

Final Agritourism Stakeholder Group Notes

Skagit Publishing and via Zoom

August 2, 2023 from Noon – 2pm

Attendees

Mark Knutzen (former Planning Commission member); Jenn Smith and Mikala Hughes (WWAA), Owen Peth (Farmer / Interested Citizen); Leo Roozen (WA Bulb, RoozenGaarde); Jesse & Jeff Anderson (Maplehurst Farm & Save Skagit Farm Venues); Katie & Brock Clements (Saltbox Barn and Farm & Save Skagit Farm Venues); Eddie Gordon (Gordon Skagit Farm); Mark Benson (Eagle Haven, Perkin's Apples); Taryn Holmstrom (Skagit Valley Wedding Rentals); Amy Frye (Boldly Grown Farms); Emma Christianson (Christianson's Nursery); Terry Gifford (Willowbrook Manor); Morgan Elton (Co. Financial Insurance, Skagit Farm Bureau; Peregrine O'Gormley (Interested Citizen); Jake Buganski (Skagit Tourism Bureau); Hollie Del Vecchio, Tim Knue, Kim Rubenstein, and Allen Rozema (SPF); Lyn Wiltse, facilitator (PDSA Consulting)

Action Items

- Lyn: Send out meeting notes from this meeting this same day along with agenda for Wednesday and Zoom invites for all future meetings.
- Allen: Bring technology so remote attendees can all see the same projected document(s) and collective edits when we get to that point.
- Allen: Work with SPF web designer to create a separate page for Agritourism, specifically the work of this stakeholder group. (Currently they have their agritourism information posted on [our Studies & Reports related to the Economic Viability Page](#) of their [Reports & Studies.](#))
- Holly: Research the definitions for various agritourism activities and send to Lyn to distribute in advance of the August 7 meeting.
- Emma: Reach out to Samish Bay Cheese Company to see if their experience can help to inform our discussions.
- All: If you know large-scale farmers, please extend an invitation to be part of this conversation – by sharing meeting notes and/or by attending these meetings.
- All: Review list and add any other potentially relevant activities for discussion at the next meeting.
- All: Post the same on your own websites or direct other interested parties to SPF's website so they can be informed and give you feedback on what is occurring. Engage your stakeholders in discussions between these meetings to the extent possible. Consider reaching out to the Board of County Commissioners to advocate creating additional time and opportunities for collaborative work and increased public participation on this incredibly important issue in order to “get it right.”

Future Meeting Dates for this Group

All meetings will be at Skagit Publishing and include a Zoom option.

- Monday, August 7 from 9am – noon
- Wednesday, August 9 from noon – 2pm
- Monday, August 14 from 9am – noon
- Wednesday, August 16 from noon – 2pm (Deadline for public comment is now August 17.)

Announcements

- Larry Jensen was unable to attend this meeting. He sent an email Skagit County Farm Bureau's “key beliefs and policies which clearly indicate they support the Ag-tourism and rights outlined in the U.S. Constitution. Copies were emailed to all and hard copies of the letter, dated August 2, 2023, were shared with the group.
- We were happy to welcome Jake Buganski to the group. Jake represents the Skagit Tourism Bureau and looks forward to working with us all.
- Jenn Smith, Board President of Western Washington Agricultural Association (WWAA) announced that, on behalf of its members, WWAA is withdrawing from participation in this multi-stakeholder process.

She explained the reason is they don't think this group can come to a reasonable agreement. Recent social media posts were also stated as a reason for leaving the group. Disappointment was expressed by all. And all agreed there would always be a seat for WWAA at this table if they change their mind.

July 31 Meeting Notes

These were reviewed and approved with edits. They will be sent out as "final" and are ready for posting/sharing with others in the interest of transparency and to invite conversation.

Report on Prior Action Items

Taryn emailed the link to the BERK Consulting reports to Lyn to share: [Skagit County Agritourism](#)

Review of Initial Draft Agritourism Definition from July 31 Meeting

Agritourism is a commercial enterprise at a working farm, ranch, or other agricultural business for the enjoyment of visitors that generates supplemental income for the owners. Activities may involve education, entertainment, direct sales, outdoor activities, or hospitality. These activities link to and support the primary agriculture activity of the land and its economic viability.

Introductory Discussion

Common interests were obvious as stakeholder group members cited the need to preserve Skagit Farmland (We don't want to become a Kent Valley!) and that ag-zoning ordinances should be written not only for the survival of these lands with precious soils, but for the farmers themselves. In many instances, additional farm-related enterprises are critical to farmers' economic survival.

With the success of Skagit County's 40- acre minimum lot size and the Farmland Legacy Program; and with large farms consolidating farmland into larger and larger blocks suitable for large scale agriculture, the barriers to entry into agriculture for new and beginning farmers are high. First generation farmers are competing for small pieces of farmland with those who are willing to pay way above market value because they want large lawns. There are far fewer crops being grown here by far fewer farmers than in the past. It was noted that around two-thirds of those engaged in agriculture in Skagit County are small- to mid-size farms/farmers. While large-scale farms have been permitted to vertically integrate by building agricultural processing facilities on farmland for years now, it was noted that small-scale farms have a similar needs to vertically integrate in order to remaining economically viable and agritourism is, in many ways, the only way for them to vertically integrate.

Preliminary Sorting of Accessory Uses

Acceptable (We will add definitions):

Venues that are insured / You-pick / farm stands / corn mazes /pumpkin patches /petting zoos / tasting rooms / Farm-to-Table Dinners / Farmers markets / Ag festivals / Farm Tours

Potentially acceptable (We will add definitions):

Wedding venues / Event venues / restaurants / Farm stays / AIRBNBs / Harvest Hosts / Concert venues

Unacceptable (We will add definitions):

Ferris wheels / motocross / monster trucks / anything with the potential to negatively impact farm animals / shotguns

Two Step Model

How do you Qualify?

Show the county proof of farm income (Schedule F) / Land lease income (farm production) / having historic building(s) on the property (show intent to restore) / 39:1 rule (a process to legally allow a subdivision of farmed land as long as the farmed land is placed into a permanent ag easement).

Then what are you allowed to do?

Need to include AG activity on rural reserve / Restore old building(s) not usable/ being used for agricultural purposes (Snohomish Co has code for this) / Event tax on events that is then used for restoration efforts?
Business license?

August 9 Meeting Topics

- Review, revise as needed, and approve these notes and action items.
- Review list of agritourism activities, their definitions, and then discuss in which group they might belong:
 - Acceptable Use
 - Potentially acceptable use
 - Not an acceptable use
- Begin review of and suggestions regarding proposed code (time permitting)