

WESTERN WASHINGTON AGRICULTURE 2020

INFORMATION ABOUT FOOD AND FARMING IN THE SKAGIT RIVER REGION



*Western
Washington
Agricultural
Association*

WHAT'S INSIDE

- The history of northwest Washington agriculture
- Farming practices & the role of dikes and drainage systems
- Crops grown in the region
- WWAA resolution & policy list

WWAA MISSION

To represent agriculture by providing services to the entire agricultural community

WWAA COMMITMENTS

Engage in internal and external (economic, environmental, regulatory) pressures on agriculture

Interact with county, state, and federal legislators and regulators

Pest and nutrient management control

Network with and support of the agricultural research community

Seek out and develop opportunities and technologies for agriculture

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STAFF MEMBERS

Executive Director

Brandon Roozen

broozen@westag.org

Office Manager

Debbie Danielson

ddanielson@westag.org

Assistant to Executive Director

Gary T. Jones

gjones@westag.org

2017 Continental Place #6

Mount Vernon, WA 98273

(360) 424-7327

westag.org

WWAA Policy Resolutions

NATURAL RESOURCES

Endangered Species Act (ESA) & Clean Water Act (CWA)

1. We believe that the human need for food, fiber, shelter, and energy must have priority over the recovery of species listed as threatened or endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act.
2. We believe listings should be based on the actual threat of extinction, not on the loss of historical habitat.
3. We support a local approach to pursuing sustainable fish stocks in western Washington, with agriculture being a key stakeholder and participant in the decision-making process.
4. We support modifying the ESA to include the economic impact of recovering endangered species.
5. We support protection and recovery of listed species by implementing biologically sound, scientifically based and economically viable measures that maintain agricultural industries, and preserve agricultural landscapes.
6. We oppose federal, state, or local designation of specified agricultural practices as a point source of pollution.
7. We oppose changing the definition in the CWA from “navigable waterways” to “all waters” in the US.
8. We oppose regulatory and prescriptive use of farmland for conservation practices, without due landowner compensation and consultation, particularly those in excess of label recommendations for fish-bearing waterways, or that are not based on best-available science.
9. We support an ESA baseline that includes dikes, tidegates, and culverts.
10. We endorse all hydropower as a qualifying renewable resource.
11. We encourage agricultural representation in processes that define “substantial potential to pollute” in Washington state.

Conservation Practices & Programs

1. We support recognition that agriculture benefits natural resource conservation and management.
2. We oppose mandated conservation regulations for farmland use.
3. We support voluntary landowner participation in conservation, restoration, and stewardship activities, so long as adjacent, downstream, or neighboring infrastructure and land are not harmed.
4. We support the implementation of Skagit County's approved Voluntary Stewardship Program Plan.
5. We support the implementation of new tools within the Voluntary Stewardship Program to make county reporting easier and more clear.
6. We believe that any federal or state agency (except for emergency services) must give notice to the landowner or tenant prior to the inspection of their property.
7. We oppose public acquisition of private land without providing for the loss in property tax revenue to local governments.
8. We request that agricultural representatives and farmers be involved in the planning and implementation of federal, state, and local government processes, to ensure that programs and regulations are culturally and economically feasible for farmers.
9. We believe that organic farmers should be held to the same standards as their conventional counterparts.

Climate Change

1. We believe agriculture should be fully involved in policy discussions and legislation development relating to climate change.
2. We oppose mandated climate change policy, such as the “Green New Deal,” that would suggest or propose to change farm size, agricultural practices, or related equipment and facilities.
3. We do not support any cap and trade, carbon sequestration, or climate change provisions without agriculture being a collaborative partner and recognized stakeholder in the development of any policy or legislation.

