

**Skagit County Planning and Development Services
Agritourism Town Hall
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Consultants: Lisa Grueter, BERK Consulting
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Facilitator: Don McMoran, Director, WSU Skagit County Extension

Panelists: Jessie Anderson, Maplehurst Farm
Terry Sapp, Skagit Agricultural Advisory Board
Leo Roozen, RoozenGaarde
Annie Lohman, Lohman Farms
Andrea Xaver, Producer, Big Lake

Questioner
From Audience: Owen _____

Sarah Ruether: Good evening, everyone. Thank you for coming tonight. I'm Sarah Ruether. I'm a long range planning manager. And welcome to Skagit County's Town Hall event to discuss agritourism. First I want to thank our panelists and Don McMoran for volunteering to be a part of this effort. Don has been willing to answer any question that I've had, being new to Skagit County, so I'm very grateful for that, and I'm really grateful to him for being our moderator. I also want to thank all the panelists who volunteered their time to be here and their willingness to share their experiences so that we can all learn and understand each other better with this issue.

Skagit County has a long history of being proactive envisioning its future, especially with the preservation of agriculture. In 1965, Skagit County adopted its first Comprehensive Plan and in 1979 Skagit County increased the minimum lot size to 40 acres for agricultural properties. This planning and foresight is what allowed the rural character of Skagit County and the preservation of ag land that we enjoy today, and without this planning and this intent to preserve ag lands, Skagit County would look much different today.

So Skagit County with this event continues to plan for the protection of agriculture and its rural character. It has established the Farmland Legacy Program in 1996, which buys conservation easements and permanently protects agricultural land. The Farmland Legacy Program has resulted in 14,212 acres of protected ag land to date.

So this work is to continue giving agricultural planning and continue visioning. And the work of all these groups and the participation of citizens like you in creating boards and programs have contributed to the beauty of Skagit County. And the work we're doing tonight continues these efforts to intentionally grow Skagit in a purposeful way that accomplishes a community vision. And having these conversations and understanding different perspectives makes it a richer process and gives better solutions to problems. And it's the work of volunteers and citizens who participate

that helps contribute to creative and better solutions. So I want to thank you for coming and participating.

And I want to say with that, thank you for being here tonight. And we have postcards in the back, if you haven't taken the survey yet and you would like to, and we will also have cards to give questions that we'll pick up later. So if you have questions we'll have a Q and A session at the very end. And I would like to thank Jenn Rogers, our long range planner. She helps me with all those really important details to make this happen so I'm really grateful for her help. And I would also like to thank Lisa and Adam from BERK Consulting. Their technical advice and help has also been really great. And with that, I will introduce Lisa, who's going to give you a background in some of the work that's been done.

Lisa Grueter: Thank you, Sarah, and good evening. I have just about 10 slides that gives you a lot of the information that's in the handout on the back table. And so I'll just remind you of the overall agenda. There's a detailed agenda on the back table, but in general I'm just going to give you some quick background. Don's going to lead a panel discussion, and as Sarah mentioned, there's a Q and A. This is what the back side of the postcard looks like. There's a white space you can put a question and Sarah and Adam will pick up these cards along the way. If you're on Zoom, there's a Chat function and Jenn will be watching for the Chat and you'll be able to submit a question at that point.

So this is a map that shows the Ag-Natural Resource Land zone, Ag-NRL zone, in the green, and the little black dots are what we inventoried as agritourism type activities in Skagit County. We had about 70 of them identified in the Situation Assessment that's on the project website that is at the bottom of the comment sheet. You can go to that weblink.

A definition: The County doesn't have a specific definition of "agritourism" but generally it's considered a commercial enterprise at a farm that's conducted for enjoyment of visitors and for income for the owner. It may also involve education and boosting agriculture as well. The types of agritourism we've been reviewing in the Situation Assessment and the policy work over the last couple of years is represented by this range of activities here, from a direct sale farmstand, U-Pick, farm stay, which is a temporary type of accommodation. The County does allow for bed and breakfasts already. There's weddings that may occur on a temporary basis in some counties or some counties may allow for that year around. And then tasting rooms for grapes or hops. And then there's other examples in the region of a combination of these different activities. As we've been looking at these different activities, we've been looking at the footprint of them to look at what scale or intensity they are on the landscape, but also the level of visitors that may be generated to look at what's a fit for agriculture in Skagit County. And this is all in that policy paper, but looking at both the activity and the footprint has been part of this work, and so some activities have less annual visits than others.

So the policy paper is on the project website. The weblink is down at the bottom there, skagitcounty.net/skagitagt. As Sarah mentioned, we've been in the middle of some additional engagement this fall. There were postcards. The ones you have on the back table were sent to about 17,000 addresses. A survey has been online and we have over 600 responses at this time. As was mentioned, the survey's going to close soon – at the end of this week, I believe. That was put out in the press release. So if you haven't taken it, this week would be a great time. We've had – this is the fourth meeting that we've held around the county, and this town hall kind of caps off some meetings we've had in Sedro-Woolley, La Conner, and elsewhere.

So the process has been one of educating the County and comparing to other counties and looking at different agritourism activities here and across the state and in other states, and conducting some engagement. That was in 2021. In 2022 we've been doing additional engagement and put out different ideas, but trying to get more input so that we can come up with the best options that are a fit for Skagit County. And after this effort, we'll take stock of what we're hearing and seeing and there will be some draft code or Comp Plan amendments likely to be looked at next year.

So we're going to turn now to a panel discussion and Don is going to lead it with our panelists. On your agenda are the detailed questions we provided to the panelists ahead of time. This is just a summary. The panel is going to introduce themselves. They're going to talk about what makes Skagit a unique county for agriculture, and talk about agritourism and what it means to the county: What's a fit and what are some challenges, and then what might be some improvements to County regulations or enforcement?

So with that, I'll pass it over to Don.

Don McMoran: Thanks so much, Lisa.

Ms. Grueter: Thank you.

Mr. McMoran: And thank you for all of those of you who were able to join us tonight. I really appreciate it. So I'm Don McMoran. I'm the director of WSU Skagit County Extension. I'm also a fourth generation farm kid from right here in Skagit County. I grew up on a 2,000-acre diversified potato farm in west Mount Vernon. So when I had the opportunity to think about tonight and to think about, you know, this process, it really brought me back to our founding fathers and them creating the First Amendment in which everyone has the freedom to free speech. And so I want you to be thinking about that tonight. You know, you might not necessarily agree with our speakers, but tonight I want you to do your best to be respectful and try to leave some of your biases at home and listen to what the speakers have to say because they're bringing different perspectives to our community. And also, just a reminder that no decisions are going to be made on the subject tonight. That really falls within the Planning Commission as well as our County Commissioners. We do happen to have a County Commissioner in the room tonight, so Peter Browning, if you'd wave your hand so everybody can make sure that they seek out meetings with you in the future to fully vet this situation as we move forward.

So tonight I want to introduce some of our panelists. I just have a short blurb on them and I'll ask for them to add to what we have on board here as we move forward.

So our first panelist is Leo Roozen of RoozenGaarde. Leo is one of the owners of Washington Bulb Company and Roozengaarde, which farms approximately 2,000 acres of land for mostly tulips. Leo, would you care to add to that?

Leo Roozen: I can later.

Mr. McMoran: Sure. It sounds good. Second panelist is Jessie Anderson from Maplehurst Farms. Jessie Anderson has owned Maplehurst Farms in Mount Vernon with her husband Jeffrey Anderson since 2008. The six-acre farm hosts special events and weddings for the community.

Jessie Anderson: Yes, thank you.

Mr. McMoran: Thank you.

Ms. Anderson: I will elaborate a little bit on that.

Mr. McMoran: Sure, go ahead.

Ms. Anderson: I think we have kind of a similar background, hearing you say that you're fourth generation. I'm also a generation – fifth generation, actually – farmer here. I grew up at Hayton Farms on Fir Island.

(inaudible voice)

Ms. Anderson: Oh, sure. So my name is Jessie Hayton Anderson and I was born and raised here in the valley. I grew up at Hayton Farms on Fir Island and began working in the fields at a young age harvesting cauliflower, packing cucumbers, weeding berry fields. My sisters and I began selling produce at my parents' farmstand, and in high school we started to deliver and sell direct at farmers markets throughout the greater Puget Sound area. And that helped fund our college education at the University of Washington. After my undergraduate degrees, I attended Seattle Pacific University and earned an MBA and then I moved to Los Angeles and worked from 2005 to 2008. In 2008 I realized that the Skagit Valley was where I wanted to settle and so I moved home and married my husband, Jeffrey Anderson, and he also grew up – he's third generation farmer here – grew up on a farm in Conway. And so we were lucky enough to buy a six-acre portion of his grandparents' home place, their farm, on Dike Road. And so we bought that in 2008.

