

**King County Agriculture Commission  
Minutes from March 8, 2007  
Issaquah Fish Hatchery  
Issaquah**

**Commissioners Present:** Nancy Hutto, Bob Tidball, Bob Vos, Larry Pickering, Grant Davidson, Judy Taylor, Micheale Blakely, Julie Haakenson, George Irwin, Ward Roney

**Commissioners Absent:** Lu Eng, Roger Calhoon, Rob Holland

**Staff:** Steve Evans, Judy Herring, Claire Dyckman, Karen Kinney, King County (KC) Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP) Water and Land Resources Division (WLRD) Agriculture Programs.

**Guest Agency Staff:** Josh Monahan, King Conservation District (KCD); Jeff McMorris, Liaison, Council member Kathy Lambert's Office

**Guests:** Erik Haakenson, Jubilee Farms; Andrew Stout, Full Circle Farms, Barry Lia, Sammamish, Ian MacRae, Farmer in Fall City.

Nancy Hutto called the meeting to order.

**Round About:** George says there is lots of action on the Plateau including sale of County Fairgrounds, hogs for sale. Ewing is beginning to plant Christmas trees, usually sustains a 30% mortality rate. A bill before Senate deals with licensing Christmas tree dealers, a \$40 permit, state inspection. He recommends against it. Storm cellar is back up, took 550 hours and 80 hay wagons. Micheale still cleaning up, getting ready for market season. Attending tractor workshop for folks flooded out. Nancy says bee work has begun. Julie getting ready for Pike Place Markets big anniversary kickoff. Bob V. had his first calf born this year, and was delighted it was a polled heifer. Ward says a neighbor growing canola beans to figure out what will work in our climate. What will it cost compared to oil costs? Problem is how dry it is.

**Decisions Made:**

**Motion:** Bob Vos moved and Ewing Stringfellow seconded that we review the letter of Don Stuart on the Farm Bill with the intent of endorsing it. Motion passed.

**Motion:** Michael Blakely moved that a subcommittee be formed to look at the proposal by Erik Haakenson to purchase development rights in the Snoqualmie and then begin to address flood control. Bob Vos seconded the motion, making a friendly amendment that it be a Task Force. Motion carried.

**Presentations/Discussions**

**Farm Bill:** Don Stuart of American Farmland Trust made a presentation on the status of the negotiations on the US Farm Bill. He thanked the Commission for their earlier letter on the level of funding, and asked for a resolution for some broad ideas that would support a new reformed Farm Bill. His points included:

- Non commodity agriculture is demanding a fair share of the bill.

- The public wants something in return for supporting the World Trade Organization and its attendant issues.
- Economic development is needed in the form of state grants and aid, technical assistance, conservation programs that simplify NRCS programs, and assistance with renewable energy. For example, if the twenty billion dollar budget were kept, there could be four hundred million a year to keep for these activities and supporting local agriculture in each state.

Erik Haakenson Proposal to address Flooding in the Snoqualmie: Eric Haakenson, accompanied by several Snoqualmie agricultural landowners, requested assistance from the Agriculture Commission in analyzing and pursuing his proposal to insure a future for agriculture in the Snoqualmie. A brief summary of his eloquent presentation:

- There have been two dramatic changes in agriculture in the Snoqualmie and the County:
  - astronomical rise in market share of organic farms
  - growth in the number of farmers markets.
 It may seem like all is going well...
- However, Snoqualmie farmers have had to cope with what approaches “100 year flood events” four times in the last 16 years. The majority of them do not have the capital backing to sustain losses incurred with this frequency. Yet, they can’t do anything to lessen the floods, regs make it hard to protect oneself or to recover. It feels like “farming with one hand tied behind your back.”
- The one threat bigger than flooding to ag is development.
- And the need for drinking water is highly likely to resurrect proposals for dams on the river.
- His vision would be that there be an immediate offering for the voluntary purchase of development rights from as many as would participate in order to guarantee the future of agriculture, followed eventually by a strong look at significant flood control measures for the valley. A dam on some arm of the river might be a part of the solution, but there are undoubtedly a lot of out-of-the-box ideas that could be pursued in a way that sustains many resources.
- If flood control or dams are pursued prior to another push to buy development rights, the valley will probably be lost to agriculture.
- Agriculturalists in the valley need to understand the commitment of the community and the County to the future of agriculture in the valley in order to continue to invest in farming.

