

SKAGIT COUNTY

FARMLAND LEGACY PROGRAM

2022 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.

Past its quarter-century mark, the Farmland Legacy Program now protects more than 14,000 acres of fertile Skagit County farmland from future development.

This voluntary program enables farmland owners to sell unused residential development rights to the county, while landowners retain ownership of their land and continue to farm.

PROTECTING LAND

The 14,300 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.

Nearly 200 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 farmland as of December 2022 represents 16% of the 89,000 acres designated Agricultural-Natural Resource Lands in the 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 over the last 25 years and into the future.

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



RECENT SUCCESSES: 2022 SKAGIT COUNTY PROTECTED FARMLAND

Ten Properties—390 Acres of Farmland—Added to Preservation Program in 2022

Now in its 26th 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. Skagit County's Farmland Legacy Program protected 163 acres of farmland in 2022 through its voluntary farmland preservation program.

Another 227 acres of farmland were protected in 2022 using the Agricultural Lands Preservation code (SCC 14.16.860), an option available to landowners with existing homes who are looking to separate their homesite from their farmland, which creates two legal lots.

The same agricultural conservation easement protects all these newly enrolled 390 acres of farmland—limiting future use to agriculture.

Preserving these unparalleled silt and sandy loam soils 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 2022 to protect their land benefits us all. They've protected it as farmland today and for future generations.

90 ACRES | BOW

Meet Jerry Nelson. Jerry holds the record for most acres of Skagit farmland protected by Farmland Legacy conservation easements, with an estimated 1,600 acres enrolled.

Since the 1940s, the Nelson family has produced potatoes from the superior soil of Skagit County. After extinguishing the first of two development rights on his Bow property in 2007, Nelson returned to the Farmland Legacy Program to eliminate the second development right, fully preserving his 90 acre farm for agricultural use as of January 2022. "Selling development rights helps a farmer pay for the purchase of farmland," says Jerry.

57 ACRES | LA CONNER

The soil on Joyce Johnson's farm boasts a long history of growing a diversity of crops, including tulips, iris, and daffodils. The Johnson farm has been leased since 1979 to the Roozen family, owners of the Washington Bulb Company, one of the nation's largest producers of tulip bulbs. Ms. Johnson's late husband Stan Johnson and his family farmed the land prior to the Roozens.

Through the Farmland Legacy Program last August, Joyce at age 104, protected 57 acres of prime farmland and extinguished one development right. "That land is the best of the best," says John Roozen, co-owner of the Washington Bulb Company along with his siblings. "I'm really excited about seeing it protected."

10 ACRES | MOUNT VERNON

Todd Johnson's newly protected 10 acres border Mount Vernon city limits and the Skagit River, surrounded by cropland. These protected acres are part of his vegetable seed operation, specializing in spinach and cabbage, on land he owns and leases across Skagit and Snohomish counties.

Spinach seed production can require up to a fifteen-year field rotation to break disease cycles and a one-mile radius of crop isolation to avoid cross-pollination. Todd, like many farmers in Skagit County, depends on trading ground with nearby farms and landowners to meet the rotational needs of his crops.



"Farmland Legacy prevents a house on every 40-acre parcel to farm around."

Jerry Nelson, Farmland Legacy easement holder of an estimated 1,600 acres (in photo at left, with son Ryan)

The Washington State Department of Agriculture reports Skagit County as a major grower of the world's cabbage seed and spinach seed. "Todd Johnson's farming operation is an essential part of what Skagit County provides the region and the world," says County Commissioner Peter Browning.

26 ACRES | BOW

Phil Wynne has owned his newly protected 25.5 acres of farmland in Bow since 1999. The land is currently leased to Skagit Valley Farms, which produced potatoes there last season. His property bridges previously protected farmland to its north and south, creating a 1,100-acre block of farmland off Chuckanut Drive near Bow permanently protected for agricultural use.



Todd Johnson's cabbage seed fields in bloom.

Photo: Todd Johnson

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Chris Boling's newly protected Conway farm lies between the south fork of the Skagit River and Interstate-5. Photo: Jake Campbell

"No asphalt... Farmland. That's what my grandpa intended it for. That's what it's going to stay." Chris Boling, whose protected Conway farmland is shown above.