I worked for my parents at Hayton Farms from 2008 to 2012, and after we had our second daughter I was motivated to work from home and I'd always been entrepreneurial so I decided to try hosting some events at our property on Dike Road. I continued to work for my parents. My husband had a separate career path. It was a parttime venture that we've grown over the past 10 years into a wonderful family business. And so we do host weddings. We also host memorials, reunions, church groups, youth group meetings, school auctions and dances, quinceaneras, also many nonprofit groups such as Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland, Children of the Valley, and the Skagit Valley Community College. Many of our clients are locals – friends, neighbors, and members of the community – as well as other clients from the greater Puget Sound area. My husband and I do believe in giving back to the community and we coach youth sports and use our venue to donate free events and also host discounted events annually for organizations such as the Festival of Trees, the Skagit Valley Hospital Foundation, Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services of Skagit Valley, and other local schools and nonprofits. We manage five acres of lawn, mature trees, and gardens; maintain a historic mansion, and a barn. We have taken no land out of agriculture and farming for our venue; however, we will be farming 10 acres this year on top of the venue – aside from the venue, and we will be selling grass hay bales and also bring fruits and vegetables for our two daughters, who are six generation farmers, to sell at my parents' produce stand.

So I think that's all that I need to say for now. But I'm happy to be here, and thank you for the opportunity to discuss two things that I'm very passionate about: agritourism and farming in the Skagit Valley.

Mr. McMoran: Great! Thanks for being here.

Ms. Anderson: Yeah.

Mr. McMoran: All right, our next panelist is Andrea Xaver. She's a producer out at Big Lake. She's also a huge supporter of agriculture. Andrea, do you want to elaborate on that?

Andrea Xaver: Well, I'm the fifth of seven generations on the same farm that we've owned for 121 years. And we're in the process now of training the seventh generation. Hopefully they'll grow up and want to do what we're doing.

I'm adamant about saving farmland in Skagit County and I don't want to do anything that upsetting to someone, but, being one of the oldest people on the panel probably, I'd like to just let people know that – some of the history. Since 1940 we've lost about half of our farmland here in Skagit County due to other conversions. In the mid-1990s, some County commissioners did away with the zoning called "Agricultural Reserve." You'd think with the population increases we'd need more agriculture land held in reserve because in 1996 when this took place the world's population was 6.79 billion. Now we're up to eight billion. Skagit County's population in 1996 was 93,772. Now it's 132,047. And I read an article the other day that said one percent of the people feed 100% of the world. Maintaining agriculture land in Skagit County is crucial, plus it's some of the richest farmland in the world. And that's hard for other counties in other states to say. So we need it all.

I'm respectful and I like our venues that we have. It's been very nice and fun to drive around and see, but the devil's in the details, as far as the future. How many people want to do something, as far as agritourism? What will they be selling? Would it be strictly off the farm? Would they be importing other things to sell? How much space would they need? Would they be taking out more farmland? Would that then further erode the farmland that we currently have and take more of that away? And what are the farmers that do next door or around in that area? What will they have to do? Do they have to get better insurance? Do they have to get security? And the reason I mention that is because about three years ago in Whatcom County – had nothing to do with agritourism whatsoever – but a little girl ran away from her parents unbeknownst to them. She went out to the barn, climbed up on something that was kind of heavy – some machinery – and it was kind of teetering back and forth and it fell over on her and killed her. What I would hate to see would be something like that in this county or anywhere else. Do we sell there again? Do we have to hire more security? Would a busload of kids drive into the wrong farm, thinking it was part of the agritourism thing, run around, get loose, and then here comes a big tractor towing a bunch of heavy equipment comes around the corner of the barn or runs over maybe a half a dozen kids? It's a possibility and I don't think that would be good for anyone.

Like I said, the devil's in the details. How much land is going to be taken up or converted to uses to sell goodies and knick-knacks? The things that we have right now are pretty much connected to larger farms and the products are grown there or whatever. So, there again, I'm pretty adamant about saving what we have because we don't have that much left really, when you consider it.

And there was another article in the paper that talked about in the next 40 years farmers will have to produce as much food as has been produced in the last 10,000 years. That's pretty mind-boggling when you consider the rate that the population is increasing and so forth. We need agricultural land for agriculture.

Mr. McMoran: Thanks, Andrea. Our next panelist is Annie Lohman. Annie Lohman was previously the chair of the Skagit County Planning Commission and a member of the Skagit Agricultural Advisory Board. She owns Lohman Farms in Bow with her husband Dave, and they primarily farm seed crops. Annie, do you care to elaborate?

Annie Lohman: Hi. I am not a second generation, third generation. I am a first generation farmer. My husband and I purchased a 40-acre farm, kind of a little low on the heel, back in 1989. And we at that time raised dairy heifers and we also grew seed crops. And then eventually we sold out our dairy herd and focus now on vegetable seed crops.

But we did it the old-fashioned way. There was an elderly lady who was – her place had kind of gotten away, and it was an opportunity for a young person of 25 years old. We put a ton of work. We had open station tractors. We had some pretty rudimentary and pretty crude implements to get started. I think of Jerry Rindall putting together a beginner package for us and I wonder what he really thought when we pulled out of his lot! But it was a ton of hard work and there were years when we didn't make anything. There were years where we made barely enough. And back then you were advised that you need to save for yourself because there isn't going to be any social security. We didn't even have 100 bucks sometimes to put towards retirement. So we put everything in that. Flash forward 30 years and we are still here, and it's because of the opportunities that Skagit County visionaries – other farmers and other community members – put on looking towards the future. And I thank God for that vision, because I wouldn't have had it. It is not an easy path to take. It's tough. You plan in multiple years; you don't plan in single year or half-years. You don't take vacation. You give up an awful lot, but it's worth it. It is such a rich reward. And this is the last place left on the whole west side of the Cascades. And you think about that. It *looks* like there's an awful lot available here for those kind of opportunities, and that's only because I-5, Chuckanut Drive, Highway 20, Cook Road, all the major arterials in this county happen to go, unfortunately, right through the valley, right through the ag sector. That ag sector – all of the zoning, including going upriver east of I-5, is only less than 10% of the county's land base. But the perception coming down Conway hill or coming from the north from Bellingham, the perception is the vast majority of the county is that wide-open agricultural vista and wide-open space, and it is not. It's less than 10%. The majority of this county is timber.

So I just want to remind people that it's because of our reluctance to sell out, subdivide like our neighbors to the south in Snohomish and our neighbors to the north in Whatcom, and even further – King County and other counties where they made it five-acre, 10-acre. Anything less than 40 even. I'm not even sure 40 was actually enough but it was a start. The opportunity to have generational farms of long term significance, and even opportunities for newbies, like me, they're not going to be there. Do we want to keep these opportunities in the next 10 years, 20 years, 30 years – even looking 50 years down the pike: Do we want to be able to have that opportunity? And I hope we do.

Mr. McMoran: Thanks, Annie. Our last but not least –

Terry Sapp: The latest!

Mr. McMoran: – member of the committee is Terry Sapp. So Terry has been a member of the Skagit Ag Advisory Board since 2015. Terry owns Hoehn Bend Farm and Fender Farm with his family, where they primarily raise cattle. Terry.

Mr. Sapp: True. Hello. I am happy to be here. I've been in this room lots of times out there, looked up here, and there were always the important people up here! And so –

Mr. McMoran: So welcome to being an important person, Terry!

Mr. Sapp: Well, I don't know if that's true, but what I learned is that if you come late you get ushered right up to the front. So that's the new trick. In all deference, Commissioner, I'm here and it seems warm in here.

(laughter)

Mr. Sapp: So fellow panelists, not all of whom I have met, I'm eager to hear more from each of you, and rather than give an opening comment here, I'll just introduce myself with a few more notes. I indeed farm east of Sedro-Woolley. For those of you who haven't been up there that recently, that's just before you get to Lyman. And we farm beef cattle primarily. We grow grass and feed it to cattle. I speak with the plural pronoun because I do so with my very farm member partner and my wife, Jean Eagleston. You can do this, Jeannie – there you are. Jeannie is a great partner in our endeavor, and it wouldn't be as enjoyable without her.

I will just say that I have had – without detail; maybe will have opportunity later to say more about involvement in agritourism – but I have two specific connections. One is that Jeannie and I created a farm-stay on our farm – *mostly* Jeannie created a farm-stay on our farm – where we had visitors come from afar to farm with us. The main activity for those visitors was that they were up in the morning when we arrived – we didn't live there – and worked along with us most of the day. I'll get into that later.