Skagit Delta

1. We support the implementation of the Skagit Delta Tidegates and Fish Initiative (TFI) Implementation Agreement (IA) as drafted and agreed between parties, to facilitate continued tidegate and floodgate maintenance.
2. We support the implementation of the Skagit County Drainage and Fish Initiative (DFI), and its continued effort to address drainage maintenance and fish protection.
3. We support both the TFI and DFI Memorandums of Understanding, which provide the foundational framework for each Initiative.
4. We support and encourage district use of the Skagit Basin Comprehensive Irrigation District Management Plan (CIDMP), and each district's pursuit of goals and commitments within.
5. We support our continued involvement in the Skagit Delta Tidegates and Fish Initiative (TFI) agreement as the sole agent for the districts, a member of the oversight committee, and a key stakeholder.
6. We support the independent leadership provided by the Skagit Drainage and Irrigation Districts Consortium (Consortium) to the twelve-member Skagit County Drainage and Irrigation Special Purpose Districts.
7. We strongly encourage district consideration and participation in habitat protection and restoration projects that relocate, impact, and/or alter dike, drainage, and irrigation infrastructure or function in a positive manner at all levels.
8. We support prioritizing and addressing the McGlenn Island Causeway and support all additional agricultural community and landowner focus restoration planning efforts.
9. We support the Telegraph Slough enhancement and restoration activities, which focus on enhancing hydraulic connectivity, improving district infrastructure, minimizing farmland conversion, and maximizing the Chinook benefit previously received agricultural landowner and organization endorsement.
10. We recognize Skagit County as the land-use authority, Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife as the resource co-manager, and NOAA as the ESA regulator on Skagit Delta water matters.
11. We strongly encourage the introduction and advancement of landscape ecology and watershed management processes (planning and/or projects) within the greater Skagit Region that consistently support and maintain TFI goals and protocols (involving WWAA members, partners, and neighbors).
12. We support the state funding of the Joint Legislative Task Force for Water Supply in the Skagit.

The history of agriculture in northwestern Washington

As we look at Whatcom, Skagit, and Snohomish counties, the history of agriculture is similar throughout the region. People have inhabited the area for nearly 12,000 years, occupying their areas for many centuries with only minor shifting. These tribal groups were largely extended families living in villages in cedar plank houses. They had active, viable communities that socialized and traded far beyond their villages and region. They fished for salmon, collected clams and mussels, and used fire to encourage bracken fern and camas to grow on natural prairies. The tribes in the area include the Swinomish, Upper Skagit, Sauk-Siuatle, Samish, Snohomish, Skykomish, Stillaguamish, Snoqualmie, Lummi, Nooksack, and Semiahmoo.

In 1827, the Hudson's Bay Company established Fort Langley north of modern-day Lynden. Their traders explored the northern part of Whatcom County. Attracted by the prairies where the Swinomish cultivated camas and bracken fern, Enoch Compton planted potatoes on Fidalgo Island in 1853. As the county cleared out the trees, agriculture grew. Rich farmland and easy water access attracted homesteaders.

In the Skagit River Valley and throughout the coast, settlers realized that rich farmland lay under the wet bogs. In the late 1800s, the settlers put in the original dikes, levees, and drainage systems that transformed the bogs and marshes of the delta into one of the most productive and desirable agriculture regions in the world. Early settlers tackled the wetlands and marshes of northwest Washington, determined to make the bogs a haven for farming. "One of the first things they had to do here was create drainage and put up the dikes so they could farm it. And a lot of that was done with brute strength and awkwardness," said Jerry Nelson of Double N Farms in Burlington.

"If it wasn't for the dikes that those old timers put in, every tidal cycle we would have water clear this far up. And so they reclaimed this entire Skagit Valley...they dug ditches, and draining the ground was the most important thing so that they could farm it," said Roger Knutzen, whose family settled in the region in 1894 as immigrants from Denmark. Like many farmers in the area, the Knutzens had the task of transforming a bay filled with stumps and snags into a working farm. "(They) removed all the stumps by hand, and dug drainage ditches in order to drain the soil off, and then started farming after several years of that kind of work."

The work to build earth-packed seawalls along the forks of the rivers and sloughs was done with horse and human power. Area settlers came together for "logging bees" to help each other clear the land. Once cleared, the land became viable for all manner of crops.

All that work, built on the backs of our ancestors, is still at the mercy of nature in many forms. Continued improvements to our dike, drainage, and irrigation infrastructure are vital to keeping this coastal region farmable.

SOURCES: Historylink.org and *The Gamble: The Washington Potato Story*



PHOTO CREDIT: Skagit County Historical Museum

Clean Air Act

1. We oppose changes to the Washington Clean Air Act that will negatively affect agriculture.
2. We oppose any agricultural dust and air quality particle size regulations.

