

SKAGIT COUNTY

FARMLAND LEGACY PROGRAM

2021 ANNUAL REPORT



S kagit County's Farmland Legacy Program is one of the most active and successful farmland preservation programs in the state of Washington.

Now in its 25th year, the Skagit County Farmland Legacy Program has protected nearly 14,000 acres of fertile Skagit County farmland from future development.

The voluntary program enables farmland owners to sell unused residential development rights to the county, while landowners retain ownership and continue to farm their land as they always have.

PROTECTING LAND

The 14,000 acres of protected farmland in Skagit County include row crops, seed crops, dairy and cattle operations, as well as silage, hay pasture, bulbs, flowers and berries.

More than 170 conservation easements on Skagit farmland place permanent restrictions on future use and development of the land—protecting its agricultural productivity for future generations.

Total protected acreage as of December 2021 represents 16% of roughly 89,000 acres designated Agriculture-Natural Resource Lands in Skagit County.

THE ECONOMY OF AGRICULTURE

We can be proud that our county has made it a priority to protect our farmers and to support Skagit County's agricultural industry—for the last 25 years and into the future.

A special thank you to our farmers and land owners for their commitment to preserve the county's agricultural landscape. And to our Skagit County Commissioners and citizens, it is through your support that this important work continues.





RECENT SUCCESSES: 2021 SKAGIT COUNTY PROTECTED FARMLAND

Four Farms—950 Acres of Farmland—Added to Preservation Program in 2021

Skagit County’s Farmland Legacy Program protected 772 acres of farmland in 2021 through its voluntary farmland preservation program—now in its 25th year of protecting Skagit County farmland. The Farmland Legacy program compensates agricultural landowners for extinguishing unused residential development rights. Landowners retain ownership and continue farming. Future building is limited to ag-related structures.

Another 173 acres of farmland were protected in 2021 using the Agricultural Lands Preservation code (SCC 14.16.860), an option available to landowners looking to separate a homesite from existing farmland.

The same agricultural conservation easement protects these newly enrolled 945 acres of farmland—limiting future use to agriculture.

Preserving these unparalleled silt and sandy loams promotes food security for the region while focusing development away from working lands. It’s farmland forever.

Meet the farmers and landowners whose commitment in 2021 to protect their land benefits us all—they’ve protected it as farmland today and for future generations.

210 ACRES | FIR ISLAND

Robert Hayton’s great grandparents established their farm in 1876 on Fir Island. They grew grain and made hay to barge from the banks of Deer Slough to Seattle to feed the city’s workhorses. In the early 1900s, the farm transitioned into a dairy and, in the 1950s into a crop farm focused on peas, then



berry, potato, cauliflower and cucumber crops. Robert is fourth generation in his family to farm the land and added a variety of berries over recent years.

Together with Susan Hughes-Hayton last February, Robert protected 210 acres of prime farmland and extinguished five development rights. “It was our great good fortune to work with Skagit County staff Grace Roeder and Kara Symonds to create a perpetual conservation easement beneficial to Hayton Farm and the county’s future in agriculture,” says Susan.

173 ACRES | LA CONNER

The soil on Nancy Dunton’s farm has grown many crops over her lifetime, including tulips, daffodils, beet and cabbage seed, cauliflower, peas and potatoes. Most of her fields are currently leased to local farmers growing flowers and food who regularly trade ground with each other. It is a critical, large piece of land in a farming community reliant on field rotation.

Through the Farmland Legacy Program last April, she protected 173 acres of prime farmland and extinguished three development rights. “Nobody is going to build on this land, ever,” says Nancy. “Concrete does not grow the food [people need] to eat.”

286 ACRES | COOK ROAD I-5 INTERCHANGE

Ever since the Pierson family’s 600-acre family farm and homestead was cut through by I-5 in the early 1960s, golf course builders to amusement park developers have

“With an ever-growing world population, we have to be careful about protecting what farmland we have left... there is no ‘somewhere else’ to go.” David Pierson

sought to purchase the highly productive farmland. David Pierson’s farm has grown dozens of crops over the years including seed crops that then went on to produce food around the world. The stark contrast between the Pierson side of Cook Road interchange and the developed area of the interchange shows the importance of preserving soil for future generations.