The other way, number two, that I am involved in agritourism is that I am on the Agricultural Advisory Board and have been for a number of years. And the Agricultural Advisory Board has indeed been involved in this topic for a couple of years. And I've worked with Lisa. Lisa, sorry I missed your presentation. I think I've heard much of it previously. But my apologies, nonetheless. And with Sarah; through the Agricultural Advisory Board, we have been involved in this topic. And the Ag Board – if you will allow for short – has established policy positions and some recommendations that have been expressed and shared with the functional operatives – that isn't a very good word – those of you who have been working on this more intensively than we at the Ag Board. But we've been real involved, and I think we'll have opportunity to get into that later. I'll try to clarify when I speak and if I have opportunity when I am speaking from my experience and representation of the Ag Board and when I speak regarding my personal experience. Thank you, Don.

Mr. McMoran: Perfect. So I think we'll kind of – we'll go right to left and then left to right. So, Terry, back to you. First question is how long have you been working in agriculture in Skagit County?

Mr. Sapp: Yeah, I don't have a number of years for that. I grew up on a farm also where we now farm. I am third generation. I grew up farming in the morning and the evening after school. Both of my parents worked off-farm, so we *all* worked mornings and evenings, and, of course, weekends. And then I went away elsewhere to do other things. I had a couple of careers and came back when I had a – I grew up enough to have a choice. Jeannie and I have been farming for –

Jean Eagleston: Since 2008.

Mr. Sapp: Thank you. How many years is that? So for a while.

Mr. McMoran: Annie, you already made mention of how you started out in 1985, correct?

Ms. Lohman: Yep. Well, my first job out of WSU – I had to put a plug for the Cougs –

Mr. McMoran: Go Cougs!

Ms. Lohman: – was as a cow breeder, mostly in dairy, in north Snohomish County. And then my late husband was a son of a farmer in Stanwood and then I moved to Skagit. And so all my adult life has been in agriculture. When I was a little kid, I picked berries for Tom Shane, so that was my very first actual paycheck that wasn't written by Mom and Dad.

Mr. McMoran: Awesome. And Andrea, how long have you been involved in agriculture in Skagit County?

Ms. Xaver: Well, like I mentioned earlier I think, my family's owned the same farms for 121 years, and when I was a kid I learned my multiplication tables feeding the cows out in the barn because my mom or my dad would go, What's 7 times 9? What's 2 times 4? And so on and so forth. So I had chores to do, had to go to school, had to do all the stuff – help my folks seven days a week. We milked cows twice a day and then when we had time we hopped in the car and we'd take tours and go around Skagit County and visit our friends and family that were all over the place and involved in farming. I drive around now and there's some places that bring me to tears. Things have changed so much because of all of the things that have taken the place of agriculture land. And that's why I'm concerned. I'm not involved in agritourism. I do – like I said, I do appreciate some of the things that we do have here today, but as I also mentioned earlier, the devil's in the details. We don't know what the future will bring and how much more erosion that will have an impact on farmland. So I hope we can do another 121 years or beyond that.

Mr. McMoran: Yeah. Jessie, how long have you been involved in ag in Skagit?

Ms. Anderson: Well, I mean, my dad drove me around when I was a baby in his pickup truck with him, but I worked as soon as I could – around 10, you know – on the farm. My first paycheck that wasn't from my parents was from Alf Christianson Seed Company __ spinach. But then I worked for my parents after that until I – well, through high school and college I continued to work at the farm, and then I was in Los Angeles working for three years but returned after that. So most of my life I've been here. I'm 41 years old now.

Mr. McMoran: Great. Leo, how long have you been involved in agriculture in Skagit County?

Mr. Roozen: Well, Don, my whole life, as people say, but I think I got my first check – we started getting paid – you know, I'm preaching to the choir to a lot of people here and I'll try to be, you know, somewhat brief because we've got a lot to cover. I'd be happy to answer more questions later, but my older brother's sitting here and he might correct me, but I think we got our first check I think when I was eight years old. He might have got his earlier. I'm not sure. But that's 62 years ago because I'm 70 now. And we've – my whole life had been in agriculture. If we weren't in school or turning out for sports or studying – and some of that stuff we didn't want to do anyway – we were working because there was always way more work to do than there was time in the day. So I think I can talk to a lot of this stuff just with practical experience, but again, I'd be happy to answer more questions later, but most of my whole life. Yeah.

Mr. McMoran: Perfect.

Unidentified Voice: Don, could you put the microphones closer to perhaps the women on the panel? I can hear the gentlemen on the end but _____.

Mr. McMoran: I don't need one, do I? I spent too much time on a tractor so I can't hear and I talk loud. I hope.

Same Unidentified Voice: The men are doing great. _____.

Mr. McMoran: Okay. Perfect. All right, so back over to you, Leo. What's your relationship with ag tourism?

Mr. Roozen: Well, most of my relationship and our relationship at Washington Bulb Company is with the Tulip Festival, and we've got hands-on experience there, of course – and just clarifying earlier when it was – you'd mentioned 2,000 acres. Most of that is not tulips. We're diversified. But we're known most for our tulips, I guess.

Mr. McMoran: That's right.

Mr. Roozen: That said, most of our hands-on experience – and that's why I agreed to be here is to share what I know firsthand – is with the Tulip Festival and with the Festival of Family Farms in the fall. And we're quite involved in those two and, you know, maybe I can add some information a little bit later. But that's my experience with ag tourism.

Mr. McMoran: Jessie?

Ms. Anderson: Okay, so as I mentioned, you know, some before, I own Maplehurst Farm with my husband and we host weddings and other events at the six-acre property. None of that land was ag land, although we are surrounded by his family farm and my family farm is just five miles from our property. But we host events together and then we also will be farming 10 acres for grass hay and then also to supply our daughters' produce to sell during their summer vacation at my parents' farmstand. And so I help them manage that. I'm the adult that helps them run that stand and that was one of my first jobs and something that they take pride in and something that will help them learn to love agriculture like I do.

Mr. McMoran: Thanks, Jessie. Andrea?

Ms. Xaver: Can anybody hear me?

(sounds of assent)

Ms. Xaver: Okay. I really don't have any association with agritourism. As I mentioned, when I was a kid my folks and I would drive around through the farmland and visit people and go look at things from one end of the valley to the other, because we knew so many people and had relatives and friends all over the place. So that was tourism, I guess you could say in a way. But then to kind of mix and mingle agriculture with tourism is kind of a different slant. Tourism, okay. Agriculture, fine. We need it. But to put those two together is kind of a sticky situation, I think. And, there again, like I said, I don't know what the future might bring or how much more land would be taken – essentially – out of agriculture.

Ms. Lohman: I'm a fulltime farmer and it's not a hobby farm, but we have been involved with helping with FFA and 4H. I was a dairy superintendent at the Skagit County Fair for several years. And so while it's really kind of not tourism per se, it's almost like ag advocacy and kind of self-preservation to kind of sow the seed for the next generation and give them a taste of it. But I suppose you could argue that that also is a potential opportunity with tourism, with farm-stays,

farmstands, and other opportunities to expose the public to our farms and our work ethic and all of that. And also we have had a WSU Ph.D. student living with us for the last several years and kind of exposing a city kid from LA to a more rural, day in/day out type lifestyle. So while it's really not ag tourism, that is about as close as I physically have gotten to it.

Mr. McMoran: Great. Terry, you want to share your experience with ag tourism?

Mr. Sapp: Yeah, I can be very brief because I already said some of it. Jeannie helped start a farm-stay at our farm. We had an extra house and two farm properties and so this became very active – and here's my pitch for agritourism – a *great* experience, *fabulous* experience. I said enough already maybe, but we had people from – I think, Jeannie, 17 countries who arrived to help feed our cows and goats and all, and almost all of them with kids. They were almost entirely people who came to stay who had small children and signed up to get their kids exposed to farms. That suited us. I had a career as an educator also so it was fun being around kids – teaching, talking about farming. So I'm wearing my personal hat now. I said I had two; the Ag Board is the other. But we also had a very sad and unfortunate traumatic experience with ag tourism next door. And I can go into that later, perhaps, as we get to some of the other issues –

Mr. McMoran: Sure.

Mr. Sapp: – but it was very mixed, a very mixed experience. Personally positive with our customers and then very troublesome next door.

Mr. McMoran: Okay. Well, we'll definitely come back to that. The next question is: What makes Skagit County a special place for agriculture? What do you believe the county is known for, Terry?

Mr. Sapp: Yeah. Yes, the obvious things. I'm going to defer.

Mr. McMoran: Okay.

Mr. Sapp: Leo and others are ready for that question better than me. I love farming here. I love that experience. I chose it late in life but having started with ___ also, all good.