Crop Protection

1. We believe that agricultural chemicals in the US and Canada should be harmonized.
2. We support the professional use of pesticides and best management practices.
3. We oppose mandatory reporting of agricultural pesticide use to governmental agencies.
4. We support the continued use of glyphosate as the label instructs for all applications.
5. We oppose cancelling crop protection product labels or uses unless equivalent replacement products are available.

Best Management Practices (BMPs)

1. We will strive to ensure that all BMPs will be written to continue the economic sustainability of current farm units.
2. We believe that federal and state agencies should recognize local, innovative conservation and BMPs and give farmers credit for using practices that effectively protect the natural resources on their farms.

FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION

General

1. We oppose any legislative or regulatory actions that would tend to prohibit good animal husbandry practices and increase the cost of food to consumers.
2. We oppose farm safety regulations that are burdensome and unnecessary.
3. We encourage our members and leaders to:
 - Communicate and cooperate with other agricultural organizations and companies (partnerships) to collectively influence agricultural policy;
 - Individually get involved in local and state political processes and work for the election of pro-agriculture candidates; and
 - Inform non-agricultural legislators of the value, needs, and importance of agriculture in the state.

Federal

1. We support refinement to the grower questionnaire from National Ag Statis-

- tics Services (NASS) that would reduce the length of surveys with the elimination of redundant questions and the timely use of farm operator-level data already reported to the Farm Service Agency and Risk Management Agency.
2. We oppose means testing for any Farm Program payment.
3. We support the implementation of the conservation portion of the farm bill.

State

1. We oppose any action taken by the Washington Governor's Office that affects agriculture without first consulting with the major agricultural organizations within the state.
2. We support the Washington State University College of Agricultural, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences budget requests
3. We oppose state legislation creating collective bargaining for agricultural workers.
4. We believe that if state agriculture programs, including research dollars, are subject to budget cuts to achieve deficit reduction, the same percentage of cuts should apply to all state government programs.
5. We support a guest worker program that secures the borders of the U.S., and provides a legal, affordable, and stable workforce for agriculture.
6. We oppose taxes and policies that hinder intra-family transfers of family farms.
7. We oppose any changes to any tax preferences that would be harmful to agriculture.
8. We support the removal of the state portion of sales tax on all farm equipment.
9. We support the ag exemption for the overtime payroll rules.
10. We support raising the state's estate tax exemption to match the federal estate tax exemption.
11. We oppose removal of lands from local tax rolls through state and federal acquisitions without compensation to local taxing jurisdictions (payment in lieu of taxes).
12. We oppose state agencies acquiring new land until they are current with the PILT payments.
13. We support maintaining the WSDA as a standalone agency.
14. We support the Conservation Commission to remain as an independent agency.

RESEARCH

1. We strongly encourage the prioritization of western Washington agriculture research, including discussions with all interested parties, in the following areas:
 - Production and varietal development in major western Washington-grown crops;
 - Livestock production and efficiencies;
 - All aspects of diseases, insects, weeds, winter hardiness, and sprout damage;
 - Soil fertility and plant nutrition;
 - Crop rotation;
 - Agriculture economics; and
 - Soil conservation.
2. We urge all growers to participate in coordinated farm research.
3. We support increased funding to the WSU Mount Vernon Northwestern Washington Research & Extension Center.

Drainage in the Skagit SPECIAL PURPOSE DISTRICTS

Skagit County, positioned between Seattle and Vancouver (B.C.), split by Interstate 5, is also arguably the most productive agricultural county in western Washington. Much of the acreage in agricultural production can be found west of I-5—approximately 60,000 acres of sub-tidal farmland. These Class 1 soils, with high concentrations of clays and sands, can only remain fertile for the many different crops locally grown if they are:

1) Protected by many miles of dikes from the tidal saltwater of Skagit, Padilla, and Samish bays,

2) Adequately drained by many miles of constructed ditches and modified sloughs during periods of high rainfall, and

3) Seasonally irrigated utilizing water captured in that same network of water-courses.

Special purpose districts carry out the duties, responsibilities, and activities necessary for repairing and maintaining drainage infrastructure, while in large part addressing those concerns and regulations.