"The smaller size of Phil's land makes it especially appealing to a residential development," says Board of County Commissioners Chairperson Ron Wesen. "Thanks to Phil's decision, the prime soil of his farmland remains protected for producers today and for future generations of farmers tomorrow."

70 ACRES | CONWAY

Chris Boling's 70-acre farm near Conway reaches back three generations to the late 1800s when his grandfather used draft horses to plow the fields. Crops grown on the land since then include grains, seed crops, and potatoes. Boling Farms sits adjacent to another 31.5 acres of protected farmland, which creates a 100-acre block of protected farmland at a critical freeway interchange.

"We offer our deepest gratitude to Chris Boling and his family," said County Commissioner Lisa Janicki. "And to Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland and its donors, who raised more than \$100,000 to protect Boling Farms. Their generous contribution allows county Conservation Futures tax dollars to stretch further in support of protecting farms here in Skagit County."

QUESTION: Why are there ten properties shown as newly-protected in 2022 on the centerfold map, and only five Legacy properties featured?

ANSWER: An additional five properties—totaling 227 acres—were protected using the Agricultural Lands Preservation code (SCC 14.16.860), an option available to landowners looking to separate an existing homesite from its surrounding farmland. No development rights are extinguished or created through this protective mechanism.

2022

Easement acquisition payments in 2022 totaled \$525,000 in Conservation Futures tax funds and donations raised by Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland.

2023

For 2023, 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.

