

# Agricultural Resources Committee of San Juan County

# ANNUAL UPDATE

AUGUST 2008

WORKING TO PROTECT AND RESTORE AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES IN THE SAN JUAN ISLANDS

## ARC PRIORITIES FOR 2008

The Agricultural Resources Committee (ARC) was created in 2005 by the County Commissioners to advise the County on agricultural issues. The ARC works to keep agriculture vital in the islands.

In 2008, the ARC is focusing on farmland preservation and farmer enrichment.

Farmland preservation efforts (see page 3) entail an agricultural conservation easement education campaign, an early warning program to help farmland owners stay in the Ag Open Space tax program, assistance to the San Juan County Land Bank with farmland leases, developing farm enterprise budgets and enhancing the ARC website bulletin board ([www.sjcarc.org/forum.asp](http://www.sjcarc.org/forum.asp)).

Farmer enrichment projects include support for a permanent farmers market, expanding the ICL program, facilitating farm-to-school projects, hosting a fall harvest dinner and exploring agri-tourism options in the islands.

The ARC also tracks regulatory issues that impact local farmers and makes pro-agriculture recommendations to regulating agencies.



## HERDING EARTHWORMS

So with a title like this you are probably thinking of the wiggly little creatures we identify with fertile soil. Good, I want you to think about soil fertility in the islands and its ability to convert solar energy into food, fiber, and other useful products. The Agricultural Resources Committee (ARC) works to protect lands dedicated to the production of food and to assist the artists of the soil - the farmers.

Daily news about global warming, finite fossil fuels, food shortages and the steady loss of farmland remind us of our somewhat precarious relationship to our earth, our soils. As we consider a food system plagued by problems of contamination, unsafe conditions for workers, and huge energy consumption costs, and puzzle over the paradox of famine in one country, coupled with an epidemic of obesity in another, it's easy to feel overwhelmed and do nothing.

Change is not easy, but it is within reach. In fact, it's under our very feet. We can nourish our own soils and work towards a truly sustainable local food system. In this we are lucky. We have many folks active in local agriculture who have not only dedicated time and energy to the daily struggles of farming but, through their work on the ARC, are also tackling issues affecting our agricultural landscape, our own good soil.

San Juan County has a history of innovation. In its work on agricultural issues, the ARC is continuing this tradition. The ARC is at the forefront of change to better our relationship with the earth in this place at this time. And the ARC remembers: No fertility, no earthworms. No farms, no food.



Bruce Gregory  
ARC Chair

[www.sjcarc.org](http://www.sjcarc.org)



## NEW SAN JUAN ISLANDS AGRICULTURAL GUILD

A permanent home for the San Juan Island Farmers Market has been discussed for years, and in 2007 the ARC identified a Permanent Farmers Market (PFM) as key to the success of local agriculture.

Following a PFM summit meeting called by the Agricultural Resources Committee, the San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild was created as a 501(c)3 non-profit entity. The Guild's first project is, of course, the PFM on San Juan Island. The Guild is moving full speed ahead on site selection and fundraising.

With the support of the community, the result will be a permanent, multi-use covered market outlet in Friday Harbor that is accessible, expandable, and economically sustainable for farmers. The market will have adequate parking, restrooms, eating space, and a public commons. Ideally, it would also provide a cold storage facility and a commercial kitchen.

The Ag Guild invites you to help create this market as an all-important outlet for local agricultural products and as a thriving, festive gathering place.

There are plenty of opportunities to contribute. Join an Ag Guild committee (where the work gets done!), or make a tax-deductible donation as you are able. For further information or to contact an Ag Guild board member, go to <http://www.sjiagguild.com>.

## DID YOU KNOW. . .?

In 1907, over 150,000 boxes of apples - Oldenburg, Summer Pearmain, William's Favorite, Gravenstein, Dutch Mignonne, King, Yellow Bell Fleur, Blue Pearmain, Rhode Island, Northern Spy, Spitzenburg, and Yellow Newton - were shipped from San Juan County.

