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SKAGIT COUNTY
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Thursday, August 17, 2023

Skagit County Planning Commission

1800 Continental Place
Mount Vernon, WA 98273

Via hand delivery and email

RE: Comments on Agritourism Amendments to Skagit County Code

Dear Planning Commissioners:

On behalf of the many stakeholders listed below who are members of the Skagit Agritourism Stakeholder Group, we are submitting some agritourism policy/code concepts for your review and consideration. These have been developed collaboratively under a consensus decision-making model. The stakeholders participating are representative of the agricultural community, the tourism community, and the farm event venue community.

Members of this group joined in a collaborative effort to review and consider the proposed code through the lens of the policy positions of:

- The Skagit County Agricultural Advisory Board, April 12, 2023
- The Skagit County Policy Concepts as presented by BERK Consulting in March 2022
- Western Washington Agricultural Association as presented in their position paper dated July 30 2023
- Skagit County Farm Bureau as presented in their position paper dated August 2, 2023 and
- Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland as presented in their position paper dated April 2022

The goal of the group is to capture the spirit and intent of the various stakeholder interests with regard to agritourism within the Ag-NRL zoned lands of Skagit County.

Additionally, this multi-stakeholder group recommends for your consideration the creation of additional opportunities for stakeholders to engage with you and/or other County staff on this important issue. With the release of the proposed code amendments during the peak season for both farmers and farm venue operators, the timing has had the real impact of making it extremely difficult for stakeholders to engage in the current process.

With additional time to work after the peak of harvest is over, we are confident we can develop additional and more detailed recommendations reflecting broad stakeholder support. It is vital for key stakeholders to be able to participate and have their voices heard on this critically important issue.

Big Lake Trees & Events
Boldly Grown Farm
Christianson's Nursery
Country Cousins, Inc.
Eagle Haven Winery
Gordon Skagit Farms
Maplehurst Farm

Saltbox Barn
Skagit County Farm Bureau
Skagit Tourism Bureau
Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland
Skagit Tulip Festival
Skagit Valley Wedding Rentals
Washington Bulb / RoozenGaarde
Willowbrook Manor

Agritourism Multi-Stakeholder Work Group
Agritourism Policy / Code recommendations

Recommend **adding** the following definitions to SCC 14.04.020

Agritourism - 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, outdoor activities, hospitality, life events, farm events, food service, farm stays, or similar purpose. These activities link to and support the primary agriculture activity of the land and its economic viability. Agritourism activities are separate and distinct from Farm-based businesses and Agricultural Support Services.

Farm Event Venue - means an ongoing business operation at a privately-owned facility or site within the Ag Natural Resource Land (Ag-NRL) zone for the purpose of hosting Agritourism events or activities.

Recommend **amending** the following existing definitions in SCC 14.04.020

Agricultural support services - any nonagricultural use which is directly related to agriculture and directly dependent upon agriculture for its existence. These support services generally exist off-site and within districts that are intended to facilitate the production, marketing, and distribution of agricultural products. **Agricultural support services are separate and distinct from Farm-based businesses and Agritourism.**

Farm-based business - an on-farm commercial enterprise devoted to the direct marketing of unprocessed and/or value-added and soil-dependent agricultural products that are produced, processed, and sold on-site. Farm-based businesses are intended to supplement farm income, improve the efficiency of farming, and provide employment to farm family members. **Farm-based businesses are separate and distinct from agriculture support services and Agritourism.**

Recommend including [Agritourism](#) as an Agricultural Accessory Use subject to the following:

- Demonstration of farm income as evidenced by IRS federal form Schedule E, F or equivalent. Agricultural Lease income may be included pursuant to Skagit County's implementation of Chapter 84.34 RCW, Open Space Taxation Act.
- Will not result in the permanent conversion of farmland,
- Will not interfere with surrounding farming operations and practices.
- Agritourism activities are subject to Skagit County's Right to Manage Natural Resources Ordinance (SCC 14.38) and Skagit County's Right to Farm Ordinance No. 12815 incorporated therein.
- Will provide experiences to visitors that promote and enhance Skagit agriculture overall.

Recommend creating a new Limited Entry Permit for Farm Event Venue

It is recommended that Skagit County create a limited entry permit system for Farm Event Venues with a primary purpose of Agritourism.

- Establish a cap on total number of permits available with preference for existing Farm Event Venues.
- Limited Entry Farm Event Venue Permits should be subject to renewal every three (3) to five (5) years.

Recommend adding the following to Permitted Uses within SCC 14.16.400(2)

- **Farm Event Venues** serving no more than 25 persons for the primary purpose of providing educational classes, direct instruction, workshops, trainings or similar, which are directly related to on-site agricultural production.

Recommend adding the following to Administrative Special Uses within SCC 14.16.400(3)

- **Farm Event Venues** serving up to 100 persons for the purposes of Agritourism subject to the following:
 - Events may occur no more than 24 days per year.
 - No new buildings can be built except when using the footprint of an existing building or from an existing foundation that is still intact.
 - A conservation easement with a binding site plan is placed on the subject parcel where the Farm Event Venue is located.

Recommend adding the following Hearing Examiner Special Uses within SCC 14.16.400(4)

- **Farm Event Venues** serving more than 100 persons and/or events occurring more than 24 days per year, for the purpose of Agritourism subject to the following:
 - Events may occur more than 24 days per year as determined by the Hearing Examiner based on site-specific evaluation and provided that events do not create a detrimental level of electrical interference, line voltage fluctuation, noise, vibration, smoke, dust, odors, heat, glare, traffic or other impacts to adjacent farming operations, neighbors, and/or other environmental impacts on the surrounding area.
 - No new buildings can be built except when using the footprint of an existing building or from an existing foundation that is still intact.
 - A conservation easement with a binding site plan is placed on the subject parcel where the Farm Event Venue is located.