Mr. McMoran: All right. Annie, do you want to fill in?

Ms. Lohman: Well, at the risk of repeating myself, I believe it's our – the Skagit County's commitment to prioritizing the ag land and rural lifestyle, and that's pretty tough. And here we are in 2022. That's a pretty tough commitment to have made and stuck with when you look around and where it's gotten away. So what makes it special and what are we known for? Well, outside of the general public, but in the ag world we *are* known for our seed crops. There's well over 100 years of experience growing vegetable seeds, cabbage, spinach, a variety of other seed crops.

Mr. McMoran: Don't forget your beet seed.

Ms. Lohman: Yeah, don't forget the beet seed. I mean, and we are a world player in those seed crops and we are national certificates in those seed crops, so they're not any small potatoes. While the acreage may be small if you compare us to Nebraska and all that cattle in Kansas and all that wheat in someplace else and all that corn, we are – acreage-wise it might seem small. And then what else are we known for? Well, our red potatoes. We're kind of pioneers on red potatoes and everybody else had to catch up. And ours were special. We're also known for our tulips. But it's mostly our soil and our latitude and the kind of gentle maritime climate that we

enjoy. It doesn't take a lot of irrigation. I mean, while there *is* irrigation, it's not, like, in the basin or other places where you *have* to have irrigation going continuously. Ours is kind of –

Mr. McMoran: Supplemental.

Ms. Lohman: Thank you.

Mr. McMoran: You're welcome.

Ms. Lohman: So I think about all those things that – and that's God-given, Mother Nature, dumb luck – I don't know. Plus a long term visioning. So that's – did I answer all those questions?

Mr. McMoran: Yeah, and others can fill in too. Andrea?

Ms. Xaver: Well, first of all there has been mentioned several times: It's the soil. Some of the richest in the world, and not too many places can say that. And then I'd like to chime in with what Annie has said about all the crops that are being grown and the weather and so forth. And it's written down but I'll mention it, that I'm on the Farmland Legacy Program with the County and I've been on that program since 2007, and we've saved over 14,000 acres of farmland from conversion to other uses. And that's pretty critical because, like I say, we keep losing it. But then I believe the county is also known for – when you drive around and take a look at farmland, you're also looking off into the distance and you see not only the farms but you see forestland, you see places to fish, you see wildlife that's settled – comes in in the wintertime and they tromp around and our little birds and fly around on the farmland and so forth. So you see the wildlife, you see their habitat, and you see incredible views that are uncluttered by something that looks like the Kent Valley.

Mr. McMoran: Thanks, Andrea. I know Jessie wants to add her father's berry crop as well as brassica production into this list of the mix. So Jessie, go ahead.

Ms. Anderson: Yes, let's! Yeah, I would say definitely on top of being known for tulips and the beauty and the history, berries – strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, blackberries, cucumbers, cauliflower, of course potatoes. There's just a tremendous amount of incredible food that is grown here. And the history. But I think it's interesting that, you know, currently just within a few miles of my small farm there is, you know, an alpaca farm that has – that sells in a little shop on their property they sell hand-made woolen goods. There's an apple cider barn that sells fresh-pressed cider. There's a nursery that sells plants. And then my family has two farmstands on Fir Island and there are others. My venue – there are other venues. You know, with the farmland there are also agritourism businesses that have grown locally and they're contributing to the local economy. And they're also a method to teach visitors about the rich history that we have here. We have guests that attend events at our venue that have never seen farmland, that don't know how their food is grown. They don't know how important it is to buy local. And getting those visitors to come and see how special the valley is and how important it is to preserve it is important too. And so I think agritourism can work together with the farms to achieve, you know, mutual goals.

Mr. McMoran: Right. Thank you, Jessie.

Ms. Anderson: Yeah.

Mr. McMoran: And Leo, I know we missed some flower production because you do more than tulips.

Mr. Roozen: To the question: Okay, what makes the valley special? My dad always said it's God's country. And so what does that mean? I mean, but if you look, we've got this mild maritime climate. As people ask me, I just go down the list. We've got the rich – the silty loam and the clay loam soils. We've got the temperature-buffering breezes or winds that just – they don't just protect us from the high and low temperatures but so many other things that don't like those breezes and winds: aphids and that type of thing; bugs that – you know, some of those things – it keeps things – it helps us. If you go down, we have a moderate amount of rainfall at the right times. At times we have to do a little bit of irrigating but not necessarily that much. So then you go into the crops. Where else do you have a diversity of crops? We've mentioned a lot of them, but what it shows us is we're growing 80 to 100 different kinds of crops here. We've got vegetable seed production, grain crops, vegetable crops, ___ crops, and dairy, beef livestock, horticultural crops, nursery crops, forage crops, rotation crops, and you can go on and on. It shows that what is the valley special for, what's it known for – it is truly unique in a lot of ways. With what can be done here – and when we talk about sustainability, what *has* been done in the early days with the pioneers and what *can* be done in the future, *if* we have – what we're known for – a lot of farm ground. We're known. The county and county-supported organizations have been very proactive in their approach to preserving and protecting farmland. We're *known* for that. Nothing that anybody's talked about here is going to continue if we don't preserve and protect the farmland. But maybe as important as anything is, we're known to have the cooperation of all these different agricultural producers that are growing all these different kinds of crops or raising livestock or nursery products or whatever. These people are all working together in cooperation towards a common goal to try to help every other individual succeed – trading ground, working, renting. Doing all the things that you all do – and I'm talking to the choir in a lot of respects. But, yeah, that's not that common either. And so we're known for that cooperative, proactive, really cutting edge thinking that is really outside the realm of maybe some people in agriculture. But I think this valley is setting an example in that, you know?

Mr. McMoran: That's great. So the next question is: How would you like Skagit County to showcase these things to visitors and residents?

Mr. Roozen: Well, you know, it comes down to, you know, the who, what, why, where, when, how. I mean, okay, who do we want to showcase this to? I mean, who are the visitors? And *what* do we want to showcase? And where are we going to do this? Are we going to do it in some auditorium or are we going to do it on the farms or on venues? When are we going to do it? Is it going to be seasonal or are we going to do it year around? And why are we going to do it? Well, one of the main reasons maybe we want to do it is because – I might touch on it a minute – is we're going to survive in ag, you know, you go back 75 years, 50% of America was rural. Today we're talking about 1% of the people that are producing all these crops.

Well, if we're going to do it, why are we going to do it? Because we need to educate. We need to show people what we're doing. We need to inform people. How are we going to do that? Well, I guess – how would we – I can only talk to what – we've learned a little bit in our companies. We need to provide information on the products that we produce or grow and sell in the world. We need to produce information on those. You know, how are they available? Where can they be purchased? How are they grown? I don't necessarily – I'm not going to go into this, but we have – we produce – we've got a website that we've got frequently asked questions that I think we're going to have to address if we want to get into agritourism and stuff. The questions that most people have – there's about 20 questions that most people have about almost anything, and if we're going to do that, how are we going to – we're going to have to make a commitment. The county and people involved in how this develops down the road, they're going to have to make a

commitment, and that's going to take a lot of time and thought and human resources and money and effort. That can be beneficial to everyone but that's – I'm just here maybe to share a little bit of what we've learned and the things that we've been involved in, the Family Farm Festival and the Tulip Festival. And we've learned a lot about people. And people want to know what we're doing and, really, our salvation is in education. The more people know about what we're doing and why we're doing it – and I'll get into it at one of the later questions, the complexities involved and that type of thing – the more they respect that and understand that there are parameters that we all have to live within. There's common ground we have to find and there's give and take. And so this is – I think this is – as I've watched this thing develop over the last few years and where it's going, I think that's going to be a key.

Mr. McMoran: Jessie, I'll repeat the question for you.

Ms. Anderson: Sure.

Mr. McMoran: How would you like Skagit County to showcase these things to visitors and residents?

Ms. Anderson: That's a good question. I think it's important for the County to support farms of all sizes and be open to agritourism businesses to support the local economy and also, you know, what was recently discussed, the partnerships that we have with our neighbors and other business owners. Support that network. And I think it's important to realize that with the many challenges that farms continue to face in this day and age, we have to be open to new ideas and new sources of income and education – overtime laws, regulations, competition from larger conglomerates, global warming. These are just a handful of the many things that family farms are facing. And so agritourism is a way to provide an opportunity for additional resources, income, and education not only within the valley but to those who visit it.

Mr. McMoran: Great. Thank you. So Andrea, how would you like Skagit County to showcase agriculture to visitors and residents?

