

Final Agritourism Stakeholder Group Notes

Skagit Publishing and via Zoom

August 9, 2023 from Noon – 2pm

Attendees

Mark Knutzen (former Planning Commission member); Jessie & Jeff Anderson (Maplehurst Farm & Save Skagit Farm Venues); Katie & Brock Clements (Saltbox Barn and Farm & Save Skagit Farm Venues); Taryn Holmstrom (Skagit Valley Wedding Rentals); Amy Frye (Boldly Grown Farms); Terry Gifford (Willowbrook Manor); Peregrine O’Gormley (Interested Citizen); Hollie Del Vecchio, Kim Rubenstein, and Allen Rozema (SPF); Lyn Wiltse, facilitator (PDSA Consulting)

Action Items

- Lyn: Send out meeting notes (draft and final) along with agenda and Zoom invites for 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 (fingers crossed it will work).
- Allen: Research how Snohomish Co. defines event and wedding venues differently. Also “farm” vs. “social” events.
- Amy: Also research various definitions.
- Allen: Ask Skagit Co. how they implement proof of farm income regarding SFRs (single fam residential homes) within the ag zone.
- Emma: Reach out to Samish Bay Cheese Company to see if their experience can help to inform our discussions.
- All: Consider what activities might occur within Event Venues.
- Allen: Continue to update the Agritourism page on SPF’s website with agendas and final versions of notes from these meetings, as well as relevant County information.
- 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.
- All: Continue to include any large-scale farmers you know in these discussions by sharing meeting notes and/or by attending these meetings.

Remaining Meeting Dates for this Group

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

- 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

Eddie emailed that he looked forward to continuing to follow the work of this group through emails as his schedule precludes him from attending the final four meetings.

Many thanks to Peregrine for bringing fresh strawberries from his garden to share. Thanks also to Kim for the cookies from her Good Eats / Sweet Treats bakery in La Conner. And appreciation to Jessie and Jeff for bringing fresh blueberries from their farm.

August 2 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

Re: Definitions, Hollie was unable to find regarding definitions for “farm to table” and “farm stay”:

1. Whatcom County does NOT appear to have a definition for farm to table in their Code. What they do have is a definition for restaurants that are allowed in the ag zone. According to that definition, a restaurant is allowed subject to administrative approval “when located on the same property and subordinate to a permanent facility for the processing of agricultural products into food or beverage for human consumption; provided, that the size, scale and character of the restaurant facility are compatible with the agricultural/rural character of the surrounding area and are consistent with the general purpose of the zone district.”
2. Snohomish County also does not appear to define “farm to table”, but—for what it’s worth—does have definitions for “farm bakery” (a building or portion of a building on a farm site used to prepare baked goods for consumption or sale on or off the farm site, provided that at least one ingredient is grown in Snohomish County or the Puget Sound Fresh region) and “farm kitchen” (a building or portion of a building on a farm site used to prepare baked goods for consumption or sale on or off the farm site, provided that at least one ingredient is grown in Snohomish County or the Puget Sound Fresh region...).
3. In the BERK materials, they define “farm to table, on-farm” as “a meal prepared for a specific mealtime and held seasonally on a farm in outdoor settings for community or non-profit purposes for reserved guests. A majority of the agricultural products must be grown on-site or be a product of the primary agricultural operation located in Skagit County.”
4. Boulder County, Colorado has some pretty extensive definitions of various agritourism uses, and defines “farm-to-table dinners” as a type of “farm event”, along with weddings, weddings receptions and “any other gathering where eating and socializing occurs”, which are allowed as an accessory use on ag land so long as there is no more than 99 people and “the majority of the food served at the event is made with ingredients grown or raised in Boulder County or by the hose farmers. Link to chart she found helpful: <https://assets.bouldercounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/land-use-code-agriculture-use-chart.pdf>)

Hollie’s summary: Overall, it appears that “farm-to-table” is generally treated in one of two ways: either as a type of **temporary event**, with a clear link to the agricultural use of the property (similar to the BERK definition or Boulder County); or as a **permanent facility**, similar to Whatcom’s definition of restaurants in the ag zone. Farm stays are a bit more elusive, but they seem to generally be treated as a type of “bed and breakfast”, where the guest may or may not work on the farm during their stay. This is also how it’s discussed in the Berk materials.

