 The Coast December 1902: p.367

3 Congressman Rick Larson, Letter, April 12, 2011

4 Washington State University Skagit County Ext., Skagit County Agriculture. Web. 2013

5 Pacific Coast Watershed Partners. The Skagit River Basin at a Crossroads. Web. 2004.

6 The Nature Conservancy. Farming for Wildlife. Web. 2013.

7 Ibid.

8 Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife. Guidance on WDFW's Vision for Conservation and Land Acquisition for the Skagit Delta. 2009.

WE BELIEVE IN...

Stewardship of the Land

We believe that sustainable farming practices support wildlife, fish, water, and land conservation efforts; that farming has been responsible for Skagit Valley being the greatest watershed left in Puget Sound; and that maintaining our agricultural land base will continue to maintain wildlife, fish, water and open space better than any other land use.

Strategic and Collaborative Leadership

We work collaboratively with our community leaders and policy makers at the local, state and national levels in an optimistic, visible and future-oriented way.

Being Responsive, Responsible and Persistent

We believe that all of our decisions and actions should be responsible to our community's heritage for this and future generations.

Being Community-Based, Civic-Minded and Visible

We participate actively in local land use planning processes and in community events to ensure the success of our mission.

Economic Viability and Quality of Life

We work together for a healthy community that supports farming as a provider of community benefits such as open space, wildlife, clean water, and robust viable economy.

Being Financially Prudent

We conduct our business with integrity and fiscal responsibility.

WHAT WE DO

Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland is the only organization in Washington State with a strategy to protect the four key elements necessary to have a viable and sustainable agricultural industry.

- **Farmland Protection**
- **Economic Viability**
- **Agricultural Infrastructure**
- **Community Support**

Commercial-scale farming is not feasible or efficient without large, unencumbered acreage. Since the mid-1970's Skagit County has had 40-acre minimum lot sizes for farmland. This fundamental policy decision has set the stage for all subsequent farmland preservation efforts pursued by SPF. **Without farmland, there is nothing.**

Unless the farmers can actually have economic viability, farmland just becomes open space. SPF's ongoing efforts pursue policies and regulations that help create an even playing field for farms of all sizes, ages and types.

The agricultural community relies on critical infrastructure such as drainage, irrigation, and flood and tide gates. Additionally the agricultural community relies on complex linkages of support industries such as agronomy supplies, scientists, tractor dealerships, CPAs, veterinarians, mechanics, etc. SPF works with others to ensure all elements, both horizontal and vertical, are present and viable in Skagit Valley.

Community support, reflected in public policy and opinion, newspaper editorials and "at the coffee shop," must reflect a presumption that farming will be a long-term part of the landscape, instead of simply a holding pattern for other uses. A large part of SPF's work is to maintain and grow community support for the long term.

OUR VISION

Farming is valued and economically successful in Skagit County and Puget Sound.

OUR MISSION

SPF exists to ensure the continued viability of Skagit County agriculture and its required infrastructure through farmland protection, advocacy, research, education, and public awareness.

OUR STRATEGIES

1. Fair and Equal Consideration

We work to elevate the protection of our farm and ranch lands to the same level as the State's other critical lands and resources.

2. Protect the Farm

We work to protect farming and farmland for a full range of economically viable farming operations.

3. Protect the Environment

We work to encourage environmental stewardship for a range of diverse farming interests.

4. Convene and Collaborate

We strive to serve as a convener and/or collaborator in order to ensure the economic viability of Skagit County agriculture and its required infrastructure. SPF supports wildlife, fish, water, and land conservation efforts which enhance and support the agricultural industry. SPF understands the importance of building strategic alliances.

5. Promote Research, Education and Awareness

We work to increase understanding and promote the multiple benefits of farming and related activities.

6. Go to the Public

We work to increase public understanding and advocate for public policies to ensure the continued viability of farming.

7. Promote the Organization

We work to increase public awareness about our mission and be more accessible and better known by our community and constituents.

8. Develop Resources & Membership

We continue to work on building a sustainable funding base from individuals, corporations, and foundations.

9. Protect Financial Integrity

We are committed to ensuring prudent management of assets and finances.

10. Stable Governance, Management and Infrastructure

We are committed to ensuring SPF has a committed and skilled board, staff and volunteer base.

11. Think and Act Strategically

We work to sustain and keep the Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland Strategic Plan useful and operational.



OUR GOALS

Long Term Goals – by 2032 (SPF Board Resolution 2013-05)

- To protect 20,000 acres of farmland within the Delta from non-agricultural use by the placement of agricultural conservation easements held by Skagit County's Farmland Legacy Program.

Mid-Term Goals – by 2020 (SPF Board Resolution 2013-05)

- To help create a functioning TDR (Transferable Development Rights) market place in Skagit County which allows for smart community growth and development while protecting our important and precious agricultural resources lands.
- To help create an active and functioning ecosystem market place that is providing less-than-fee simple opportunities for wildlife viewing, hunting, and habitat and water quality improvements.
- To build the financial strength of the organization to grow and address the existing and future needs of the agricultural community in the Skagit Valley and Puget Sound by raising an additional \$700,000 annually.

Short Term Goals – by 2015

- To raise awareness and increase public participation of Skagit agriculture through our Talking Fields, Crop Identification, InFARmation Radio and Farm Tour programs.
- To develop a public speaker series that will engage the local and regional community in issues related to the importance of sustainable agriculture, land stewardship, domestic food production and environmental stewardship.

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