In 1959, there were 79,062 chickens in San Juan County, along with 1,300 hogs, 7,456 sheep and lambs, and 372 milk cows.

By 1964, there were only 6,530 chickens, 3,236 sheep and lambs, and 151 milk cows. *(Where did all those chickens go?)*

In 2002, there were 2,731 sheep and lambs, but llamas were up to 820.

44.4% of San Juan County is classified as rock or rock outcrop according to the USDA soil survey. (48,920 out of 110,080 acres)



## BUY LOCAL: ISLANDS CERTIFIED LOCAL PROGRAM EXPANDS



In 2007, the Agricultural Resources Committee created the Islands Certified Local (ICL) program to recognize the efforts of local food establishments that pledge to use a 5% minimum of their food budget to buy local farm products. Today eighteen restaurants, inns and stores participate in the program. This year, the ARC is expanding the ICL program to include food producers and processors.

Participating food processors pledge to use a 75% minimum of local ingredients in their products. Livestock must live in the islands for a 50% minimum of their lives. Local is defined as San Juan County.

Look for the Islands Certified Local program logo on local farm products or in the window of your favorite restaurants in the islands. Visit the ARC website at [www.sjcarc.org](http://www.sjcarc.org) and click on "ICL Program" in the menu to find the participating farms, food processors, restaurants, B&B's, and other food establishments in the islands. Join us in strengthening our local economy: buy local!

## ARC HELPS LAND BANK WITH FARMLAND LEASING

The high price of land in San Juan County is a serious obstacle to new farmers. One of the ARC's top priorities is to develop creative ways that local producers can gain secure, affordable access to farmland.

As part of this effort, the ARC is helping the San Juan County Land Bank develop a program for leasing out agriculture land to local producers. This fall and winter, the Land Bank will be requesting long-term lease proposals for its King Sisters Property on San Juan Island. In 2009/2010, the Land Bank anticipates offering a

similar lease for farmland acreage on Cattle Point Road.

Over the next few years, a lease arrangement will also be crafted for the iconic Coffelt's Farm on Orcas. Vern and Sidney Coffelt recently sold their farm to the Land Bank in order to make it available to the next generation of farmers, helping ensure a future for local agriculture.

For more information about farmland lease opportunities, contact the Land Bank at 378-4402.



## FARMLAND PRESERVATION MATTERS

Farmland preservation is important for more than just farmers. If you appreciate local food or a beautiful view, the logic is obvious. Tourists come here for those same reasons, which fuels our economy. If you own property here, you may be surprised to know that farmland helps to support residential property, by requiring fewer services while still paying taxes. Farmland also provides wildlife habitat and unimpeded areas for ground water recharge, which in many instances filters stormwater run-off from county roads,

There are several organizations and programs to keep farms intact. The private, non-profit San Juan Preservation Trust has preserved over 12,000 acres in three counties. They generally operate through voluntarily donated conservation easements, which usually limit the development that can occur on a property in perpetuity. The Land Bank is a public agency of San Juan County that has preserved about 5,000 acres, both by outright purchases and conservation easements. For long term but not permanent farmland preservation, the county Assessor administers the Agricultural Open Space tax

program, which lowers the annual property tax for working farms. The ARC works with each of these organizations it its mission to keep farming healthy in San Juan County.

## CRITICAL AREAS ORDINANCE (CAO) UPDATE

Washington State's Growth Management Act (GMA) requires that San Juan County enact a "critical areas ordinance" (CAO). A CAO regulates the use and protection of "critical areas", defined as Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas, Fish and Wildlife Habitat, Wetlands, Geologically Hazardous and Frequently Flooded Areas. The County is currently out of compliance with this requirement. In an effort to bring the County into compliance by December 2008, the County Council appointed a citizen advisory committee to help draft the CAO.