Through the Farmland Legacy Program last June, David protected 286 acres of prime farmland and extinguished seven development rights. “We’ve stopped the sprawl of commercial development... That’s not what this land



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Content and Editing: Sarah Stoner, Kai Ottesen, Andrea Xaver





“Once this land is paved over, or scooped out and carried away, it’s gone forever.” Nancy Dunton, whose permanently protected La Conner farmland is shown above.

is for,” says David. “Gone are the days developing on productive farmland, thinking that it can be replaced with new farmland somewhere else. There is no somewhere else to go,” David adds.

103 ACRES | CONWAY

The Tobiason farm has been in their family for three generations. The property sits just west of the I-5 corridor with the Skagit River on its eastern edge. It has been farmed by the Morrison family for several generations. Potatoes were the most recently grown crop on this highly productive land. “We weren’t sure what we’d do with the family farm after our mother died last February,” said Wendell Tobiason, part owner with his four siblings.

The Tobiason family protected 103 acres of prime farmland and extinguished two development rights last October. “The Farmland Legacy program allowed us to come together as a family to clarify our values surrounding the farm,” says Wendell Tobiason, one of four siblings. “We are proud as a family to participate in preserving farmland in Skagit Valley, and as well, our grandfather’s legacy,” adds sibling Michael Tobiason.

Despite strong land-use planning, the state of Washington continues to lose farmland to development—nearly 100,000 acres between 2001 and 2016.

Over 50% of the land lost was considered the state’s best quality farmland, according to the American Farmland Trust’s recent report *Farms Under Threat: The State of the States*.

2021

Easement acquisition payments in 2021 totaled \$1,465,000 in Conservation Futures tax funds.