Andrew Stout noted that the Snoqualmie is a unique Greenbelt.

Ian McRae noted that all of them, not just dairies, need some sort of equipment pad for floods.

FPP Covenants Discussion: Bob Tidball and Bob Vos led the Commission in a discussion of philosophical and strategic underpinnings related to revising the FPP Covenants.

Bob Vos gave a context for altering the covenants, suggesting that conditions have changed:

- Home prices have increased
- Thousands want homes in the country
- The original covenants may have assumed the farms would be farmed so they didn’t say that was needed.

- The current draft has a bias towards open space – he wonders what was meant by that term at the time of the covenants.

He said their discussions have wrestled with Item b in the handout:

- What prevents trees and brush from growing up?
- What maintains drainage?
- What maintains water rights?

The problem with requiring a farm plan is that there are no consequences if someone stops using the farm. The KCD is not regulatory agency. We now are beset by the potential for “scenic homesites”.

His points:

- Should we require that all the FPP be under Ag Tax Classification?
- In the definition, after fallow farmland they added: ag is an open space use and that should come out of the ordinance.

Comments:

Ewing: does not like that government “requires”, prefers “encourage”.

Larry: one of the things is anticipating those who don’t intend to farm who will abuse the conditions or allowances.

George: we need to know what percentage of existing lands in the FPP are farms in order to make a change to the covenants.

Judy: how would you enforce a requirement that people farm?;

Michaele: “my stomach clenches that we have regulations”. Yet we have the precedent of items such as soccer fields.

Bob V: I suggest that because this is a voluntary program, it is not requirement.

Larry: You can lease a farm to a dairy, then to a flower farmer, then try to get someone who can barely find the resources to mow it - and then you find no one interested in farming.

Ward: to retain good large land you need #1 Farmers #2 infrastructure. I worry that we have either of those left.

Bob Tidball introduced the idea of a development rights farm bank. There is no incentive to participate in the FPP when all someone has is the right to a home site.

Ewing: change the name from residence to “caretaker’s” site.

George: if the county has purchased the rights so someone can’t build a house, then the asset is held by the county. They could renegotiate that right in the future. The County would probably err on the side of not selling the right back.

Judy: Do Commissioners have concerns about there not being a house? (Several “yes!”. Others “no”.

Bob T: the original covenants by passed the programmatic issues. That is hwy we need to change the program. “In fee” means the parcel is auctioned to the highest bidder. This is not a deal with a farmer. We want agriculture. Not a playground.

TO BE CONTINUED AT NEXT MEETING!

**Public Comment:** None.

**Staff Reports:**

- Steve Evans introduced Karen Kinney as a new member of the WRLD Ag Team. Karen has worked for the Seattle Markets and was once an Ag Commissioner.
- There will be two meetings - Olympia and Ellensburg - to discuss how to procure the organic hay that is needed for cattle. George noted that most of the organic beef is from 7-8 year old dairy cows. When Micheale says it will only be regulatory, Steve said no, USDA cannot give out grazing advice. .
- Judy Herring announced that she got funding from Conservation Futures for purchase of development rights on two more farms.
- Karen Kinney reminded commissioners of the permit process workshop at the Snoqualmie Senior Center, and of the Dahlia Tuber collection on April 14th.

### **Agency Reports:**

#### **King Conservation District (KCD) Josh Monaghan reported:**

- Matt Livengood won the KCD Board Election.
- Three events coming up:  
Small Farm Expo, March 24<sup>th</sup>  
“Safer Grass”, April 20 and 21<sup>st</sup>.  
Farm Tour end of
- Farm Plan services are now at an average 3 month wait. Planning is taking longer. The KCD has hired a new planner.  
Ewing asked why the delay: Josh said a because of the CAO and need to coordinate with DDES, and because the District didn’t add staff because their funding future was uncertain until Council approved the assessment.
- KCD offering free soil samples to anyone who has a farm plan
- KCD purchasing another ground-driven manure spreader to lend out.
- Working with “Salmon Safe” to expand that program to South King County.
- Were looking at funding Sustainable Ag Initiatives including a “farmer liaison” position.

Nancy Hutto adjourned the meeting.