Introductory Discussion

We started by agreeing how important it is for the recommendations that come from this diverse stakeholder group to represent as many groups as possible. We are grateful to have position papers provided by WWAA, SPF, and the Farm Bureau relating to agritourism. We can refer to these as we craft our recommendations and be as inclusive of their views as possible.

Restaurants in the Ag Zone

As part of Emma's action item from the last meeting, she talked to Allen about food service that is allowed within the ag zone. Allen shared that limited food service is currently allowed within the ag zone, presumably through the code that allows farm-based businesses. The understanding is this type of food service is limited to offering simple snack type items, typically prepared off-site. There is a desire by a number of farms – including Samish Bay Cheese – to be able to offer food items prepared on site. It was noted that currently, the County’s Health Department is unable to grant commercial kitchen approval to facilities that rely on well water. It was recognized that testing and certification of the water coming from wells would be required if it is going to be used to serve the public. It was also noted that the Health Department certification and associated processes are outside the scope of this group and land use permits. If it were determined that food prepared on-site for sale to the public would be allowed, then it would be up to the permit applicant to comply with and obtain all other necessary approvals. It is common for folks to bring in a licensed food truck to prepare hot foods for events. Seating inside a building is handled through the building department. Buildings are classified by occupancy type/use. Depending on occupancy rates, the Fire Code would also kick in.

All agreed there is a difference between farm-to-table restaurants and farm-to-table experiences. The Health Department is involved whenever food is served to the public – whether by a licensed caterer, food truck or through a licensed premises on-site. As part of her action item, Emma also talked with Allen about distilleries, wineries, and breweries, many of which have tasting rooms. Allen commented all three fall under the definition

of agricultural processing facility, which is an outright permitted use within the Ag-NRL zone. That, combined with the definition of farm-based business and the fact that tasting rooms are already allowed with limited food service, there is nothing in the current code that would prevent a company like Anheuser Busch from setting up North America's largest brewery, with associated public sales and wholesale distribution in the Skagit Delta.

Consensus on How to Qualify for an Agritourism Permit

There was consensus on the following as the primary element needed to qualify to apply for an Agritourism permit as an agricultural accessory:

- You must show proof of farm income (through Schedule E, F, or equivalent.)

It was recommended this definition include ag land lease income.

All agreed this was the core element necessary to be able to apply for specific agritourism permits.

Other ideas considered but agreed need to be applied as criteria for specific activities (e.g., events or wedding venues).

- Requiring farmland to be permanently protected similar to the County's 39:1 program be granted a permit.
- No new buildings could be built except when using the existing footprint of an existing building or from an existing foundation that is still intact.
- Only barns built before a certain date can be eligible to be used for an event venue

Other points of consensus agreement:

- No permanent conversion of farmland can occur
- No interfering with adjacent farming practices.
- Limited entry – a cap on how many event venues would/should be allowed in the County. Taryn likened this to how the number of commercial fishing permits is limited.

Accessory Uses

We reviewed this list from the last meeting and, starting with the "acceptable" uses, began to discuss whether, and under what circumstances the activity would be:

- Permitted outright
- Require an Administrative Special Use Permit (public is notified) or
- Require a Hearing Examiner Special Use discussed (public is invited to weigh in)

Acceptable (We will add definitions):

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

All agreed that these activities are currently allowed and should continue to be allowed.

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 and adjacent farming operations.

August 9 Meeting Topics

- Review, revise as needed, and approve these notes and action items.
- Review list of activities and associated definition of Accessory Uses that would, might and would not be acceptable on Ag NRL.
- Discuss preparation of letter with recommendations to the County