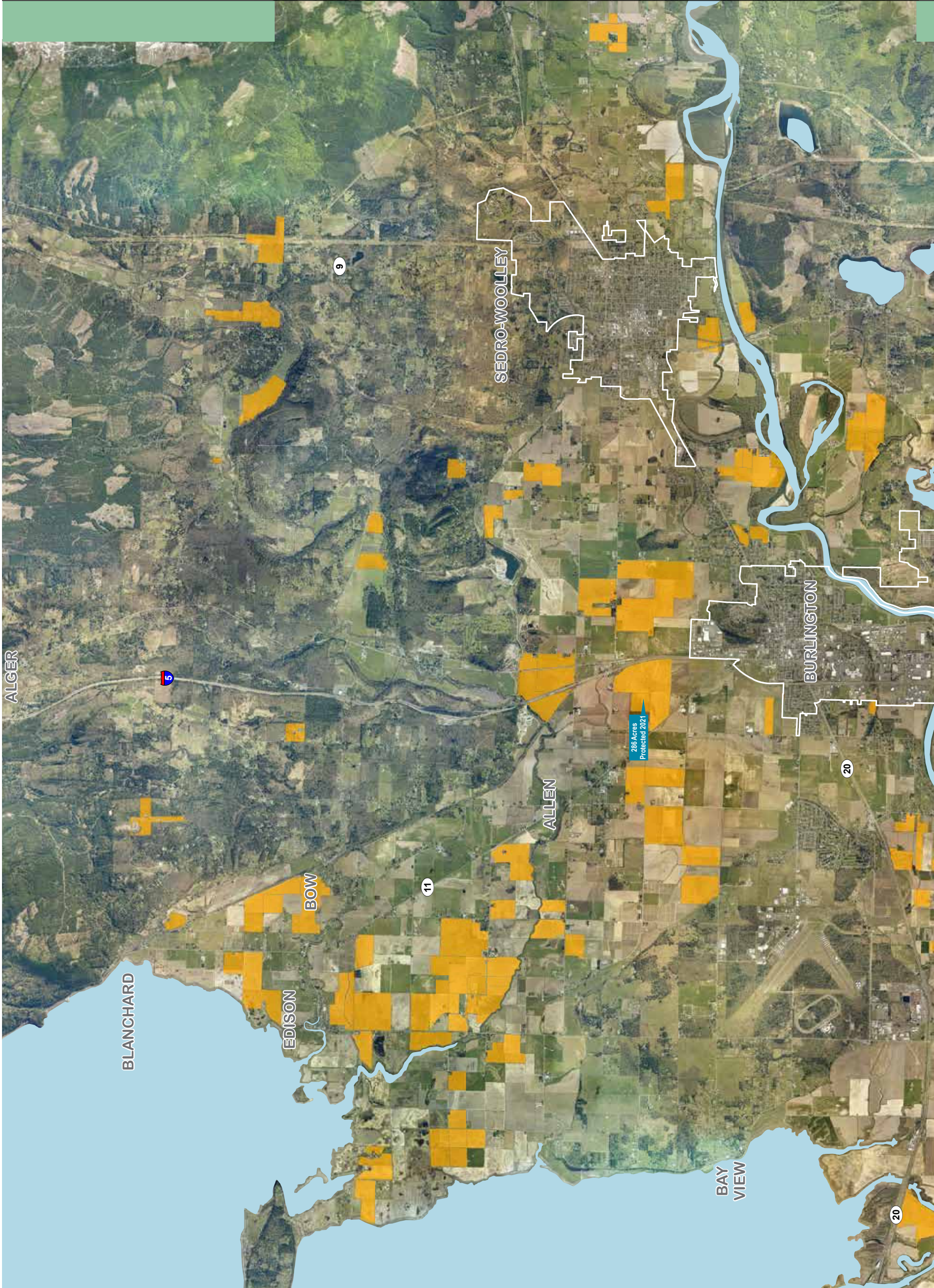
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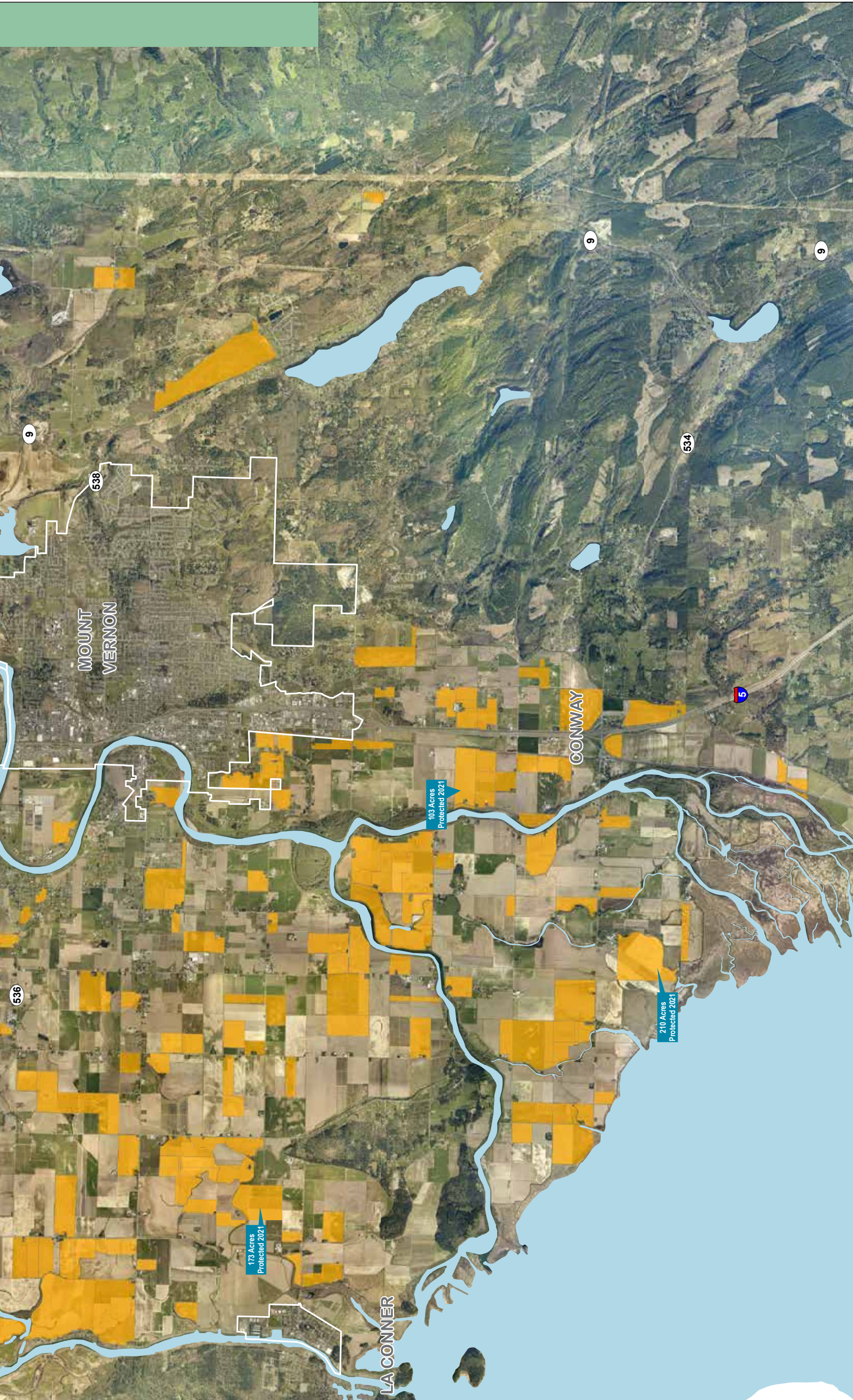
For 2022, the county has budgeted \$1.8 million in Conservation Futures tax funds for the purchase of easements to protect additional agricultural land. More information on Skagit County’s Farmland Legacy Program is available at skagitcounty.net/farmland or by calling (360) 416-1417.

