

Agricultural Resources Committee of San Juan County

ANNUAL UPDATE

AUGUST 2009

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



THINK GLOBAL, ACT LOCAL

Why save farms and farmland? The simple answer is food security. We have become increasingly complacent about food. There's always food at the grocery store, right? Food problems in other places don't impact us here, do they? As the meltdown of the world financial system demonstrates, we can lose financial security, and the same is true for food security.

During the past year, increasing attention has been given to the breakdown of the global food system and accelerating international food crisis. Thirty-three countries are now facing extremely severe food shortages. Conditions appear dire with an estimated one billion hungry people on the planet. Climate change is also accelerating and major droughts are occurring in Australia, Argentina, parts of Africa, and the Central Valley of California – America's food basket. Even our state's agricultural gem, the Yakima Valley, is predicted to feel the negative effects of climate change on agriculture. A recent study by the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development, an intergovernmental body involving more than 400 scientists and 30 governments commissioned by the UN and World Bank, recommended a fundamental rethinking of agricultural knowledge, science, and technology in order to achieve a sustainable global food system. Global food security is now a critical issue on the UN agenda.

So what does all this mean for San Juan County? It means that we would be wise to advance our efforts in farmland preservation and local food production. It's time we begin moving towards a sustainable food system on the local level... plan ahead and be prepared.

In order to place our island communities in a more secure position for the future, the ARC will be making important policy recommendations to the San Juan County Council this year on no net loss of farmland, the right to farm, water for agricultural use in the Water Element of the San Juan County Comprehensive Plan, agricultural impact statements, and genetically modified organisms. If we can nurture agriculture here and now, we will be better prepared for the changes that are coming.

Ron Zee, ARC Chair

ARC PRIORITIES FOR 2009

The ARC focuses on addressing obstacles to successful farming operations. In the islands, the loss of farmland to development, excessive regulations, lack of affordable labor, and the lack of infrastructure makes a challenging occupation even harder.

In 2009, the ARC has completed a farmland mapping project (see pg. 3), and has proposed a no net loss of Agricultural Resource Lands as one measure to help preserve farmland. Water is another critical natural resource for agriculture and the ARC is working to ensure that farmland retains water for farming. Along with access to natural resources, the right-to-farm must be clearly defined in our County Comprehensive Plan. The ARC is working to enhance existing language.

One of the keys to viable agriculture is a strong market for local farm products. The ARC continues to promote local agriculture through the Islands Certified Local (ICL) program as well as finding ways to link farmers to consumers.

Finally, the ARC explores options for scale appropriate regulations for farm labor, small dairy operations, poultry processing and egg handling.

www.sjcarc.org

ARC MOVES TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

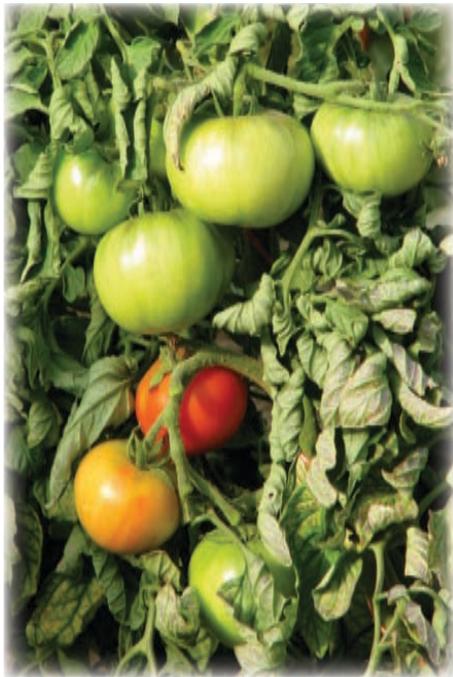
On June 9, 2009, the San Juan County Council voted to allocate dedicated economic development funding for the Economic Development Council (EDC) to fund the Agricultural Resources Committee coordinator position.

ARC Coordinator moved into EDC office on June 22, 2009 and met with Bill Watson (EDC Program Coordinator), Ralph Hahn (EDC Chair), Ron Zee (ARC Chair), and Bruce Gregory (ARC-EDC liaison) on July 2, 2009. The group reviewed the ARC 2009 Work Plan and the Economic Development Element Agriculture Sector recommendations to set priorities that meet the goals of both the ARC and EDC.

