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SKAGIT COUNTY
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October 25, 2011

Skagit County Commissioners
1800 Continental Place, Suite 100
Mount Vernon, WA 98273

Dear Commissioner,

Skagit County Farm Bureau is asking you to please schedule a hearing and consider opting into the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) created under ESHB 1886 during the 2011 Legislative session. The legislation passed in the House 92-5, in the Senate 48-1 and was signed by the Governor in May.

The VSP is established as an alternative to RCW 36.70A.060 under the Growth Management Act (GMA).

The VSP provides a unique approach to (1) protecting critical areas and (2) maintaining and enhancing a viable agricultural industry. Both are goals of the GMA, yet have often been the result of expensive and contentious legal battles across the state.

As part of the VSP, the county will convene stakeholders, including agricultural, tribal and environmental interests, to create local goals and plans to protect critical areas, enhance critical areas and maintain and enhance the viability of agriculture.

Skagit County Farm Bureau is committed to voluntary programs and believes the new VSP approach will demonstrate that local stakeholders can find common ground and shared interests.

Success of the program will demonstrate that more can be accomplished by working together and avoiding costly and contentious lawsuits.

Our state federation, Washington Farm Bureau, participated in four years of negotiations involving county, environmental, and agricultural interests. The negotiations were facilitated by the Ruckelshaus Center, a policy resolution center operated by the University of Washington and Washington State University. The negotiations began in 2007 at the direction of the Washington State Legislature.

Statewide environmental, county and agricultural interests have committed themselves to the success of this program.

While the county has until about the middle of January to opt in, we encourage you to expeditiously schedule a hearing and subsequent decision.

This legislation creates a new model that could be replicated across the nation, and we look forward to the opportunity to make it work in Skagit County.

Please let us know when you, a committee, or advisory panel will be discussing this new program opportunity and when you will have a hearing.

We look forward to working with you, county staff and local stakeholders to demonstrate program success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Hinton", written in a cursive style.

Jim Hinton, President
Skagit County Farm Bureau

C: Skagit County Ag Advisory Board

Skagit County Planning Department

Skagit County Planning Commission

Dan Wood, Director of Local Affairs
Washington Farm Bureau

Kristen Hinton, Western Washington Field Manager
Washington Farm Bureau