Many agricultural lands contain "critical areas." Recognizing the potential impact of a CAO on valued agricultural activities, the state senate passed a "time out" bill which prohibits counties from enacting CAO provisions regarding agriculture until 2010. Nevertheless, the ARC believes participation in the current CAO process is important, since all provisions regarding critical areas may potentially impact agricultural activities. To that end, an ARC member, Todd Goldsmith of T&D Farms on Lopez, serves on the CAO advisory committee, along with representatives of the San Juan Builders Association, the Realtors Association, the Marine Resources Committee, the San Juan Initiative, the Friends of the San Juans, as well as a local land use attorney, two members of the public and an employee of the County Planning Department.

The CAO committee has been meeting twice a month for the last 10 months. The process has been slow, but thorough. Committee members must review and understand a voluminous amount of complex scientific data, as well as the interplay of numerous legal issues involving a variety of government agencies. The committee must then attempt to reach a consensus on a proposed recommendation to the County. To date the committee has made significant progress on the Aquifer Recharge issues, and some progress regarding Fish and Wildlife habitat. It appears unlikely, however, that the committee will complete its work in 2008.



**Check out the ARC  
on-line bulletin board**

[www.sjcarc.org/forum.asp](http://www.sjcarc.org/forum.asp)

**island ag classifieds  
& shared news**

# FEEDING OURSELVES

Farmland preservation and food security have never been hotter topics. In addition to articles in the local press, the ARC is assisting our County Council in their consideration of a "no net loss of farmland" planning policy, which would ensure that a minimum acreage stays in agricultural resource land designation. In addition we have begun a Foodshed Mapping project ([www.sjcarc.org/foodshed.asp](http://www.sjcarc.org/foodshed.asp)). In collaboration with other local ag groups, we are attempting to map all the farmland in the county, and to figure out how much food is grown where. This will help us to gauge our preservation efforts, to get a better understanding of our food system, and to give all of us a basis for future decisions.



## ARC MEETING DATES

The ARC meets on the fourth Monday of the month unless noted.  
**MEETING ANNOUNCEMENTS ARE POSTED ON [WWW.SJCARC.ORG](http://WWW.SJCARC.ORG)**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Many, many thanks the following folks for their generous support of the ARC's work.*

**Rex Doane** webmaster extraordinaire for keeping the ARC website current and beautiful.

**David Bauermeister** and the NW Agriculture Business Center for assisting the ARC with the ICL program and in so many other ways.

**Paul & Mary Brooke Barger** and Mirabella Skin Care for donating the proceeds from their monthly community dances on San Juan Island. They have raised over \$700 for the ARC since October 2006.

**Anna Maria de Freitas** and Coho Restaurant for hosting the May 2008 ARC meeting with a fabulous locally grown lunch and excellent service.

**Juniper Maas** and Juniper Lane Guest House for featuring the work of the ARC during an open house.

**Ron Zee** and **Todd Goldsmith** for serving as chair and vice-chair of the ARC from 2006 to 2008.

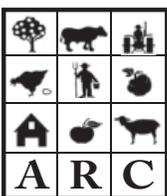
## ARC COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Bruce Gregory, Chair, *Mitchell Bay Farm*
- Eliza Habegger, Vice Chair, *SJC Land Bank*
- Jane Burton Bell, *SJI Farmers Market*
- Peter Corning, *Synergy Farm*
- Christina Dahl-Sesby, *Heritage Farm*
- Neal Foley, *Kitchen Garden Company*
- Todd Goldsmith, *T&D Farms*
- Ralph Hahn, *SJC EDC*
- Sara Jones, *Jones Family Farms*
- Danna Kinsey, *Driftwood Ranch*
- Jim Lawrence, *Thirsty Goose Farm*
- Hawk Pingree, *San Juan Island*
- Tom Schultz, *WSU Extension*
- Madden Surbaugh, *Steps Wine Bar & Cafe*
- Mark Tompkins, *SJC Health & Community*
- Ron Zee, *Sweet Earth Farm*

## ARC STAFF

- Eliza Buck, Coordinator
- Tim Clark, Farmland Preservation  
Coordinator

***To contact the ARC, email [arc@sanjuanislandscd.org](mailto:arc@sanjuanislandscd.org) or call 360-378-6621***



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