Community Forum on Agritourism
Hosted by Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland
WSU Mount Vernon Northwestern Washington Research & Extension Center
June 11, 2018 from 1:00 - 2:30PM

Definition of Agritourism: ***Any Ag-based operation or activity that brings visitors to a farm or ranch***

Flip Chart responses to Question #1:

Agritourism could result in permitting more intense development in the floodplain. If Skagit County moves forward with developing policies to support agritourism, what is the appropriate scope?

- Consider scale/scope/use
    - Allowing large production facilities…allow for broader uses
    - Only allow a certain percentage of the land to be developed
    - Handling waste water, etc.
- Look at a broad scope – don't be narrow
- Narrow sideboards can clarify what is vague in the current scope
- Consider impact of agritourism on farmers / Ag
- Consider impacts – travel on I-5, restrooms, lodging, etc.
- We need a plan
    - What do we want in Skagit County?
- Opening up for competing uses makes it harder for Ag (even small Ag/CSAs)
    - How do we hold the line?
    - When does it stay subordinate to Ag?
    - Consider impact on Ag
- Need controls on size and scale
- Perception = reality (spraying/dust)
    - Uninformed visitors have unrealistic expectations
- Enforcement often varies (depending on how well neighbors get along)
- Need zoning protection to keep Ag in Skagit County
- Need long-term planning. Nothing stays the same!
- Do we have a line for urban growth area?
- Traffic – Impacts to Cook Road and Hwy 20
- Sewage treatment plants/drainage system/straight to the river
- Public perception – farmers with face time to the (voting) public can help shape that perception
- It's hard to make it on our own. We need to vertically integrate
- It's hard to define "accessary use"
    - Include certain forms of food/beverage service
- Don't want it to be easier to build agritourism facility than to build a house
- Want to guard against "creep"
    - Hard to hold the line (economic leniency)
    - May get requests to import additional crops
- Conflict in Ag businesses (e.g., harvesting wheat on a wedding day)

- We need ENFORCEMENT of whatever we come up with
  - How do we keep control?
- It is imperative to anticipate / watch for unintended consequences of code over time
- We had to build a processing shed when we just wanted a bakery to sell pies w/our own berries."

Flip Chart Responses to Question #2:

What "bookends" should the County be considering for agritourism projects and activities (e.g., only permitted in existing buildings/on existing impervious surfaces; only through special use permits, etc.)?

- Need to plan for unknowns / Adapt over time
- Concern re: What happens next?
  - Next generation, etc.
  - Make restaurant permits something you have to check periodically to ensure compliance.
- What is there on the land after the business closes?
  - What's there to serve that business now? With festivals, can bring in ways to temporarily store waste, etc. What about when it is permanent?
- Keep existing forms / figure out how to use old barns
  - Find a way for kids to keep farms here
- Tourists need to be able to stay / eat / enjoy the farm land here
- Make it easier to do the right thing than the wrong thing
  - Use existing structures, footprints when possible
- Improve coordination between Skagit County, applicant, infrastructure folks (WWA can help)
- People come here for farming and rural nature of this area-not necessarily the infrastructure
- Sewer vs. commercial processing system
- Beneficial to have farms/barns not being used?
  - Existing parcels less than 40 acres?
- Question around "BTI Landscaping"
  - What is allowed/not?
  - What does the County do when they find a use that is not allowed?
  - They compel people to comply - may result in lawsuit.
- What is criteria for the long term?
- Require a percentage of farm-produced product
  - Defined footprint
  - Guard against scope creep
- Is there a better way to address code violations rather the passivity of the current complaint driven system?
- Non-confirming use – check more often for compliance
- For some farms, the infrastructure is long gone. How do we preserve the farm land?
- High cost for special use permits, e.g., horse stable, small things should be affordable