“Skagit County’s farmland is some of the most fertile in the world. The difference between rich farmland and the rest is that it can take two to three times the amount of marginal land—lower crop yields, higher input costs, fast soil degradation—to make up for the loss of the best quality land.”

The Cost of Lost Farmland, Skagitonian’s *The Dirt*







PROTECTED FARMLAND IN WESTERN SKAGIT COUNTY

Farmland Legacy Conservation Easements



Aerial Photo 2021
Skagit County GIS

Map Print Date: April 4, 2022



SKAGIT VALLEY AGRICULTURE

The Skagit Valley’s fertile soil has been rated in the top 2% of soils in the world, making the Skagit Valley one of the most important and productive agricultural regions in the world. Roughly 90,000 acres of agricultural land grow 90 different crops, generating nearly \$315 million in revenue in 2020.

More tulip and daffodil bulbs grow here than any other county in the United States. Yet there’s far more to Skagit County agriculture than its famed bulb flowers. Its 12,000 acres of potatoes gross \$60 million annually. Skagit County supplies much of the world’s cabbage, table beet and spinach seed. It is a hub for innovation in the regional grain market, and is one of the state’s top dairy regions. And those are just the highlights!

Skagit County is home to a dizzying array of fresh market staple and specialty crops, processing, nursery crops, grains, small fruits, tree fruit, and more. Bulbs grab more headlines than broccoli and Brussels sprouts, but this diversity of crops is essential to the agronomic and economic resilience of Skagit Valley agriculture. Growers here make the most of each piece of farmland, with an exceptional crop diversity that supports soil health, pest control, disease management, and market diversification.

APPLES

The coastal climate allows Skagit County to grow a unique variety of apples that are not grown in the large apple-producing regions of central Washington. These apples include Jonagold, Gravenstein, Spartan, Akane, and Honey Crisp. While the quality of these apples is excellent, the absence of nearby apple processing facilities makes shipping apples back and forth across mountain passes commercially impractical, limiting apples to a niche crop in the Skagit landscape.



BLUEBERRIES

Compared to the Midwest, quality and production of Skagit County blueberries is exceptionally high. The Pacific Northwest has been one of the fastest growing blueberry production regions in the U.S. While Skagit County currently produces around 30% of the state’s total blueberry production, the rapid increase in acreage over the past few years appears to have slowed.

COLE CROPS

All Skagit County Brussels sprouts, cauliflower and broccoli are grown for fresh market. Head quality is exceptionally high in this region. Approximately 60% to 80% of Brussels sprouts, broccoli and cauliflower grown in Skagit is consumed in Oregon, Washington and British Columbia. Skagit farmers grew more than 2,000 acres of Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, and broccoli this year.

BULB CROPS

Skagit County’s bulb industry averages about \$20 million in annual gross income, \$3 million of which constitutes bulb sales. Skagit County grows more tulip and daffodil bulbs than any other county in the nation—with approximately 1,100 acres dedicated to bulb crops. These flowers are sold as both bulbs and cut flowers which are then shipped throughout the U.S. and Canada. The Tulip Festival, established in 1984, brings more than 400,000 visitors and \$65 million in revenue to county businesses each year.