Ms. Xaver: Well, I agree with Mr. Roozen: from the perspective of education. I think there's been a big shortfall within the state educational system of telling kids or educating kids about all of our resources, whether that's farms, fishing, forestry, or what have you. And I see the same problem here in Washington in Skagit County. There needs to be more education available on a regular basis to remind kids, because you usually have to tell people three times before they remember anything. Certainly me, anyway. But more education for kids so they know what's going on in this county. And agritourism: There again I get a little – kind of get a chill because I don't know. Like I said, we don't know enough about what the future might bring or what this really means for agritourism and how it might impact us. So we need more details. How many more of these sites are we going to have? How much parking is going to be needed on farmland? What will the traffic do? Will there be more traffic – an increase? Is it going to make it hard for the farmers to run up and down the roads with their tractors and equipment, or are they going to be stuck in a traffic jam? We need more details. Meanwhile, you could put people on a bus and drive them around Skagit County. Maybe they'd learn a thing or two here and there. That'd actually be kind of fun as long as they don't get off the bus and go onto the wrong farm and get run over by a tractor.

Mr. McMoran: Thanks, Andrea. Annie?

Ms. Lohman: I guess I took the question literally. How would you like Skagit County to showcase these things? And I've been elsewhere – other states – and I've been to some large cities where

they've got an ag showcase and they're proud of their agriculture or their community, and we really don't have anything. We don't have anything in downtown Mount Vernon, for example, or Burlington that is dedicated to this ag community. We kind of let it go piecemeal and let the farmers or those that have venues kind of take that ball, but it's kind of destroying it. There might be a map showing where a variety of U-Pics or opportunities are, but really we don't have anything coordinated that's year around. And, you know, for me, I'm never going anywhere in the summer, so is there something that somebody could do in the winter? We don't really have anything. And I'm kind of reluctant to pass that baton and put the onus on government, and so I would almost rather see the ag groups – and we have a whole bunch of them – take on that task and figure out how to staff it or do something, rather than rely on a government entity to do it.

I think about when my daughter was an intern for Donnie at Extension. She was the only OSU student at WSU; I thought that was pretty funny back then. Anyway, but she had the job of doing the voice for that agritourism sign as you come into Skagit – that blue information sign. Maybe we need some more placards. I know there's a little bit of placarding around La Conner where it shows what's growing in the crops. Well, if you down to Oregon you see placards as you're going down I-5 along the fence lines or along the right-of-way there saying what's in the fields. Maybe we should consider expanding that to not just be along around La Conner but maybe out towards Bow-Edison and out towards Sedro-Woolley and, you know, kind of broaden that so it's a little more than just people driving by – you know, *while* they're driving by. Maybe they'll look and see.

So I guess I go back to I just don't want to put the whole onus on Skagit County.

Mr. McMoran: Fair enough. Terry?

Mr. Sapp: Yeah, thanks. I don't want to repeat the things that people have already said and the people out in the audience here probably already know and maybe jointly believe about Skagit County. And Don, I'd really like to think maybe we could – or maybe I'm going to jump offside and get a penalty here, but I'd like to think that with our precious time here, and people who have come to visit or listen and offer ideas perhaps, that we could dig into the weeds a little deeper here. And I want to do that because on the Ag Board we've spent a lot of hours and a lot of time trying to dig into some very serious policy issues, and I know that we're going to go into a legislative writing stage. The Growth Management Act is going to have a very big impact on what we do here in this county. Other counties have tried. Cases have gone before the Growth Management Hearings Boards that are instructive. And so I'm hoping we can get some dialogue going. I think –

Mr. McMoran: I think we get there.

Mr. Sapp: Okay, as long as we don't run out. I don't want to –

Mr. McMoran: We're scheduled to go to 8 p.m., so...

Mr. Sapp: Yeah.

Mr. McMoran: Yeah.

Mr. Sapp: So yeah, all good in ag land in Skagit County and I support it, and I like education. I think that's one of the real important parts that isn't left out of the ag tourism discussion too much and not well enough focused about how we can produce an educative element to add to how people participate here.

Mr. McMoran: Yeah. So the next question might start you down that thread. What might be a threat to the county? So it says: What might be a threat to what makes the county a special place for agriculture?

Mr. Sapp: Yeah. So yeah, you threw the flag on me. I think that agriculture is heavily threatened by many forces coming from many directions. In other forums where I have participated, the discussion is housing. And I know that's an essential issue for the Commissioners as well and county policy-making. It's a *big* threat to agriculture. You need places to build houses. Ag has land. It's an obvious choice. And now I don't want to deter our thinking here, but I'm looking out and I see Commissioner Wesen. Amazing that I'm here speaking to you! It befuddles me!

(laughter)

Mr. Sapp: But I know the policy issues are great and the direct challenges to agriculturalists are great. They're huge in my little community. It's called **SkyU**, halfway between those two places out there – Sedro-Woolley and Lyman – where ag land is being consumed for a variety of other kinds of things. Not housing and not agritourism, but one of the things that's creeping in that I see is the use of ag lands, barn yards becoming construction business zones. The excavators and the dump trucks and the aggregates and the things – obvious good place for those kinds of businesses. They're not agriculture. They are business. They are sources of employment. But the vectors or the directions from which the intention to use agricultural lands for non-agricultural things is tremendous, and we all know by reading the newspaper that building an airport out there is one of them. So they're innumerable. And I think it was said someplace, you know, we just have to put our stake in the ground and address all of them.

Mr. McMoran: Annie?

Ms. Lohman: I think – as I said earlier, I think perception that the majority of the valley is available is a threat and that it's potentially loved to death. Everybody wants to come and live here. I see on our local Bow-Edison group and various ones there's constantly – and I don't mean this in a bad way. People want to live here because we've done a really good job of keeping it as a rural place. We're on the tipping point of switching over from being a rural county to suburban, and that's a completely different mindset, completely – that's a paradigm shift from rural to suburban, and I think we need to think long and hard about do we want to be that. And I feel that is a threat because it's a shift, a major shift.

I also think there's a lot of pressure in the ag community. There's thin margins in any given year. Some years, I mean, you have a banner year and other years it's pretty grim. And you've got labor issues, you've got capital gains, you've got taxes, you've got all these pressures, and farmers tend to be individuals and we don't talk about that stuff much by ourself. So there's a ton of personal pressure on each of our farms. And so that, in a way, kind of contributes to that threat. And I don't want to be a Debbie Downer here, but I also think about the urban vise that we're in between the north and the south, and that's a real thing. And it was really apparent during COVID because people tended to stay home. They didn't stay home! You should have seen Chuckanut Drive! I mean, Burlington and Mount Vernon were ghost towns. They were all up on Chuckanut, where I happen to farm. And that kind of – that COVID kind of revealed that people could live further away from their workplace and kind of telecommute or Zoom or do whatever. Where we farmers, we're already working at home and I have this *five-second* commute. So that incompatible suburban-rural-urban dynamic that I can't really articulate it very well but I hope you kind of get the feel. The other thing is I feel a need to have some cautions about injecting

incompatible uses. There's an awful lot of what you could call agritourism that is absolutely compatible, but there's also incompatible uses that could be packaged and sold as agritourism or tangentially related to the farm that create incompatibility, and it will always be the farm that ends up having to buffer, set aside property and step back, and I view that as a major threat. Because if you can't take care of your crop you can't make a living and you will fail.

Mr. McMoran: Andrea, care to add to threats?

Ms. Xaver: Yeah, I agree with you, Annie. And the other thing that could happen, of course, is the rezoning because that's already happened. And then in the east of I-5, there've been the threats on farmland because of wild animals. The elk. The elk have come in here and have been imported and so forth and other things, and they're being threatened by hoof rot. And nobody really seems to care except the farmers. Where's all the people who call themselves – and I don't mean to take offense to anybody, but call themselves environmentalists or fish and wildlife people that care about the animals. But they don't do anything about the hoof rot and it continues to spread and it goes and will affect anything that has hooves. So some of these farmers upriver are going to be driven off their property because of all the damage so far from the elk and other animals that want to come in and take over. And then the people who love to come here and take a look, and they move here and so on. They move here to get away from it all but they bring it with them. So hence we have further rezoning issues, possibly. And then upriver, like I mentioned, people will be forced off their farms because they can't farm them anymore – too much damage. So they're going to give up and go away. So I always wonder, What's behind the scenes? Is it someone who wants to move here and then develop everything we have? Then you can kiss farming goodbye in Skagit County.

Mr. McMoran: Thanks, Andrea. Jessie? Threats.