The following priorities were identified:

- Draft San Juan County Agriculture Sector Action Plan for recovery and expansion of agricultural enterprises;
- Develop a public education campaign to promote the value of the Agricultural Sector to the county's economy;
- Coordinate ARC-EDC efforts to push policy for agriculture - ARC recommends policy to SJ County Council and the EDC works with local and state agencies;
- Recommend scale appropriate regulations for small businesses;
- Promote greenhouse infrastructure in town/villages (UGAs);
- Produce comprehensive countywide farm and food industry (AG) guide.

New ARC contact info: phone 360-378-2906 and email info@sjcarc.org.



DID YOU KNOW?

There's a new way to get and share news about farming, local food and agriculture in the islands.

Join the **New List-Serv, San Juan County Farm and Food**, a collaborative effort of WSU Extension, the San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild and the Agricultural Resources Committee.

To subscribe, send a blank email to: join-sjcfarmandfood@lyris.cahnrs.wsu.edu

NATIONAL CENSUS REPORTS SAN JUAN AG GROWING

Farming in San Juan County is growing – and growing faster than national and state averages, according to a new report from the National Agricultural Statistics service. The number of farms, farmers, acres farmed, and revenue are all growing in San Juan County. The report, released last month, is a national census conducted every five years, and results from 2007 show 66 more farms (291 total) in the islands than in 2002, a 29% increase compared to 13% for Washington State and 4% nationally.

County farm revenues grew 12% to a 2007 total of \$3.6 million. Fruits and berries (\$895,000), and cattle and calves (\$845,000) are the two greatest market value products in the islands, followed by aquaculture (\$468,000) and vegetables (\$408,000). Vegetable production is increasing rapidly, with 55 farms now harvesting 48 acres, up from 25 farms and 23 acres just five years ago. The number of orchards is also up (from 42 to 58), although the total orchard acreage has shrunk slightly.

One way San Juan County differs from national trends is in the age of our farmers. The average age for farmers nationally is 57 years and 54 for the state as a whole, the average age for San Juan County farmers is 61.8 years. But for gender, the county again matches national trends. The number of women farmers has increased nationally, which is also true here, with 34% of farms primarily operated by women.

To learn more about the 2007 AG Census, visit www.nass.usda.gov.

ARC MAPS AGRICULTURAL LANDS IN SAN JUAN COUNTY

During the first six months of 2009, the Agricultural Resources Committee of San Juan County (ARC) finished a mapping project begun during 2008, funded by a grant from the Washington State Office of Farmland Preservation (OFP). The project looked for patterns of farmland loss by mapping all agriculturally viable parcels within the county. Aerial photos, Geographical Information Systems (GIS), and windshield surveys were the main tools used to achieve these goals.

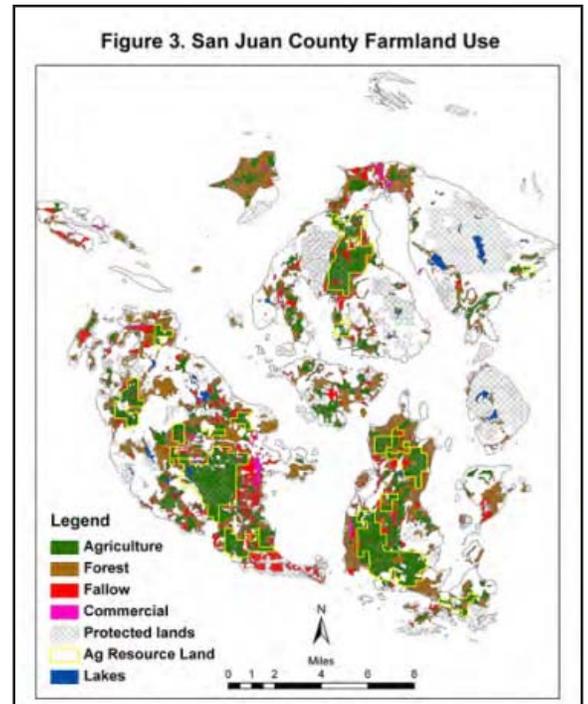
Tim Clark, Project Coordinator, assessed aerial photos of 4,675 parcels identified as having agricultural soils to determine the use of the land. He identified forty-six categories collected into four groups: agriculture, fallow, forest, and commercial. These groups correlate with the likelihood of farmland loss. Commercial is not going to be used for agriculture. Forest is unlikely to be used for agriculture. Fallow parcels could more easily be returned to agricultural production.