CHICKENS AND EGGS

As of 2021, Washington ranks 17th in the nation for egg production. Two major companies, Day Creek Organic Farms, and National Foods produce the majority of eggs for Skagit County. Collectively, egg and fryer production totaled more than \$27 million in revenue for 2020.

DAIRY

At the end of 2020, there were 23 commercial dairies in Skagit County. Fourteen years prior, there were 46. Skagit dairies grossed an average of \$1.65 million per farm, producing a total of 255 million pounds of milk for the year, or approximately 29.6 million gallons. The loss of dairies negatively affects the agricultural community and county economy on many levels. Dairies provide natural fertilizer essential to soil health and nutrient needs for many crops. They also generated nearly \$40 million in revenue in 2020.

GRAINS

Small grains like wheat and barley have always been important rotational crops in Skagit agriculture, but in recent years they have taken on even greater economic importance. Researchers, farmers, and businesses have worked closely over the decade to identify varieties well-suited to the maritime climate of the Pacific Northwest that also meet the needs of specialty markets, such as malters, millers, brewers, and distillers. These specialized markets often require different crop characteristics and flavor profiles than they can find in commodity grain markets. The scale of production and crop rotation in the Skagit Valley is well suited to these smaller, specialized markets.

POTATOES



Potatoes are the Skagit Valley’s single largest crop by revenue, generating over \$60 million annually. With 12,000 acres dedicated to their production, Skagit County potatoes are in great demand for their high quality. While Late Blight disease, Silver Scurf, and Flea Beetle threaten their production, Skagit farmers work closely with WSU Skagit County Extension to research and troubleshoot these issues in order to continue growing fresh market red, white, yellow, purple, fingerling, and chipping potatoes.

RASPBERRIES

Washington state produces about 75% of the nation’s frozen red raspberries; 95% of this comes from Whatcom and Skagit Counties combined. Skagit County primarily grows Meeker berries, which are processed into juice, preserves, yogurt, bakery ingredients, and frozen products.



SEED CROPS

Skagit County vegetable seed crops consist primarily of spinach, cabbage, and beet seed. Skagit County is considered a world contributor, producing roughly 8% of the world’s spinach seed, 25% of its cabbage seed, and 25% of its beet seed. County seed acreage runs below 5,000 acres due to the need to prevent cross-contamination and cross-pollination. Skagit County ranks first in vegetable seed production throughout Western Washington providing over \$6 million from vegetable seed crops. As of 2020, nine vegetable seed companies called the Skagit Valley home: Sakata, Illinois Foundation, McDonald, Rijk Zwaan, Schafer, Skagit Seed Services, Syngenta, Universal, and Vikima Seeds USA.

STRAWBERRIES

Acreage has increased in recent years, thanks in part to a demand for local production. Skagit County continues to produce about 20% of Washington’s strawberries. With around 500 acres in production, strawberries generate roughly \$2 million in revenue annually, making this crop an important and iconic part of Skagit County agriculture.



HOW MANY ACRES HAVE BEEN PRESERVED?

Farmland Legacy Program	
FLP Enrollment	175 conservation easements
Total Acres Protected	13,874 acres in Farmland Legacy Program
Extinguished Residential Development Rights	263
Pending Easements	575 acres; 14 development rights in program queue



Why do landowners apply to enroll in the Farmland Legacy Program?