Ms. Anderson: So when I thought about threats, I definitely thought of development, pavement, buildings, things that are, you know, permanent or semi-permanent and they do detract from farming. And since the valley has, you know, such a limited amount of sacred farmland, development is really what I think of when I think of a major threat. And just in my own personal experience, I haven't seen farmstands and U-Pick operations – I'm looking at the list here – the tasting rooms, wedding venues, farm stays. I have not seen those putting down pavement or taking away farmland. I see them working in small areas, you know, *nearby* farms or maybe it is a small farm running an operation on their farm. But they're not paving, taking away farmland. It does seem like there is a great fear about, you know, what we could lose and the challenges for agriculture here, but I don't see a direct connection between many of the local agritourism operations and those – you know, the pavement and development.

Mr. McMoran: Okay. Leo, threats?

Mr. Roozen: Well, I think that probably we've touched on most things but no doubt overdevelopment and conflicting businesses in the farmland community, businesses that conflict with farms in farmland are threats. Loss of agricultural diversity is a threat. Loss of farming operations and/or related ag-related businesses is a threat. But maybe the greatest threat could be a lack of the understanding by the greater part of our population the complexity of our agricultural infrastructure here in Skagit Valley. I mean, really what is that whole big infrastructure and how complex is it? What's all involved in – what is needed to ensure our continuity into the future? That's probably the biggest threat – the lack of the general population understanding that big picture. And I think maybe that will – I felt when I made these notes that that kind of plays into our next questions.

Mr. McMoran: It does. In fact, the next question is: What does agritourism mean to you and what are the types of agritourism you'd *want* to see in Skagit County?

Mr. Roozen: Well, I'm not going to try to reinvent the wheel on this one. I've kind of followed some of these discussions over time and I know there's numerous definitions of agritourism. One was up on the screen earlier, and I think just a little more technically, I'm just reading one that I think fits our thoughts. "Agritourism can be defined as a form of commercial enterprise that links agricultural production and/or processing with tourism in order to attract visitors onto a ranch, a farm, or an agricultural business for the purpose of entertaining and educating the visitors, and generating income for the farm or business owner." I really do believe that the days of that – of *no* tourism of any type are gone, and so the key down the road is going to be for us to define, What is agritourism? What of all the definitions of agritourism are we talking about? And that was the definition that I thought worked best for our type of thinking. That'll play into, of course – is this a two-part question: What types of agritourism would you like to see?

Mr. McMoran: Yeah.

Mr. Roozen: Well, again I'm not going to try to come up with something unique again. We obviously – our farm and our businesses are members of Skagitonians to Protect Farmland. And I think they have a feeling – they have a position that any kind of agritourism must be tied to an ongoing farming operation and be evaluated by the following criteria: It must relate to and support the primary use of agriculture at the site. It does not interfere with the surrounding agricultural operations and practices. It will provide experiences that promote and enhance Skagit agriculture overall. It does not result in the conversion of agricultural land. Done properly – we talked about education earlier. How do you get to all these people? How do you get them to listen to you? Well, there are people coming *to us*. And to build the infrastructure of auditoriums or facilities or that type of thing to educate these people, we've got an infrastructure here. It's called Skagit Valley Agriculture. And we've got damn good professors and teachers. It's all the guys running these businesses. And so if there's a certain amount of agritourism done properly and obviously with limitations and fit the guidelines that are agreed upon down the road that that's what this whole process is about, we've got a very, very unique opportunity in this valley to – without advertising or trying to get – the public, they're coming to us and they're hungry for knowledge. And they're very impressed by what all of you people are doing, what we're doing in our professions every day, and the more they learn the more they are impressed. And I think, done properly, we are on the road to protecting our farmland and we're on the road to protecting agriculture and we're on the road to protecting our future for generations to come. But it will need to be done with – I guess the definition is, What is agritourism and what are we going to do? And I just personally I think most of the people in our companies agree with these basic bullet points that Skagitonians has said numerous times in the past years of this is what they're all about. And I know there's much, much more and there're people in this room that know way more about this than I do, because I'm just kind of trying to stay up with it all in what we're doing in our everyday businesses, but that's kind of our feelings, I think.

Mr. McMoran: Great. Jessie?

Ms. Anderson: Well, I guess to me agritourism means businesses located on farms, related to farms, or that are located nearby agricultural lands. And I really do believe that these businesses can exist in harmony with local farms and promote economic strength, growth, and education. And that's what I've seen with my own personal experience. The guests that attend our venue are hungry to learn about the valley. They want to walk the grounds. They want to see the land.

They're curious about what's being grown right around the farm, what we have in our field. They want to know about it. Some of them have never seen it firsthand and they leave, you know, getting to spread this to others. So that's what agritourism means to me, and I think if it's, you know, done right it can be a very positive thing.

Mr. McMoran: And any specific types of agritourism that you want to see in Skagit County?

Ms. Anderson: Well, I would say definitely the agritourism operations that, you know, can coexist well with the farms and promote the protection of farmland. The agritourism businesses that I mentioned before that are right in my own neighborhood all seem to be doing very well, you know, with the neighboring farms, or many of them are small farms themselves. And I personally have not seen conflict or negative impacts. It's been a positive coexistence.

Mr. McMoran: Okay. Thanks, Jessie. Andrea?

Ms. Xaver: Yeah, I would agree with that. I think, you know, it has to have a positive influence and no negative impacts. And there again, we need more details. How many more of these are being planned and would that actually boil down to harming Skagit County? How many do we need?

Mr. McMoran: Annie?

Ms. Lohman: I think this is probably the toughest question on the page because I don't want to presume to tell somebody what they should be doing any more than I want somebody to tell me what I should be doing and what I should be growing or what color cow, whether it be a Holstein or Jersey, et cetera. So it's tough. I guess my – and I'm damn independent and I don't want to take that away from anybody else. And I'm not a person that enjoys working with the public so I *want* to be on the tractor or the combine. I don't want to be doing a farmstand or running a corn maize and that sort of thing, because that's not me. But it *is* other people. And I understand that and I accept that.

But I guess I would want it to be absolutely tied to the farm. It can't interfere with the neighbors. It can't prevent the greater area from doing their normal business. And I say that very carefully because sometimes we make a heck of a mess. I raise spinach. It is one of the dirtiest things to combine. You don't always get to pick your day. You have to kind of seize the opportunity sometimes, and the wind doesn't always blow your way. And you don't *want* to be a bad neighbor, and I've actually knocked on people's doors and asked them if they wanted to bring in their laundry because I know I'm going to dust it. And I can't help it. So it just has to be carefully thought out and located and – and I'm just kind of thinking back on what Leo said earlier about we're unique in our cooperation, and it extends to that, too. And I'm still struggling with it, but I guess limited with an absolute direct farm linkage.

Mr. McMoran: Thanks, Annie. And I did want to make mention that a lot of the words that Leo shared with you were created by Terry Sapp. Some of those regulations that he and the committee – the Land Use Committee with the Ag Advisory Board – put together. So Terry, I want to thank you for spending the time on that effort.

Mr. Sapp: You're welcome. And yes, I think some of Leo's words were borrowed from the Skagitonians' position paper also. But in answer to the question, I'd start by saying I got very interested in this topic for reasons personal that – this is the personal hat now – that have been described here in part with my wife Jeannie by some of our efforts on our farm. I realized that the

topic was becoming central to discussions in this county by reading the newspaper and going to meetings, and wrote a nine-page letter to the County who was – the party who was leading the topic at that time in its initial stage, coining a phrase at the beginning of my paper which established myself as a proponent of agritourism, big A, little t. Big A, little t agritourism, I intended to mean and went on to try to explain, it's got to be agriculturally related. Agriculture first. Introduce tourism as it might fit those conditions in a general way.

Since that time, I've become increasingly involved not just through the Ag Board but my own personal interest in studying – and I mentioned it earlier – some of the very nitty gritty sometimes dirty details that have to do with how state law directs counties to use their zoning authority and powers to determine what can be done in certain places within a county. And I think, as the discussion evolves, we're going to see – and I think Lisa helped queue this up here – that it has to do with zoning. What zones do we do certain things in? That's the foundation of our land use mechanisms for development in our counties, and it is by nature of the state's *requirement* upon counties. And the state invokes some rules about how zoning can be used within those defined kinds. And in this case, mostly our talk would lead us to trying to evaluate what we do in the agricultural zone. So the big A, Agricultural zone, and what kind of tourism might fit in there. We cannot avoid that. It's going to be a zoning question. It has to be a zoning question. State law requires that it's a zoning question. And so when we start rewriting, when the rules and guidelines and definitions in law and County code begin to be written down on paper and the details are established, we're going to see that it is a question of how we create allowances in certain zones. There are lots of businesses and lots of things we can do that can be sited anywhere – all good things. The big question is going to be: Shall we do them, or which of them shall we do in the ag zone and what shall be reserved for other uses in the ag zone? Mainly the kinds that fit agriculture. So big A, little t. And indeed – I'm not going to go to it right now exactly what the Agricultural Advisory Board policy position was on that zoning question – what to do in the ag zone – but I'm sure we'll get to it. I certainly want to offer it.