Patterns developed once statistics were generated from parcel attributes. Fallow lands tended to be smaller parcels around agricultural parcels. Urban Growth Areas lie next to agricultural areas.

Based on this study, three primary factors account for most farmland loss: 1) when larger parcels are sub-divided into smaller parcels, they often fall out of agricultural use, turn fallow, become populated with shrubs and eventually return to forest; 2) forest gradually encroaches upon larger parcels; and 3) Urban Growth Areas can intrude into farmland.

The findings from the mapping project offer some possible directions to go: create more incentives to decrease development rights on large farms; promote intensive agricultural models for small farms; allow landowners with land that meets specific criteria to opt into Agriculture Resource Land designation and incentivize that zoning. Most importantly find ways to make farming be a profitable endeavor in the county.

In conclusion, farmland preservation requires natural resources, the economic support of a profitable enterprise and the social support of the community. To see the full report and maps, go to the home page at www.sjarc.org.



SAN JUAN ISLAND PERMANENT FARMERS' MARKET MOVES FORWARD

The San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild is a 501(c)(3) Washington State non-profit corporation that was created in February of 2008 with the primary purpose to support and enhance sustainable agriculture in all of San Juan County.

The Ag Guild recognizes that development of a comprehensive food system is essential to fostering sustainable agriculture in San Juan County. As part of that greater goal, the Ag Guild's first project is the creation of a Permanent Farmers' Market facility on San Juan Island. This multi-use agricultural facility will:

- Address the goals of the San Juan Farmers Market Association for a year-round covered farmers' market facility that will include a mid-week as well as Saturday market;
- Be designed to include storage, processing, distribution, and educational facilities;
- Address several county goals including farmland preservation, tourism promotion in the off-peak season, and economic development with the greatest local multiplier effect;
- Address emergency preparedness goals through facility design and increase the community's capacity for self-sufficiency;
- Provide cold and cool storage facilities for San Juan County farmers with no access to OPALCO and farmers with limited storage capacity.

A feasibility study for the Permanent Farmers' Market project was completed in January 2009. The Ag Guild's website includes links to the full document: <http://www.sjiaguild.com/feasibility.php>

The feasibility study determines the feasibility of a permanent farmers' market facility in Friday Harbor per se, and identifies the top three most feasible sites. The most feasible site is 150 Nichols Street (old Friday Harbor Electric) for a number of reasons: its downtown core location; historic character; build out potential; green space; and existing public restrooms. In addition, the SJC Land Bank's approved budget for \$600,000 towards the purchase of this property, with \$400,000 estimated as the value of an historic preservation conservation easement.

Currently, AG Guild is talking with the 150 Nichols Street property owners and is hopeful that they can agree on a purchase and sale agreement.

WORKING TOWARD A HEALTHY FOOD SYSTEM

How much food do we grow in the islands? How long could we feed ourselves in a time of emergency? The ARC continues to gather information about what and how much food we produce in the county. If you haven't done it already, please help us by filling out either a garden or food production survey. To learn more about the Foodshed Mapping project go to: www.sjcarc.org/foodshed.asp. This is just one aspect of assessing our food system. The ARC is also working with a group of agencies interested in creating sustainable agriculture in the islands. This effort is headed up by the San Juan Island Community Foundation - Critical Needs Task Force Food Group. For more information visit: www.sjicf.org.



ARC MEETING DATES

The ARC meets on the fourth Monday of the month unless noted.
MEETING ANNOUNCEMENTS ARE POSTED ON WWW.SJCARC.ORG

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

Bruce Gregory and **Eliza Habegger** for serving as chair and vice-chair in 2008-09.

Rex Doane, webmaster, for keeping the ARC website up-to-date and functional.

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

San Juan Islands Conservation District Board and Staff for their total commitment to the success of the ARC since it's inception, with dedicated funds, office space and staff time.

Washington State Conservation Commission and the **Office of Farmland Preservation** for grant support of our farmland mapping project in 2008 and 2009.

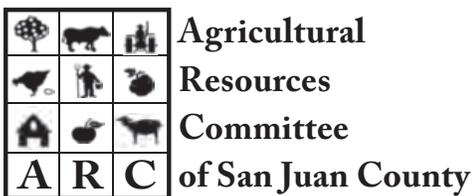
ARC COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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

ARC STAFF

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Tim Clark, Project Coordinator

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