3 Conservation Values

3.1 The Protected Property

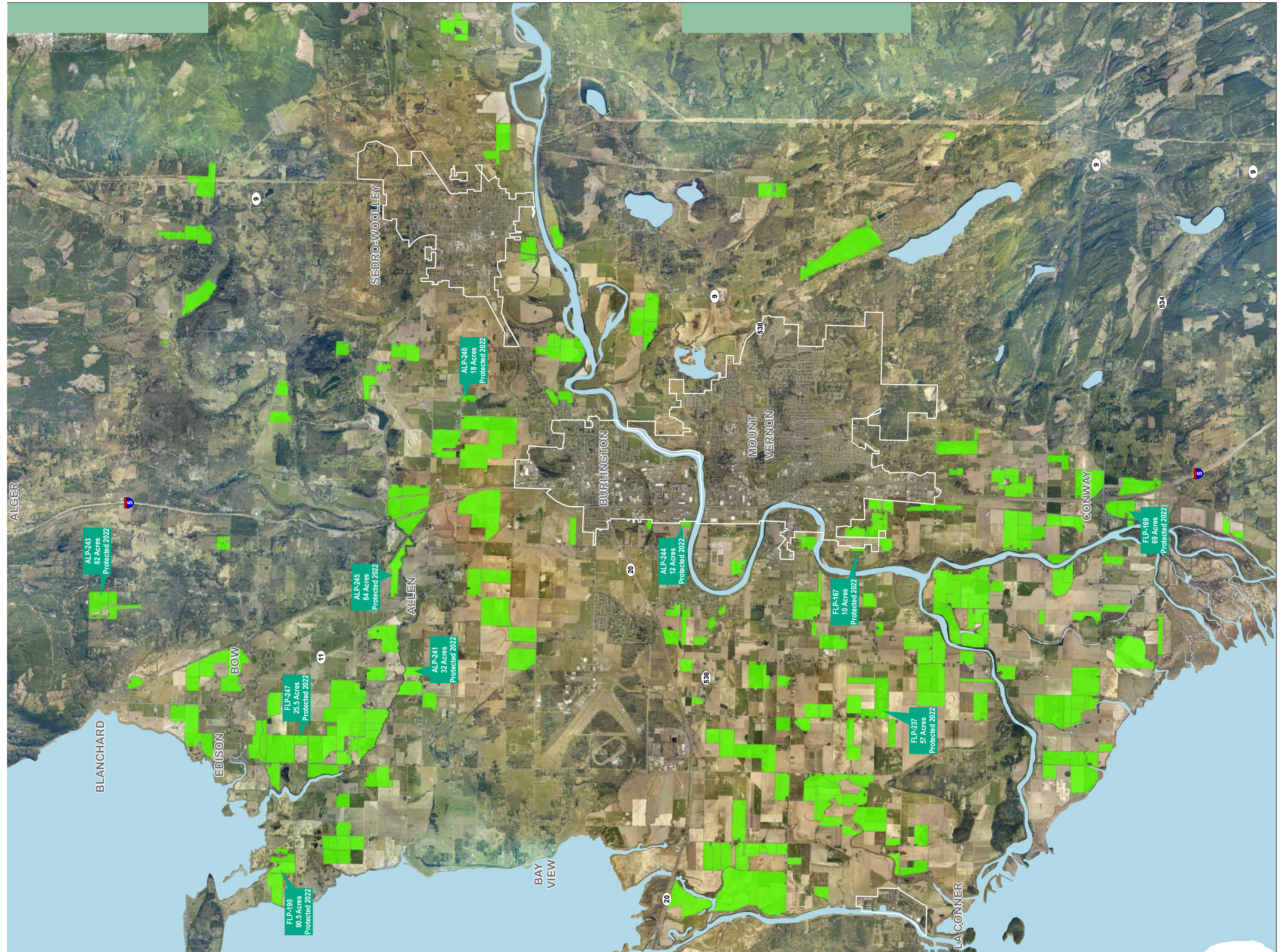
is of significant agricultural value

to Grantor, the people of Skagit County, and the people of the State of Washington.

The 'Conservation Values' include protection of agricultural productivity and protection of prime and important agricultural soils.

Joyce Johnson's newly protected La Conner fields planted in daffodils

Photo: Rakan AlDuaij



PROTECTED FARMLAND IN WESTERN SKAGIT COUNTY

ALP - The Agricultural Land Preservation code provision allows for the subdivision of a lot of record into a one-acre tract for an existing house when the property owner places a conservation easement on the remaining farmland.
FLP - The Farmland Legacy Program financially compensates farmland owners for extinguishing residential development rights with conservation easements placed on land zoned Agricultural-Natural Resource Lands (Ag-NRL).



Map Date: April 18, 2023



Miles



Farmland Legacy Conservation Easements

SKAGIT VALLEY AGRICULTURE

Economic Impact

- \$328 million farmgate value
- Approximately 90,000 acres of agricultural land* grow 90 different crops of commercial value
- 2,600 jobs; \$108 million in wages
- Support businesses (fertilizer dealers, equipment dealers, consultants) add:
 - Estimated \$200 million in additional economic value, and hundreds of jobs
- Collectively a top employer in Skagit County

Agricultural Production of National and Global Significance

- Major producer of vegetable seeds in the world
- Produces 75% of the nation's cabbage and spinach seed
- Produces 95% of the nation's table beet seed
- Produces 25% of the world's cabbage seed
- Produces 25% of the world's table beet seed
- Produces 8% of the world's spinach seed
- Major national producer of blueberries, raspberries, and blackberries



- Fifth largest dairy-producing county in WA.
- Approx. 15,000 dairy cows produce 30 million gallons of milk for the year and a key supply of fertilizer for organic growers.

** 89,000 acres of land in Skagit County are zoned Ag-Natural Resource Lands (Ag-NRL). An estimated 65,000 acres (70%) of that total is tillable farmland; the remaining farmland acreage is non-tillable, taken up by roads, houses, driveways, ditches, etc.*

WHAT A FARMER FACES IN A YEAR: MICHAEL HUGHES ON FARMING THE SKAGIT

Michael Hughes of Hughes Farms, Inc. is a fourth generation Skagit farmer-producer.

Michael serves as chair for the Skagit County Agricultural Advisory Board.



Michael Hughes in a Hughes Farms field during potato harvest. Photo: Tahlia Honea

WHY THE WORK OF OUR FARMERS IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND

Every year, farmers across the county hear directly and indirectly from neighbors, asking why they must do a particular operation on a particular day. Noise, dust, smells and other parts of agriculture impact surrounding areas. Many activities of commercial agriculture are driven by the weather and must take place as conditions allow as opposed to when the day or the clock make the most sense to the public.

CARS ON THE ROAD: A FARMER'S COMMUTE

When farmers move from field to field our equipment is at least twice the size of the cars around us. In recent years, increased vehicle traffic on roads has made this part of farming work more dangerous. Multiple accidents occur, sometimes when cars are impatient and want to get around the equipment and start passing as tractors are making turns into fields.

