



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

For immediate release: March 11, 2008 (08-08)

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Contact: Jason Kelly (360) 902-1815

P.O. Box 42560, Olympia, Washington 98504-2560
Visit our Web site at: agr.wa.gov

Future of Farming project aimed at keeping agriculture profitable

OLYMPIA – What can our state’s policy leaders do to help Washington’s farming families stay profitable over the next 20 years? To help sort out the challenges and the opportunities, farmers, ranchers and others in the industry are encouraged to help develop a strategic plan through the Future of Farming project.

As always, the challenges for the agriculture community are daunting: enormous start-up costs, weather and price risks, energy and other input costs, and many more.

At the same time, opportunities for profitable farming abound in the state: a diverse climate that supports more than 300 crops, well-developed food processing infrastructure, world-class export facilities and strong demand for local farm products.

What can the Legislature do to mitigate some of the risks? In areas of opportunity, how can the state lay the groundwork for the private-sector innovation that drives profitable businesses?

The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) Future of Farming project will develop a strategic plan to guide decision makers as they work to support the continued economic viability of the state’s \$34 billion food and agriculture industry. The goal of the project is to pass on a vibrant farm economy to the next generation of Washington producers.

“It’s been over 20 years since we drafted our last strategic plan for Washington agriculture,” said WSDA Director Valoria Loveland. “While the economic picture today looks very bright with high commodity prices and growing exports, we must always be thinking ahead to anticipate tomorrow’s challenges. Some people need to be reminded that farming is a business, not a hobby. A family must make a living to keep that land in production. We want to help the next generation succeed on the farm.”

A project steering committee representing a broad cross-section of the industry has met to develop a framework for prioritizing discussions. WSDA has hired an agricultural economist, Jennifer Harte, to coordinate the project. As opportunities and challenges are identified, private and public sector economists, agronomists, educators and other specialists will provide detailed input where appropriate.

During the spring and summer, listening sessions with farmers, food processors and other members of the public will be held throughout the state. WSDA is currently requesting input through an online survey on the project’s Web site: www.agr.wa.gov/fof.

The project’s final report will be delivered to the Washington State Legislature before the end of the year. The strategies identified in the report will be structured to assist the Legislature and other governments to enact policies that benefit agriculture. The 2007 Legislature provided funding for the project.

###