FARM, FISH, FLOOD INITIATIVE (3FI)

In 2011, Western Washington Agricultural Association with a broad group of

governmental and private organizations met and initiated the Farm, Fish, and Flood Initiative (3FI). This collaborative body of natural resource managers met and continue to meet to create, develop, and implement land management goals and opportunities that benefit agricultural viability, salmon population recovery, and catastrophic flood protection across our local landscape. This partnership of the willing addresses differences head-on to work through the multitude of internal and external factors that affect protection and advancement of all “Fs” involved.

SKAGIT TIDEGATES AND FISH INITIATIVE (TFI)

In 2006, it was clear that tidegate repair and replacement, those activities necessary and imperative for drainage and irrigation districts, would require lengthy permitting and variable mitigation if permitted on a case-by-case basis, and would likely create multiple obstacles for district commissioners. The Skagit Delta Tidegates and Fish Initiative (TFI) is a collaborative, multi-stakeholder process convened by Western Washington Agricultural Association for the purpose of identifying pathways and protocols for federal, state, and local permitting of tidegate and floodgate repair and replacement activities within the Skagit and Samish river deltas. Today, drainage and irrigation districts, through their commitment to TFI, are able to work on tidegates with less regulatory scrutiny, streamlined permitting, and consolidated mitigation.

SKAGIT DRAINAGE AND FISH INITIATIVE (DFI)

The Skagit Drainage and Fish Initiative (DFI) brought together the agricultural community with state and tribal entities in 2006 in a collaborative process to design and implement necessary planning, environmental documentation, and permitting for the drainage districts’ maintenance activities. As part of this process, the districts now work under Drainage Maintenance Plans approved at the county, state, and federal levels by resource and regulatory agencies. These plans describe and inventory all the watercourse features in the districts, prescribe Best Management Practices for all watercourse maintenance activities, and identify proposed habitat improvement projects in the Skagit Delta agricultural area.

Agriculture is the #1 industry in the Skagit River Valley

Local farmers produce about \$300 million worth of crops, livestock, and dairy products on approximately 90,000 acres of land. Over 90 different crops are grown in the county. Blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, tulips, daffodils, pickling cucumbers, specialty potatoes, Jonagold apples, and vegetable seed are some of the more important crops in this maritime valley. More tulip, iris, and daffodil bulbs are produced here than in any other county in the U.S. Ninety-five percent of the red potatoes grown in the state of Washington are from Skagit County. In addition to food and fiber products, agriculture in this region provides habitat for thousands of swans, snow geese, and dabbling ducks.

Numerous agricultural suppliers, organizations, and agencies serve the needs of this important industry. Each October, thousands of people attend farm tours during the Festival of Family Farms to learn more about the bounty, beauty, and complexity of the valley’s working landscape.

AGRICULTURE: SKAGIT FUN FACTS

- Potato acreage consists primarily of fresh market reds, whites, yellows, purple, fingerlings and some chipping potatoes. Skagit potatoes are in demand for their high quality.
- The majority of raspberry acreage in Skagit County is now harvested by hand for the fresh market. Washington produces about 75% of the total U.S. production of frozen red raspberries, and 95% of that is from Whatcom County.
- Skagit County is a major producer of cabbage, table beet, and spinach seed for the world. There are six vegetable seed companies in the county, most of which market products worldwide.
- More tulip and daffodil bulbs are produced in Skagit County than in any county in the U.S.
- Skagit County ranks fifth in dairy production in Washington State.
- Skagit and Snohomish counties produce nearly 75% of the U.S. supply of spinach and cabbage seed, and nearly 95% of the U.S. table beet seed.
- Every year since 1999, approximately 20,000 visitors enjoy the Skagit Valley Festival of Family Farms.

Why the Skagit River is so special

The Skagit Valley is unique for many reasons: its people, its past, its economy. If you chart this uniqueness, it leads you to the river. There are two major factors of the Skagit River and our unique situation:



1) The Skagit River is the largest river in the Puget Sound, and it is the only Puget Sound river inhabited by all six Pacific salmon species (Chinook, coho, sockeye, pink, chum, and masu). In the Puget Sound, the Chinook are protected by the ESA due to a decline in their populations.

2) The Skagit River Delta is also a world-renowned, sub-tidal farming area, generating hundreds of millions of dollars in economic activity.

Area farmers produce fresh market fruits and vegetables. This region also supports family dairy operations.

Both fish and farmers need the Skagit River to flourish. WWAA believes we don’t have to decide between one or the other, rather, we can maintain a landscape that allows both to thrive.