We've also had issues when people park cars thinking other cars can get by but once you bring a tractor along you can't get by. Farmers get stuck in the middle of the road because of the parked car, or because the parked car is blocking entrance to the field. Increased development in the ag zone only increases these tensions.

DEVELOPMENT: CHOICES

Skagit County has repeatedly chosen to prioritize long-term agriculture over alternatives—even when those alternatives may make more money in the short term. The current 40-acre minimum for residential building in the ag zone and the county's strong commitment to the purchase of development rights in the ag zone through Farmland Legacy serve as examples of this.

Protection of Skagit farm ground has provided opportunities for first-generation farmers and multi-generation families alike. Beginning farmers are able to start a farm without competing with non-agricultural interests for land. This is the ideal place for farmers to start—we have ready-made markets to the north and to the south of us, to sell direct to consumers with high-quality crops. Also, generational farms have been able to grow with their families, allowing families to stay on the farm, providing food to neighbors down the street and across the nation.

Even families who aren't still actively farming understand and they work with farmers to protect the land. They know the importance of keeping working lands that produce their food. This choice—prioritizing agriculture for the long-term—helps farmers with certainty and stability, now and into the future.



HOW MANY ACRES HAVE BEEN PRESERVED?

Farmland Legacy Program

| | |
|---|--|
| FLP Enrollment | 197 conservation easements |
| Total Acres Protected | 14,325 acres in Farmland Legacy Program |
| Extinguished Residential Development Rights | 265 single-family homes kept out of working lands |
| Pending Easements | 730 acres, 15 development rights queued for protection |



Cattle graze off Farm to Market Road, Bow.

Photo: Rakan AlDuaij



Late night farm work along Josh Wilson Road.

Photo: Jay Erps



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



John Morrison and Osbaldo Vera disconnect a field tiller from a tractor at Morrison Farms. Photo: Cathleen Enns

CONDITIONS REQUIRED FOR GROWING IN THE VALLEY

As far as a timeline for when the growing season happens, all this activity typically occurs in the fields from middle of April through end of November. Planting season starts once the weather warms and winter rains subside.

SPRING PLANTING

April and May are peak planting season. Later May plantings and into June result in lower yields for most crops, because they are unable to accumulate enough heat units in our climate to catch up. This is why, once the ground is fit, farmers plant from early in the morning to late at night. You'll often see us in the fields before the sun even gets close to coming up until long after it's gone down. This is to put the seed in the soil under ideal conditions and to give it the most time to grow.

SUMMER HEAT, OTHER IMPACTS

Summer months are for tending crops and harvesting early vegetables. Most harvests occur early in the morning before the heat of the day. When the crop is growing, spray applications and fertilizer applications are timed with growth stages and weather conditions. Heavy rain during the growing season flares diseases that can take a crop in a matter of days. For example, late blight in potatoes—the disease that caused the Irish potato famine—can overtake a region in days. To stop spread after a rain event, the entire crop needs to be treated in a tight time period but these applications can only occur in certain environmental conditions. Farmers cannot make spray applications in high winds, extremely high temperatures, and sometimes humidity. This means while it seems the farmer has a couple of days to treat for disease, they might actually only have

two or three hours to get across the whole field before they start losing crop. Sometimes this time period happens early in the morning, late at night or the middle of the day. It just has to happen when the right wind and right conditions occur.

