

Skagit County Agriculture Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

September 13, 7 pm

Skagit County Administration Building

Members in Attendance

Nels Lagerlund Michael Hughes Kraig Knutzen
Sloan Johnson Terry Sapp Tim Van Hofwegen

Proxy Designations

Michael Hughes for Steve Omdal
Michael Hughes for Scott Hanseth

Members Absent

Barbara Cleave Greg Lee Murray Benjamin
Scott Hanseth Steve Bertelsen Steve Omdal

Others in Attendance

Don McMoran, WWU Extension
Andrew Miller, EDASC
Kathy Jewell, Skagit County Planning & Development Services

Call to Order

Nels Lagerlund called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

Meeting Minutes

Kraig Knutzen moved to approve the August 9, 2017 minutes, Sloan Johnson seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Local Issue – Agritourism, Andrew Miller

Andrew Miller, Director of Business Retention & Expansion at EDASC - Presentation on Agritourism

Agribusiness is defined as the entire range of commercial activities and disciplines that make up modern food and fiber production

Agritourism is the act of visiting any agribusiness for the purpose of enjoyment, education or active involvement in the activities of the farm/operation. It promotes the products of the farm and generates additional farm income. Goal is to increase net returns for growers, to diversify and supplement incomes and create brand loyalty. A way to keep workers employed year round.

WSU research conducted a state wide survey on agritourism, about 40% of the agritourism farms operate on 40 acres or less and an additional 38% operate on 21-100 acres.

Statewide agritourism activities include, 54% Ranch or Farm Tours, 45% Roadside Stands, 34% Weddings & Special Events, 29% Pumpkin patches.

Currently Skagit County Agritourism is Roadside stand/stores, Christmas trees, U-pick berries and wine tasting/tours. Andrew feels there is an emerging opportunity in Skagit County. 70% of the agritourism businesses have come about in the last 10 years. 60% of statewide agritourism operations yield gross revenue of more than \$50,000 per year.

Andrew shared how millennials and gen Z will pay more for the experience than they will for food itself. 20-30% of grocery buyers are willing to pay 30% more for an experience with company that is value based. How they want to support and buy products that are ethically sourced.

PLU did a market analysis last year for WSU and EDASC. They found Skagit County needs to capitalize on the image and the fact we are authentic. Skagit strengths are proximity to 6.5 million people, easy access due to I-5, beautiful and buzzworthy, family farms, north cascades & San Juan Islands. We have done very little marketing promoting our area. The Ag community needs to come together to make a 20-50 year strategic plan and take advantage of opportunities. We can create opportunities to have a conversation and educate the legislators on our farming and why our process works.

Andrew discussed the point of sale concepts on the horizon – public market is being discussed within the city limits of Mt. Vernon. The market would have local businesses and products which are authentic to Skagit Valley; community & values based. This proposal has been discussed extensively with city of Mt. Vernon. They envision it as a market that has local products as well as museum displays to educate consumers about our agricultural community/process, story of the area and businesses, and maps to things such as an Ale Trail. This would be a “landing zone” for ag products. Asked the board “What are the spaces (off the farms) you can have an authentic experience?” His end goal is more profit per acre. Asked for ideas so we can create a coherent plan for 30+ years, urged AAB to be looking for benchmarks that work in other areas. Wants to collaborate and come up with a successful model.

Nels discussed the bad examples of agritourism and what we don't want to happen here. We would need a way to regulate so that we don't do away with the farmers in 30 years. Who will code enforce? How to balance the farming vs tourism experience? How to plan it out in a way it doesn't create conflict and won't turn Skagit Valley into another Snohomish County? Proposed the question on how does GMA (growth management act) play into this? Would GMA allow this? How does GMA and critical area play into this?

Terry discussed the impact of farmers making more money on tourism than farming. The economic opportunity needs to be met with regulatory reason. Terry read the legislation on Agritourism and he understands that the new legislation simply defines agritourism. Its only purpose is to grant immunity from liability.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Seattle City Lights (SCL) relicense by 2025

Nels asked if anyone has time for committee meeting? Need to figure out how we can be an influence in this. Nels will talk to Branden Roozen.

Issues; flood control, cfs, want more water in summer released and less released in winter.

Terry suggested we separate the two issues and just straight forward claim we need more water in the summer. Not get into how they control their flood water/release.

AAB will come up with some bullet points regarding need/goals and what our message to SCL will be. Will discuss with Skagit County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) and will then draft a letter. Encourage BOCC to support Public Works with SCL for their work for Flood/Irrigation.

SPF meeting

Darrin Morrison wants to know if he can meet with AAB the next 2 months at a breakfast meeting. SPF & AAB board, the meeting has been set for November 1st. Nels suggested we discuss the topic of agritourism with SPF as well.

WSU Extension Update – Don McMoran

Brown marmorated stink bug has been found in the county. These insects have an effect on a large variety of crops. Worries that 3 years out you deal with a full overgrowth of population. Don offered to put traps on farms if farmers want them.

1/12/18 - Seed workshop

2/16/18 - Ag Summit

2/23/18 - Potato Workshop

3/23/18 - Berry Workshop

NO COMMITTEE REPORTS

Adjourn

Michael Hughes motioned to adjourn, Sloan Johnson seconded. Adjourned at 9:05 pm

Next meeting will **October 11, 2017 at 7 pm.** – Nels may not be here.