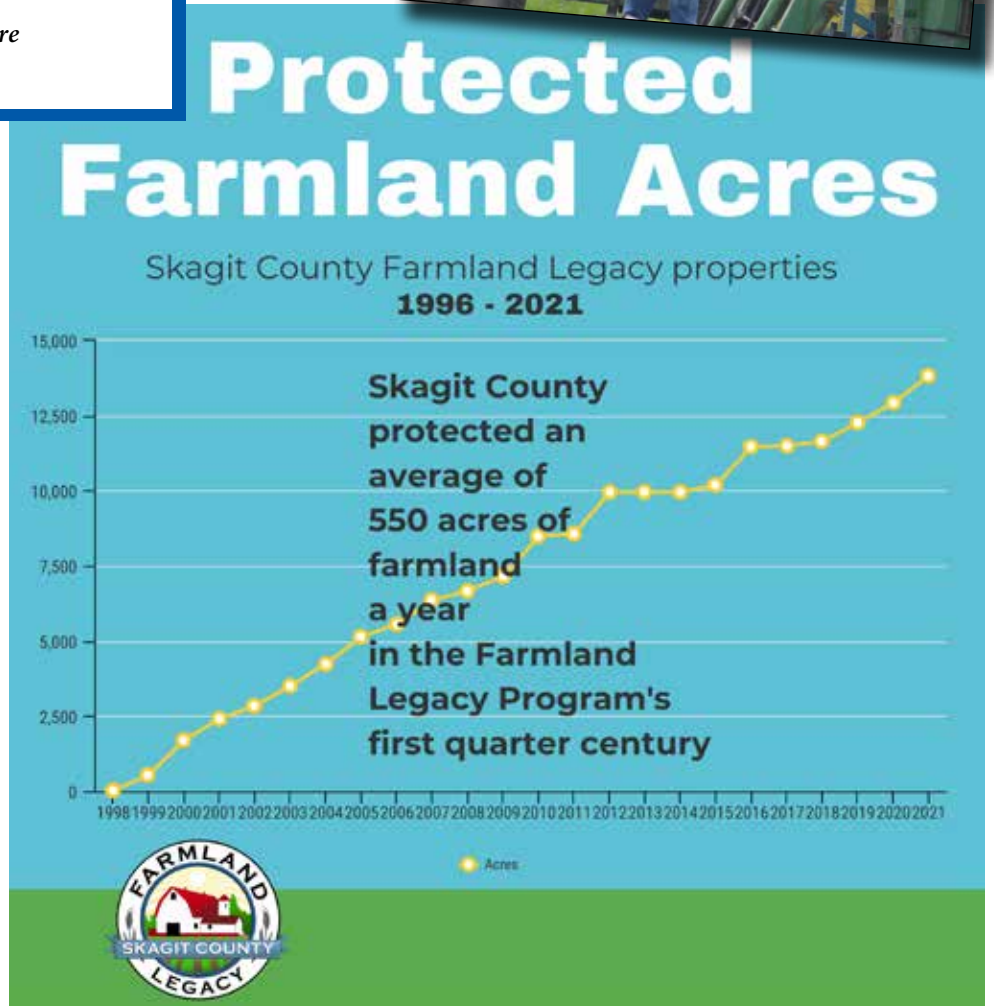
- To preserve land for agricultural production in perpetuity
- To reinvest funds into equipment
- To reinvest funds into additional land purchases
- To aid in farm succession planning efforts
- To supplement farm income
- To reduce farm debt

Benefits to the community

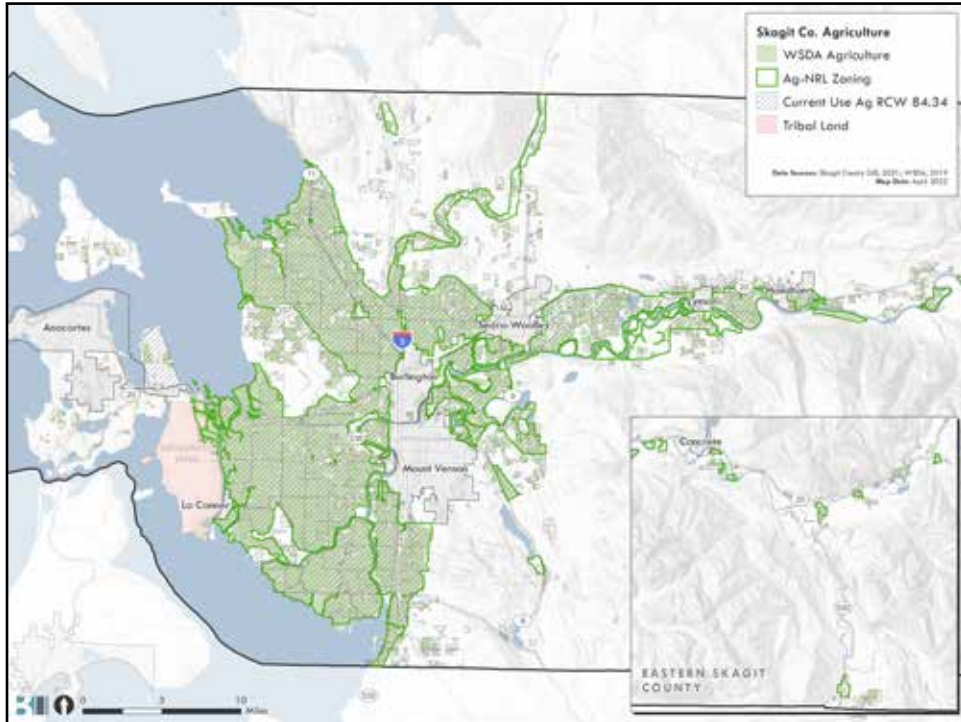
- Preserves open space and rural character
- Supports local food production
- Limits development in the floodplain
- Reduces urban sprawl
- Contributes to the agricultural economy
- Conserves soil for future generations