FALL TIME, CRUNCH TIME

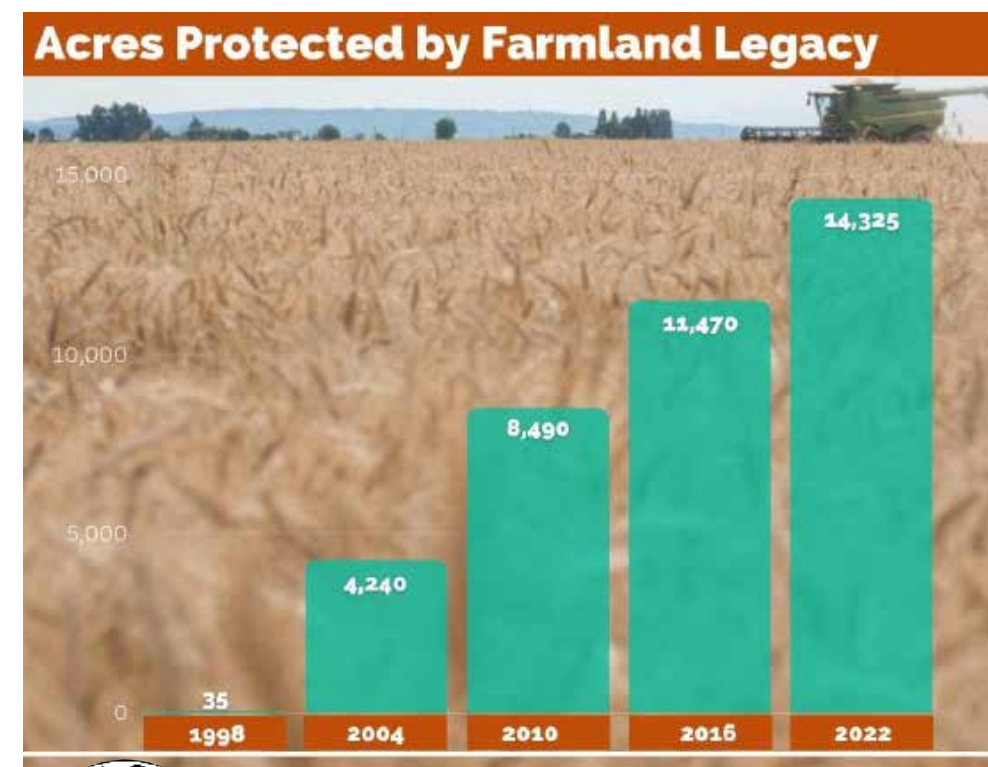
Fall harvest can be the most time-pressed part of the year. Rain impacts the quality of grains and vegetables at harvest. Rain can even completely end the harvest of crops like potatoes. In 2021, an estimated 2,000 acres of potatoes in the county went unharvested here, which is about 16% of the crop in the county, completely gone.

Early frost impacts corn silage quality which impacts a dairy farm's entire year of access to feed since there's only one growing season each year. Like planting, harvest occurs early in the morning until late at night, usually seven days a week, until we are done.

END OF HARVEST DOESN'T MEAN EVERYTHING IS DONE

The end of harvest work doesn't mean the work is done. We still have to get through the fields, to get subsoiling done. Subsoiling work allows water to percolate into the soil to prevent surface erosion and runoff during winter's heavy rains, and make manure applications.

Many people don't know that dairy operations are limited as to when they can make their manure applications—only during time periods when grasses and crops are actively growing. This means dairy farmers in the fall have to quickly empty their silage and storage pits to ensure they can make it through the entire winter without having a problem with their manure. This includes holding on to rain that falls on the yard, too, they can't discharge it. When they have to pump, they have to get rid of it.



Since 1996, the Skagit County Farmland Legacy Program has sourced \$23.5 million in compensation to farmer-landowners for the permanent protection of agricultural land in Skagit County. The breakdown of the \$23.5 million spent over the past 26 years includes \$13.8 million in Skagit County Conservation Futures Tax and \$9.7 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 | \$858,800 |
| WA State Recreation & Conservation | \$2,927,880 |
| U. S. Department of Agriculture | \$5,359,087 |
| Skagit County Conservation Futures Tax | \$13,885,142 |
| Total invested to date | \$23,532,909 |





PROTECTING OUR PRIME AGRICULTURAL SOILS

INTERESTED IN ENROLLING?

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

Take the following easy steps:

- Call today to request an application.
- Learn more at www.skagitcounty.net/farmland
- Call or meet with Sarah to discuss your specific property characteristics, concerns, goals.

The Skagit County Farmland Legacy Program works with Agricultural-Natural Resource Lands (Ag-NRL) landowners one-on-one through the process of protecting these working lands for future generations.

