



CHIMACUM GRANGE

Serving Rural Jefferson County, Brinnon & Quilcene

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Jefferson County Planning Commission
621 Sheridan Street
Port Townsend WA 98368

Dear Gentle People,

The Chimacum Grange applauds your concern for sustainable agriculture and food security for Jefferson County. We would like to offer some recommendations which we feel are important, listed in no particular order of priority.

It is absolutely crucial that you recommend that Jefferson County opt in to the Ruckelshaus Center process to help secure a sustainable future for agriculture in our region.

This has been a substantial and unprecedented effort to reach a compromise that can satisfy the need for agriculture in many respects with the need to be environmentally responsible.

HB1886 will be overseen by the Washington State Conservation Commission, a state agency that, with the Jefferson County Conservation District, commands a high degree of respect and displays exemplary levels of organizational integrity.

Should the county not opt in, agriculture will be significantly harmed and additional expensive and divisive litigation involving the county, from both the agricultural and environmental communities, will certainly result.

Reliable access to water resources in support of agricultural needs is a critical and contentious issue, although it is somewhat out of the general purview of the Planning Commission. Nevertheless we strongly urge you to take a well-defined, strongly affirmative stand, particularly given recent new information and water availability assessment tools developed by the U. S. Geological Survey.

The policy goal of regional food security provides the logical nexus between preferred land use and water accessibility that supports an appropriate recommendation calling for a significant modification of current administrative water policy specific to Jefferson County, and is a necessary precursor to legislative support.

Water accessibility is administratively controlled by the Washington Department of Ecology. This administrative control is separate and distinct from actual physical water availability. We recently learned that the administrative controls placed upon East Jefferson County in the form of the Ecology's instream flow rule are based upon grossly underestimated available groundwater quantities. This is particularly the case in the Chimacum Basin, home to our most productive agricultural soils, where outdoor watering

Helping to make Jefferson County affordable, sustainable and self-sufficient

restrictions currently guarantee that much of the potential farmland will remain fallow unless the rule is revised to take actual water availability into account.

There are those who will advocate for dryland farming. In some years that certainly can be successful with certain grain crops. Years that have too much or too little precipitation surely will not bode well for those crops.

General dependence upon dryland farming techniques will severely limit the range of crops that local farms will be able to produce, and will not lead to the necessary levels of food security needed to support East Jefferson County's small population.

In addition to natural water issues, ambient temperature can have a significant effect on crop yield. Although the threat of warming temperatures is in vogue these days, the reality for local farmers is that crops have been damaged by extended cool seasons the past few years. This year's pollinating bee activity has been a full month behind normal.

Another significant issue is that under policies directed by the Growth Management Act (GMA) existing agriculture is generally protected, while potential agricultural opportunities are precluded.

Farmland is farmland only when it is in production.

Should it make a difference whether an acre was, or was not, in active production prior to an arbitrary date?

While we are not certain what absolutely may or may not be possible under GMA, we are certain that restrictions on new agriculture make your efforts to promote agriculture a moot point.

We strongly suggest that farmland be treated equitably, regardless of whether it was previously in production.

A significant area in which agriculture can benefit is the increasing interest of growing crops under cover.

Whether old or new agriculture, farmers need to be able to invest in greenhouses and hoop houses. These farming practices extend the growing seasons, lessen the risk of climate damage to crops, yet will require water.

Current county administrative practice places an expensive and unnecessary financial burden on farmers, especially new farmers. In many cases the full potential of agriculture will never be realized because of these costly burdens.

We strongly encourage "thinking outside the box" when it comes to subdividing land.

New potential farmers, whether young people or young retirees, often cannot afford to purchase large tracts.

At the same time, owners of existing farms are getting older and retiring from active production on their land.

Land trusts have been able to assist new farmers with land acquisition. But land trust funds are limited.

How about considering an option to allow holders of private property to purchase smaller tracts of agriculturally productive land?

For instance, in support of community sustainable agriculture, an owner of a forty acre parcel would be allowed to sell off parcels in one acre increments, as long as there was a requirement to keep the land in agricultural production, or worst case, in ag conservation.

This, of course, leads to maintaining safe and reasonable living conditions.

We believe that living conditions need to be sanitary to the extent of protecting those who live in an abode as well as the environment, i.e., don't contribute bacteria or nitrogen to waterways. Aspiring farmers, whether beginning landowners, lessees, or farm workers, need to be able to live under conditions that are acceptable to them, while conducive to human health and safety.

Once again, thank you for your interest in promoting agriculture. We, at the Chimacum Grange, extend our sincere offer to work with you to attain viable agricultural opportunities in Jefferson County.

Dick Bergeron
President