Since 1996, the Skagit County Farmland Legacy Program has sourced \$23 million in compensation to farmer-landowners for the permanent protection of agricultural land in Skagit County. The breakdown of the \$23 million spent over the past 25 years includes \$13.5 million in Skagit County Conservation Futures Tax and \$9.5 million in local and federal grants and nonprofit contributions.

Funding Sources & Partnerships	Contributions
Skagit Land Trust	\$104,000
Ducks Unlimited	\$148,000
The Nature Conservancy	\$250,000
Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland	\$756,800
WA State Recreation & Conservation	\$2,927,880
U. S. Department of Agriculture	\$5,359,087
Skagit County Conservation Futures Tax	\$13,462,142
Total invested to date	\$23,007,909



SKAGIT COUNTY PRIME AGRICULTURAL SOILS



Interested in Enrolling in the Farmland Legacy Program?

Are you a farmer or farmland owner interested in seeing your property protected as farmland in perpetuity? Skagit County Farmland Legacy Program works with Ag-NRL landowners to voluntarily keep working lands in production.

Take the following easy steps:

- Call today to request an application. Now accepting applications for the second half of 2022 and early 2023.
- Learn more at www.skagitcounty.net/farmland
- Call or meet to discuss your property characteristics for an initial eligibility review.

Contact Farmland Legacy Program Coordinator Sarah Stoner, 360-416-1417, sstoner@co.skagit.wa.us

MEET THE TEAM!

Established along with the Farmland Legacy Program, the Conservation Futures Advisory Committee (CFAC) is a diverse group of farmers, conservationists and business people who oversee the preservation program and its associated Conservation Futures fund.



Left to right: CFAC members Audrey Gravley, Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland (2021-2025); Keith Morrison, At-Large (2018-2025); Margery Hite, Skagit Conservation District (2021-2024); Monitoring Agent Kai Ottesen; Owen Peth, District 1 (2013-2022); Farmland Legacy Coordinator Sarah Stoner, Skagit County; Andrea Xaver, District 3 (2007-2024); Chair Scott DeGraw, District 2 (2008-2025); Jim Glackin, Skagit Land Trust (2018-2026).

CONSERVATION FUTURES ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Reporting to the Board of Skagit County Commissioners, the Advisory Committee (CFAC) reviews and recommends farmland voluntarily offered from owners looking to prevent conversion to non-agricultural uses. CFAC members closely review an applicant's property to consider factors such as size of farm, soil quality, scenic values, and possible development pressures such as proximity to towns and high-traffic roads. Committee members attend monthly meetings together with County staff and local partners.

The committee includes one representative each from the Skagit Conservation District, the Skagit Land Trust, Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland, the three Commissioner Districts and one citizen-at-large member. Two County staff serve as ex-officio members.

ANNUAL MONITORING

'Farmland forever' is key to the Farmland Legacy mission. Annual monitoring of protected properties ensures that farmland remains just that... farmland.

FARMLAND LEGACY PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Skagit County Agricultural Lands Coordinator Sarah Stoner helps landowners through the lengthy and sometimes complicated process to permanently protect their farmland. Contact her with questions or to discuss a specific property at (360) 416-1417, sstoner@co.skagit.wa.us.

WITH GRATITUDE TO OUR FARMERS AND THE ONGOING COUNTY SUPPORT

Hats off to the Board of Skagit County Commissioners whose steadfast support and foresight created one of the most successful farmland preservation programs in the state.

And a resounding thank you to the farmland owners of Skagit County whose hard work and commitment to protect their farmland benefits us all.

"Agricultural land peppered with residential houses results in smaller and smaller chunks of open space that make it harder to farm efficiently."

Sarah Stoner, Farmland Legacy Coordinator



To view Title 14.16.86, visit www.codepublishing.com/wa/skagitcounty/