CONSERVATION FUTURES ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CFAC)

Chair

Scott DeGraw, District 2 (2008-2025)

Members

Owen Peth, District 1 (2013-2026)

Andrea Xaver, District 3 (2007-2024)

Keith Morrison, At-Large (2018-2025)

Margery Hite, Skagit Conservation District (2021-2024)

Jim Glackin, Skagit Land Trust (2018-2026)

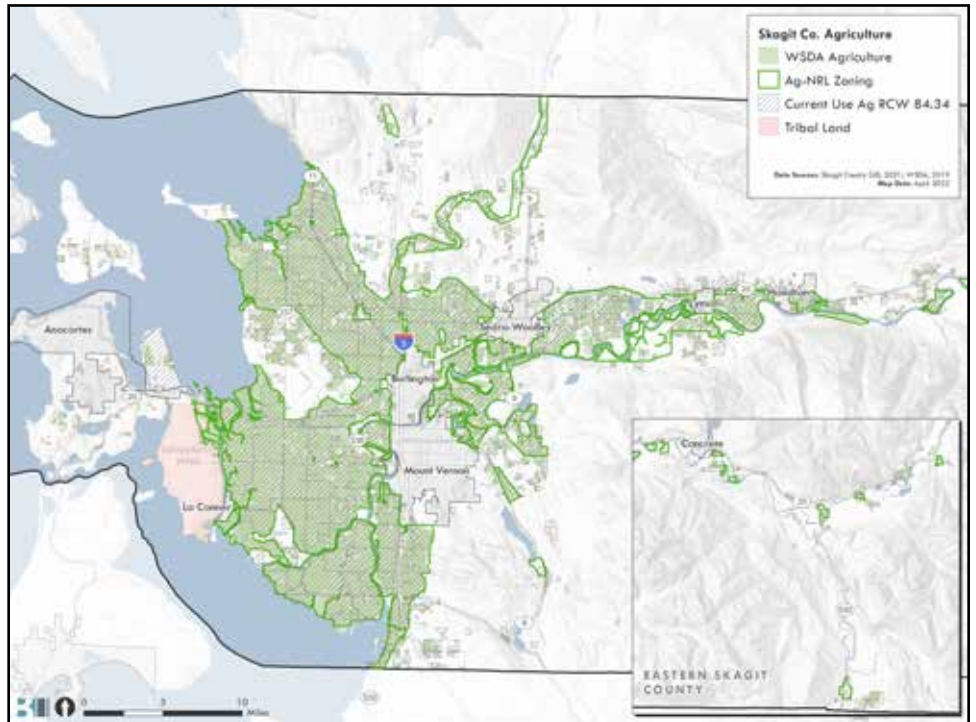
Audrey Gravley, Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland (2021-2025)

Trisha Logue, Skagit County Finance Director (ex-officio)

Jack Moore, Skagit County Planning & Development Director (ex-officio)

Reporting to the Board of Skagit County Commissioners, the CFAC reviews and recommends the 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. Committee members attend monthly meetings together with County staff and local partners.



FARMLAND LEGACY: ORIGIN STORY

1996 *May:* Skagit County citizens vote an emphatic “yes” in support of a tax levy of 6.25 cents per \$1,000 assessed property value to protect county farmland from development.

1996 *December:* The Skagit County Board of Commissioners enacts a property tax levy known as the Conservation Futures Tax as authorized by RCW 84.23034, for the purpose of protecting farmland.

1997 *March:* The Conservation Futures Advisory Committee (CFAC) is established to oversee the Conservation Futures fund.

1997 *November:* The Skagit County Board of Commissioners approves recommended parameters for the farmland preservation program, outlined in its founding document, Resolution #16766, after the public hearing and comment period for recommendations. The Farmland Legacy Program is born.

1999 Development rights are purchased and easements placed on more than 500 acres in the program's first full year of staffed operation.

CONSERVATION FUTURES FACTS

14 Skagit County is one of 14 counties in Washington that levy a conservation futures tax. This local tax funds the Skagit County Farmland Legacy Program. The State of Washington has 39 counties.

TOP 2 The Skagit County Farmland Legacy Program is one of the most active and successful farmland preservation programs across the state, due to the number of protected acres and the ongoing community and county government support.



\$100,000
Property Value =
\$6.25 Per Year

“Concrete does not grow the food we eat or the beautiful flowers people need and enjoy. The more we lose our land, the less we’ll have to plant and harvest.”

Nancy Dunton, Farmland Legacy easement holder, protecting 173 acres of La Conner farmland

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



Spring work in the valley, Skagit County.

Photo: Cedarbrook Studio