Mr. McMoran: Sounds good. Lisa, do you have a question?

Ms. Grueter: Yeah, I just wanted to say we wanted to reserve a little time for audience questions, so I'd like to make a plug: If people do have a question to maybe write it on the back of the postcard. We'll pick it up at the end. While we're doing that, Don, I thought if you want to pick a couple of questions and kind of do a last round, then we can take some from the audience, if that works for you.

Mr. McMoran: That sounds fabulous. All right, so next question – I was kind of hoping we could wrap it all up because Terry really led into this well – is, What is the best way to ensure agritourism is related to the primary use of the land for agriculture? And with that, What are the opportunities and challenges of things like tasting rooms, restaurants, wedding events, and special events? So Terry, you already kind of led us in. Let's start with one of the ladies to lead into that.

Ms. Lohman: Well, the challenge is expectations. When you go to a restaurant, when you have a wedding, there's a bit of a heightened emotional situation, especially on a wedding. There's expectations that you're going to have a pristine, perfect day and a perfect view, but your neighbor might be doing their regular stuff and it's going to rain the next day and they don't have a choice. They're not doing it to wreck the day. They really aren't. They just don't get to pick. And that collision is what I fear or am cautious about, because I don't want to be a bad neighbor, I don't want to ruin someone's day. I got married. I've eaten at a restaurant that was pretty fancy. And so I don't want those ruined for them, but I also – I've got to pay my bills. I put everything in that crop. I need to be able to do my work.

Mr. McMoran: Good. Others?

Ms. Anderson: Well, I guess I would just elaborate on that. And I completely see where you're coming from. I do think it's important when families, businesses, organizations book a wedding at a farm venue they understand that it is a farm venue. And when I give tours of our venue, we talk about the planting, the harvest, what's going to be grown, and we're very transparent about the fact that my husband's family is farming that land actively and that may be taking place when we're hosting an event. My husband and I will also be farming acreage right around the venue ourselves and so, you know, it's a juggle but it's something that can be done with communication and understanding. And it has not presented an issue for our venue. Thus far we were able to work together with our neighbors and our clients to, you know, achieve our goals.

Mr. McMoran: Jenn, do you have some questions?

Jenn Rogers: We do.

Mr. McMoran: Go ahead.

Ms. Rogers: Okay, so the first question is: Farmers file a Schedule F, so if someone is a farmer by that definition and isn't taking any land out of agriculture, should they be told what else they can or cannot do on their farm to ensure their financial future and be able to maintain or sustain their farm?

Mr. Sapp: Sure, they should be told what to do. I know that's not popular. I know it's not the property rights position. But it's a position that needs to be stated. That's why we have zoning. Zoning determines its sites. It is written into law. It is the code in every county. Our county has code that says what can be done in a certain zone. And no, because somebody is a farmer and owns land, it doesn't mean automatically that they can do anything else they want.

Mr. McMoran: Any others want to comment on that question?

Mr. Roozen: I would agree with that, and there would be a process. Does that mean that an individual can't do anything else? I think it was well stated and then there is a process and I think these discussions are part of fine-tuning or developing or drilling down on that process because there seems to be a lot of gray area out there now. And so as this is done, there would be a process that an individual would go through to see if they would qualify to do the things they wanted to do on that land. If I understand how this is all supposed to go properly, so can we – that thing – it's a free country. I can do whatever I want. That is not so. Our country is the way it is because we have processes and rules and regulations and we follow those and we respect them and we honor them and if we need to change them we modify them. And so I think that the answer was probably good.

Mr. Sapp: And if I could just add a point. We're not at the starting point on this matter of policy. That happened 100 years ago. Get current. We have laws in place right now that deal with what we can do with our lands, not just in the ag zone – in the industrial zones. There're a series of rules about what can be done in the industrial zones. Or the residential zones, for that matter. You can't build any kind of house you want. Why can't I build whatever kind of house I want – 10 stories tall? Well, because there are rules about that and we didn't just make them up last year. It's 100 years old.

Mr. McMoran: Thanks, Terry. Next question, Jenn.

Ms. Rogers: Okay. Aren't commodity farming pressures and regulatory interference the real threats to agribusinesses' viability in Skagit County? And why aren't we talking more about how to create new customers and allies in our urban neighboring communities?

Mr. Roozen: Could you say that one more time?

Ms. Rogers: Aren't commodity farming pressures and regulatory interference the real threats to agribusiness viability in Skagit County? And why aren't we talking more about how to create new customers and allies in our urban neighboring communities?

Mr. Roozen: I think those are threats. The question that was asked, those are real threats. But if I understand correctly, that's not the purpose of what we're addressing here. There could be numerous – the way I understand it, there could be numerous town hall meetings and discussion groups and that type of thing about threats to agriculture in the Skagit Valley, but the purpose of what I understood what we're doing here and where we're trying to go with this particular topic is focused on agritourism. And so there could be a whole other one focused on any number of other threats. But my understanding is that we – if we start bouncing all over, we're never going to get anyplace. So I would suggest we stay with the topic of agritourism.

Mr. McMoran: Looks like we have agreement. I'm seeing some head nods. Next question.

Ms. Rogers: In philosophy it's called the wedge theory. The phenomenon has also been called "creep." Common usage: Give a person an inch and they will take a mile. How can policy be written so that people do not take a mile and keep expanding the agritourism activities? For example, more events, more days of events, more visitors, et cetera.

Mr. Sapp: Exactly! How could that be stated rhetorically more clearly? We're all driven, I think most of us. Anybody who has any entrepreneurial spirit is driven by the idea that we're going to do something *new* or *more* or more *productive* next year when we get some time to do it. And so the individual drive, I think, motivates us to run up against the rules all the time. And, darn it, those rules keep getting in the way and that's why we're here. We're trying to – this county has already established all of the rules about agritourism that you would wish to know. They're in the law. They're already in the books. This county has a law that says that temporary events have to be sited in such a way that they are on existing developed property of no more than one acre. Now I look out at my field and I can tell you how much is five acres and – that's 10 acres, I say to – that field out there, Jeannie, we're driving by is – that's about 10 acres. One acre is 208 feet square – on a side – 43,658 square feet, I believe.

Mr. McMoran: 43,560.

(laughter)

Mr. Sapp: Our professor from Washington State University! But it's 208 feet to the east and another 208 feet north.

Mr. McMoran: And for those that aren't aware, it's about the size of a football field without the end zones.

Unidentified Voice: Right.

Mr. Sapp: The existing law says it's not only *County* law, it's *state* law. Growth Management Act, 36.70A.177 says you get an acre when you Counties zone for non-farm accessory uses. You know, we could all be here trying to legislate policy and think what's good for our county or business or agritourism or farming. We aren't starting today. There's already law about this. Are we following the law? That's why we're here. We're not following the law.

Unidentified Voice: We're here to bend the law.

Mr. Sapp: So I admire the tremendous work that BERK Consulting has done and the County staff has done revolving as it is and we start again. We already have a law. I don't think it's acceptable to a lot of entrepreneurs who are out there doing things that aren't within an acre or don't satisfy another 15 of the rules. But that's what we're trying to figure out until we rewrite the rules.

Ms. Anderson: Well, it sounds like we do need to keep an open mind because things have changed, I mean, since the rules were created. I mean, my great-grandfather settled my parents' farm after the Civil War. It's a different time now, and it sounds like we're here to discuss how things are changing, and there will be changes made to the laws. We need to respect them but also keep an open mind because our needs are changing. It's a changing economic landscape and that's reality.

Mr. Sapp: Can we have a little dialogue? I totally agree with that, except that it's not like let's just make it up new. There's state law in place right now.

Ms. Anderson: Sure.

Mr. Sapp: Go talk to your legislator who wrote the Growth Management Act and ask them why they put one acre in there and if they'd like to change it please.

Ms. Anderson: Well, it sounds like Skagit County is working to, you know –

Mr. Sapp: They can only go as far as the state allows because a higher, greater law.

Ms. Anderson: Yeah. Absolutely.

Ms. Xaver: Well, and you need a certain amount of farmland too. If you have big farms, you've got to have enough for crop rotation and all the things that big farmers need. And if you start chipping away at some of these bigger farms, then they can't exist either. So you can't keep saying, Okay, we'll do an acre here and an acre there and an acre over there, and so on and so forth, and pretty soon you're impeding the work and the viability of the farmers that do contribute so much to this county.

