

Skagit County Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB)
Minutes – August 17th, 2005

Members in attendance:

Oscar Lagerlund (Chair)
Dave Boon (Vice-Chair)
Randy Good
Bill McMoran
Murray Benjamin
Lyle Wesen
Mike Hulbert
Kim Mower
Roger Knutzen
Annie Lohman

Members not in attendance:

Bob Hughes
Rose Merritt

Others in attendance

Mike Shelby
Vic Jensen
Judy Jensen
Mike Youngquist
Brien Thane
John Smith
Carly Ruacho
Ned Zaugg
Allison Deets

1. Call to order & introductions:

Chair Oscar Lagerlund called the meeting to order at 7.10 pm. He welcomed members and guests to the meeting. Vic and Judy Jensen from Golden Glen Creamery, Mike Youngquist, Brien Thane from the state Office of Rural & Farmworker Housing, John Smith from the Skagit Housing Authority, and Mike Shelby from Western Washington Agricultural Association.

2. Minutes:

Chair Oscar Lagerlund, requested corrections or additions to the July minutes. Lyle Wesen noted that he was recorded as being both present and absent, but that he was in attendance at the July meeting. Correction noted by staff. Murray Benjamin moved that the minutes be approved as corrected. Randy Good seconded the motion. Motion carried.

3. Raspberry Ridge II/Farmworker Housing – Brien Thane & John Smith

Brien Thane, from the state Office of Rural and Farmworker Housing, and John Smith, from the Skagit Housing Authority, presented some information on a proposed second phase of Raspberry Ridge, which was developed as farmworker housing several years ago. John Smith provided some background on the project, and Brien Thane provided the Board with maps of the proposal, which will develop some property on the eastern edge of Burlington (between the Urban Growth Boundary and Dike District #12's property) into farmworker housing. John Smith stated that the County Commissioners saw a need for additional high-density farmworker housing close to urban amenities, and Brien Thane added that an adequate supply of housing is key to an adequate farmworker supply.

Brien Thane told the Board that there is a section of state law that allows counties to waive the regulations to allow the housing authority to build outside of the UGA if necessary. This is an extremely limited provision in the state code and does not allow for variation from or expansion of that provision. Brien Thane also reported, in response to a Board question, that the minimum threshold for consideration for farmworker housing like Raspberry Ridge is that the worker must demonstrate he or she earns a minimum of \$3,000 annually, directly from farm work.

4. Salmon Recovery Plan Update – Mike Shelby

Mike Shelby, Executive Director for the Western Washington Agricultural Association, provided an update on the Chinook Recovery Plan. The key issues have been outlined by the affected parties, and a timeline for negotiation has been established. A draft letter has been received by the Ag Association from Bob Lohn, Regional Director of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), indicating that NMFS will be responding to the letters from the Skagit community stakeholders. A verbal agreement has also been reached among the parties to bring back the plan and work through a process acceptable to the entire community. Western Washington Ag Association and Skagit County are stressing that the stakeholders will need more than the six months that has been suggested in order to work this out.

5. Pest Management – Oscar Lagerlund

Chair Oscar Lagerlund suggested the need for the Board to consider some questions related to pests, and specifically beavers, that interfere with drainage and stream flow. He would like the Department of Fish & Wildlife to identify its policy on beavers and their dams, noting that riparian habitat is frequently flooded by dams or its trees are stripped and killed by beavers. Roger Knutzen stated that he had asked the same question of the Department of Fish & Wildlife, which responded that it liked beaver ponds for full-time habitat, because they're a "must for spawners." Mike Shelby pointed out that any new beaver dam within Skagit County's drainage system can be removed per the new Drainage Maintenance Agreement.

6. Value-Added Ag Products – Vic Jensen, Judy Jensen, Mike Hulbert

Guests Vic and Judy Jensen, owner-operators of Golden Glen Creamery, offered an informative talk on how they got started with their creamery, and the challenges and successes they've had in the first year of operation. This is a full-family effort: Vic and Judy are involved, as well as their son and two daughters-in-law. Judy and the Jensens' daughters-in-law make the cheese processed by Golden Glen Creamery, and have received training and certification in order to sell their cheese products direct to the consumer. Currently, Golden Glen offers four products – mozzarella, gouda, sharp cheddar, and fresh cheese curds – and sells at farmers markets in the area, as well as developing new markets here and elsewhere.

Vic Jensen said the permits for the creamery were easy to get from the State, but that the County has been a challenge as far as permitting is concerned. At this point, Golden Glen still can't sample cheese because the farm is on a well – the Jensens can drink the water, make cheese with it, and process milk with it, but cannot sample cheeses on-site.

Mike Hulbert asked if the creamery plans on selling both retail and wholesale, and the Jensens stated that that is in their business plan. The creamery will be getting into PCC Natural Markets in the fall, and that they are finding that most stores will pay the retail prices currently charged by the farm.

Mike Hulbert of Pleasant Valley Farms provided an update on the start-up pickle processor's progress. At this point, Pleasant Valley is selling mostly wholesale to the food service industry, but working on "phase 2" where it will be moving into a glass line for retail. The company is following steadily a marketing plan, by selling first directly to restaurants, then to second tier distributors, and now is moving into first tier distributors, and has a new contract with Food Services of America.

Mike Hulbert said that the County initially posed some problems for the development of the company, based in large part on neighbor concerns, but has since backed off. The state and

federal agencies have not been a problem. Financing has been difficult as well; while the company had half of the finances up front, it was not enough. The company has three full-time salesmen on board working to market the pickle products, but marketing is still a difficult hurdle.

Food Services of America (FSA) was a difficult contract to get, especially since they have 286 pickle products. However, FSA has committed to bring Pleasant Valley Farms on as its sole pickle provider. Inventories continue to be a problem, particularly with the increased demand brought by the large FSA contract, but the company seems to be forecasting fairly accurately. The ultimate goal is to control the pickle market west of the Mississippi, and supply a “Skagit grown” pickle for 8-10 months out of the year. Mike would also like to bring on two or three food scientists to help the company develop dressings, mayonnaise, sauces, and a potato salad – pickles is phase one, with more to follow – and an ultimate goal of providing a local processor for a variety of Skagit crops.

Chair Oscar Lagerlund called for a motion to adjourn. Roger Knutzen moved, and Murray Benjamin seconded, that the August meeting of the Skagit County Agricultural Advisory Board be adjourned. Carried.

Adjourn regular session, 9.02 pm.