

Farmers Need, and Enjoy, Quality Partners

Agriculture is dependent on many partners in the community to help us manage our community's natural resources. **Whatcom Farm Friends** would like to acknowledge a few of the many.

WSU Extension provides research on plant development, animal health, pest control, good farming practices, and education for all aspects of living on the land. They teach young and old and create a life-long learning atmosphere. The *Whatcom Conservation District* builds the bridge between healthy farms and natural resource protection. They bring us the technology and the "know how" to conserve natural resources. The *USDA Farm Service Agency* and *Natural Resources Conservation Service* provide financial help so we, like any industry can meet the challenges of change. We also stay current within our own individual specialty areas through the various state boards, commissions and organizations such as the WA Red Raspberry Commission, the WA Dairy Federation, the WA Seed Potato Commission and the Washington Farm Bureau.

But we also partner with some, not so common, bedfellows? The *Whatcom County Public Utility #1* has worked side by side with the Ag community for the last ten years providing funding for the Farmers Growing Trees for Salmon project to purchase small seedlings. Together we have grown over 100,000 trees to be planted along the river and streams for salmon habitat. They were leaders in watershed planning and they continue to work with us through the development and on-going activities of the Bertrand Watershed Improvement District and the North Lynden Watershed Improvement District. They explore water usage for irrigation, instream flows for farm and fish needs, drainage and habitat.

The PUD, City of Lynden, and the *Port of Bellingham* continue to work on the possibility of a centralized bio-digester to turn animal and municipal wastes to biogas for heat and fuel. Whatcom Farm Friends hosts a group that includes the *Vehicle Research Institute and the College of Business and Economics at WWU, Darigold, the Port of Bellingham, the PUD, the City of Lynden, and Bellingham Technical College* that work on agri-energy issues and the growing potential of anaerobic digestion for manure and municipal solid wastes.

The agriculture community manages the greatest amount of acreage that is prime habitat for Salmon west of the Cascades. We recognize our responsibility to protect the health of our watershed. Partners in this endeavor are *Washington State Department of Wildlife, the Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association (NSEA), the Washington Department of Ecology and Whatcom County Government*. Many farmers know Steve Seymour, our Watershed Stewart. He helps us find ways to protect the waters that run through our land, while protecting our need to drain our land at times and to irrigate at other times. The staff at NSEA works closely with our farmers to plant buffers along their creeks. They too recognize the need for protection must be in balance with the needs of the farmer. The Department of Ecology has also been a good partner for us. Their mandate is to protect the waters of the state. They fully support our Watershed Improvement Districts and have financially supported this endeavor for the last twelve years.

Farming is no different than any other industry when it comes to the need for carefully thought out and comprehensive research. We could have no better partners than *Washington State University, Western Washington University, and Bellingham Technical College*. As the population grows and agriculture changes there will be adjustments in the way our industry operates. Climate change, natural disasters, fuel costs, labor issues, technical enhancements, growth of our populated areas, and transportation needs are issues that are being faced today and will continue to impact us into the next century. Our universities and colleges are at the forefront of this research and our link to creative solutions.

One of the goals of Whatcom Farm Friends is to protect a minimum of 100,000 productive acres. The *Whatcom Land Trust* is a partner in protecting these lands forever. Through tools like a conservation easements and Purchase of Development Rights we expect to be around for a very long time.

It is not just Whatcom Farm Friends that are concerned about sustaining agriculture in Whatcom County; our PARTNERS are as well. We recognize them and thank them.

Whatcom Farm Friends Board