



July 30, 2023

Our organization has represented farms of all sizes, male and female owned, in Skagit County for nearly 80 years. These farmers created the unique landscape and economic power of this County. Also, the world is dependent on the food we produce commercially. Our valley's soil is rated in the top 2% of soil in the world. What we have here is unlike any other state and region in the U.S., and we must treat it as such. The Right to Farm Ordinance is as necessary today as it was in 1991, and any negative impact on farm operations or farmland must not be ignored. Skagit County's success relies on agriculture and the many farm families who support our communities. Because of this, we support the proposed agritourism code language that the Ag Advisory Board drafted, with a few suggested changes.

We acknowledge that agritourism has become another essential industry to the County. Event venues of this area are successful, however, because of the open spaces and beauty of agriculture. Without active, large-scale farming, they lose their unique opportunities and customer base.

We support agritourism activity that is an accessory to a working farm operation, and does not negatively affect neighbors or cause the loss of farmland.

We believe that agritourism should be defined as:

"an activity that is an accessory to a working farm operation. It is operated on land and accessory buildings within the farm and is operated by the owner or operator of the farm or family members. It includes the sale of goods or food-related items, and at least 50% of the products sold must be cultivated on the onsite farm throughout the season, or include products grown by the farmer-operator."

We also support amending the current definition of agricultural accessory use in SCC 14.04.020:

- (6) Miscellaneous agricultural support buildings, including barns, sheds, corrals, farm offices, coops, retail spaces and seasonal roadside farm stands, which are used for on-site soil dependent agriculture on a working farm.
- (8) Any agricultural accessory use that is an agritourism event or activity shall be an accessory to the primary farming operation of the farm site.

We support the County Ag Advisory Boards' amendments for subsections 9 and 10.

While we do not believe wedding events are agritourism events specifically, we support creating a pathway for responsible, working farm event venue operators to operate legally within the Ag-NRL under temporary special use permits that are renewed annually. We also believe that a "working farm" can include a property owner who rents the majority of their farmland to an active farmer for commercial food production.

We also expect event venues to be held accountable to standards and regulations that complement and protect agricultural operations and farmland in the County. There have been a number of negative impacts on agriculture from events that don't operate responsibly, and we want to ensure that there is a

clear process for enforcement of bad practices and negative impacts in the future. Our members have witnessed vendors and attendees illegally entering farm fields, attendees calling agencies due to farm smells, and vendors threatening farmers who don't stop operations for ceremonies. Farmers face many potential challenges with event venue neighbors, including the obvious physical pressures of having additional people near fields and ranches. Many farms carry additional liability insurance because of these events. If a member of the public crosses onto a farmer's property and is injured, the farmer is liable. Also, there are often additional food safety implications that farmers must manage when neighboring events happen. If someone crosses into a farm field and disrupts or urinates near a food field, that field will be unharvestable due to food safety regulations. We cannot stress how important it is to have a set of enforceable regulations for event venues to operate within the Ag-NRL.

We support amending SCC 14.16.900(2)(h) to add additional criterion in Special Uses for a special use permit for temporary events:

- (v) Special use permits for temporary events in Ag-NRL are additionally subject to the following criteria:
  - (A) Events may occur on no more than 24 calendar days per year.
  - (B) All events must be accessory to agricultural use on a working farm.
  - (C) All permits are subject to annual review.
  - (D) Permit holders must be onsite during all events to monitor activities and uphold standards.
  - (E) Any structures, spaces, or septic infrastructure created for temporary events must be removed once the permit is no longer active and the land returned to original state with no farmable land loss (ie: parking lots, pathways, restrooms, eating areas, etc.).
  - (F) A proper traffic maintenance plan for the event must be approved by the county 30 days prior to the permit activation, and must have minimal impact on surrounding neighborhoods.
  - (G) Events must include a plan to keep visitors restricted to their property and guarantee zero impact (physical or other) on neighboring properties. This plan must be approved by the county 30 days prior to the permit activation.
  - (H) Permit holders will be held financially liable for any damages, harassment, distress, or loss of production on neighboring properties during the event caused by any intrusion of event attendees, hosts, or vendors.

We also recommend that the Skagit Right to Farm Ordinance be included in the Special Use contract with the permit holder held accountable to reading and understanding this ordinance.

Finally, we recommend that a fee for the Special Use permit go towards agritourism and Special Use permit code enforcement.

### **Approved by Western Washington Agricultural Association Board of Directors**

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