Mr. Roozen: Well, to comment on what's been said – what Jessie said: I think there's – the way I see it, there's some gray area out there and there are people that have bent the rules and bent the laws, and what I understand this process is all about here is that we just maybe need to upgrade and maybe some updates need to be made or discussed because there's no better guaranty for failure than – that's what's – there's an evolution – whether we're talking about sustainability – what sustainability was called a hundred years ago and what it's called today is different. It's still very sustainable, and for agriculture in Skagit Valley to continue to be sustainable and for us to do what we want to do, that's the purpose of why we're here to have dialogue and have discussion and to say, Okay, where do we want to go and what are we trying to do and is there room for updates or improvements? And, you know, some people are – you can't satisfy all

the people all the time. But you have to – we have to continue. I mean, that’s what life’s about. When there’s enough noise and there’s enough – I don’t want to say dissension, but there’s enough disagreement on – and different factions start going like this, it’s time to get together and say, Hey, we need to talk about this. And what do we want to do and how are we going to get where we want to get and still continue to have what we want to have?

And so you’re right. I mean, until we do that, the law’s the law, you know? That old story that until we – that’s why we’re here. That’s how our country’s built. If we don’t like it we have to get involved in the process and try to make changes. And until that’s done, the law’s the law. The rules are the rules. But we are here for that and I don’t think it’s – this has been going on for a while and I think it’s going to continue. I personally – for those that want a fast fix, I think there’s going to be disappointment because it’s real hard. And the more you get involved and start digging in, you know, the more stuff that comes up. And done improperly, we’ve all seen new rules and new regulations that are passed and then there’s unintended consequences that we just didn’t see. We didn’t want that. We didn’t expect that. So thus the discussion. And sometimes maybe debate and maybe even, you know, a little bit of emotion involved. But I’ve followed a lot of this stuff. I haven’t been to a lot of these. I’ve never sat up here. But I do think it’s good stuff and I encourage everybody here to – I know there’s some very, very active people in this room that are saying to me right now: Why don’t you just shut up because you’re not here half the time.

(laughter)

Mr. Roozen: You’re not here half the time and I am, and so why do you have anything to say? But, you know, that’s the way the world works. I mean, there’s a lot of people out there and it’s not just the 10 or 15% that show up that can make all the rules. We have to be aware of all the people out there and all the factors and then we have to encourage input or you get unintended consequences and then you get big problems.

Mr. McMoran: Agreed. Go ahead, Annie.

Ms. Lohman: You touch on kind of a very uncomfortable question: How to deal with creep. Because in one area somebody’s creep doesn’t bother anybody. They don’t – they’re really good people and they’re accepted in the neighborhood and it works for whatever reason even though we know it’s creep, if you want to call it that. And I don’t mean “creep” as in “creepy.” But in another place not far from there it’s a train wreck. And then you get the guy that *is* following the rules and he gets the book thrown at him and he can’t hardly operate. He can’t hardly get going. He can’t do the project because it’s too onerous. And yet another guy, because of creep or stealth – whatever you want to call it – is able to do exactly what this other guy wants to do legally permitted. Legally and permitted.

So I don’t know how to address it. And I don’t – and it’s a challenge of being fair. The visual that comes to mind is when my daughter, who is very headstrong, was a little girl and I would say, Don’t come any closer, and she would inch closer and I would say – and she would want to know, Is it still wrong? Is it still no? And I feel that way when you’re talking about creep. And the challenge with it is it can become permanent and then you finally – regulation or authority comes to bear on it to make – and then the challenge is what do you do with it? It’s established. And if you just codify it and make it allowed, is that good public policy? And that’s the question and it’s way above my pay grade. And that balance, I don’t know how you deal with it.

But as I was listening to all the discussion and the question and trying to keep the question on the table, I want to make sure, though, that that arguably non-ag creep structure or whatever doesn’t

inadvertently marginalize or subordinate the farm activity that's all surrounding it. And that's the danger of creep, when the venue gets bigger and bigger and bigger or the numbers get bigger and bigger. And let's be honest. We farmers are outnumbered. We are vastly outvoted. We are absolutely in the minority. And that's a reality. And so we're able to be here actually by the good will of the vast majority. And we can't hide from that bald-faced fact.

Mr. Sapp: I've got a good example of creep and it comes from another county so we don't have to point at each other or blame one another. It's King County. And Lisa knows this very well. In King County they had a great **interfuge** (sic) of creep, if you will, with wineries, breweries, and distilleries. So this became a big issue in King County and Sammamish Valley. It's basically near Woodinville, where wineries were set up and tasting rooms and things, and it was a hit for tourism. And then they grew outside of Woodinville and into the Sammamish Valley – the rural area which has special zoning by the County, of course – and became a conflict with agriculturalists. An effort was made in that county like we are making here to try to discern what should the rules be. A study was done in 2016, I believe it was begun, that led to further study. Fifty-four winery, brewery, or distillery institutions or enterprises were operating outside of city limits in the rural zone in King County. Fifty-four of them. Fifty of them, the study determined, were *illegal*. The County just wasn't paying attention. In they crept. They were small businesses in garages, in barns, in backyards. Fifty out of 54 did not meet the code. Now what's King County – pardon me again – King County going to do about this? Oh my God. So legislation was written, it was challenged, it went to the Growth Management Board, it came back, it went to the Superior Court, came back. The Growth Management Hearings Board invalidated the law – invalidated King County's rules for wineries, breweries, and distilleries – WBDs – and remote tasting rooms. Another part of the creep was that these garage enterprises set up and brought wine from eastern Washington. And then they became restaurants. Way out of bounds! So poor King County is in the midst now of having *no* ordinance about this because the Growth Management Board invalidated it. Invalidated it both for Growth Management and for State Environmental Protection reasons because they didn't meet what they were supposed to do in the ag lands to meet environmental requirements because they were enterprises that were running sewer and water and all this stuff. No one was watching. Now they've got a mess.

Mr. McMoran: Thanks for that example, Terry. We're down to our last two minutes so we can take one more question and then we'll close things out, because we did agree that we would close things out at 8 o'clock.

Ms. Rogers: Thank you, Don. What is the proper channel for noise complaints regarding alcohol-related gatherings other than informing the Skagit County Sheriff's Office? I'm happy to answer that on behalf of the County.

Mr. McMoran: Go ahead!

Ms. Rogers: We do have a code enforcement team, so that is something that you could call Planning and Development Services that's got some code enforcement. But if there's any other dialogue about noise that you might have? That's our last question.

Mr. McMoran: Anyone?

(silence)

Mr. McMoran: Maybe another question?

(laughter)

Ms. Rogers: That's the last of our questions.

Mr. McMoran: Okay, perfect.

Ms. Rogers: So maybe one more question from the prepared ones, if you'd like?

Mr. McMoran: We could take maybe one from the audience?

Unidentified Voce: (unintelligible)

Ms. Rogers: If you'd like to provide a comment or a question, can you come up to the mic just so anyone that's watching online can hear?

Same Unidentified Voice: Will I be loud enough right here?

Ms. Rogers: No, you will not.

Owen _____: It's very brief. Hi, my name is Owen _____. Thanks for taking my question. I'm glad to see all these good people in this room and hopefully we can come to some good solutions. I'm sure we will. These people are quite bright in here. I think it's pretty unique. I'm going off-topic here but I think it's pretty unique to get these people in this room here right now. And I think Leo said earlier, these farmers are very bright people so I'm sure we'll get good solutions if we all participate. The question would be: On the enforcement part, is there consideration on the County to eliminate the non-anonymous complaint system? I see a lot of code violations. We've talked about them. There's oodles of them. I can point them out everywhere. I have to write my name down in order to get the complaint to move forward or else it's not really looked at. And I don't want to be a bad neighbor, like Annie. I'd like everybody else to get along and stuff, but we do have rules. We've got a lot of rules on the books. So are we going to follow them? And if we're going to, we've got to police ourselves a little bit. That's kind of where I'm going with that. I think it's good to police ourselves. It keeps us honest. But, yeah, that's what I've got.

Mr. McMoran: Thank you, Owen. Jenn, do you care to follow up on that?

Ms. Rogers: It's something that I think we can certainly pass along to our County Commissioners, but I'm not sure I would feel comfortable giving an opinion on at this time.

Mr. McMoran: Awesome. And I think that's a good plug. We do have two County Commissioners with us tonight, Commissioner Browning and Commissioner Wesen. So as you have, you know, issues that you want to discuss with the County Commissioners, they'll be happy to schedule a meeting with you at a later time and date. I'm sure our panelists will be able to stick around for a few minutes. We are past the 8 o'clock hour so I'd like to adjourn at this time. I'd like to thank all of our panelists. Thank all of you that were able to join us tonight. I think we had some fabulous discussions and will give something for those in Planning to think about as they move forward in this endeavor. So thank you all for coming and have a great night.

(applause)