

Agricultural Resources Committee (ARC)

Minutes of February 23, 2009

12:00 – 2:00 PM

Whidbey Island Bank, Friday Harbor

ARC Members Present: Peggy Bill, Jane Burton Bell, Peter Corning, Todd Goldsmith, Bruce Gregory, Sara Jones, Danna Kinsey, Jim Lawrence, Hawk Pingree, Tom Schultz, Jim Sesby, Madden Surbaugh

ARC Members Absent: Eliza Habegger, Neal Foley, Ralph Hahn, Kji McIntyre, Mark Tompkins

Friends Present: Richard Anderson, Tim Clark, Rik Karon

ARC Staff Present: Eliza Buck

MINUTES

Minutes were not available for approval.

Public Comment: Richard Anderson requested that the ARC discuss how the committee will effect change in the agricultural community and how we get that information out to the public.

OLD BUSINESS

Update on water reserve for Agricultural Resource Lands – Eliza Buck asked the committee to respond to the new section of the water element drafted by the Water Resources Management Committee. The ARC decided to write a letter to WRMC with a number of questions that they would like to have the water committee address before submitting to the County Council. The letter should go out before the WRMC meeting on March 9, 2009.

Update on Regulations Subcommittee meeting with Claudia Coles. Peter Corning shared some key points from the meeting. On egg handling, Coles said that the WSDA food safety egg handling guidelines were just that, guidelines. She expected that farmers would find equally satisfactory processes to get their eggs clean. On an Ombudsman for farmers, Coles suggested that Fred Berman of the WSDA Small Farms team serves in this capacity. She also recommended that farmers contact Keren LaCourse, the new WSDA NW Regional Inspector Supervisor, with regulatory issues. Corning also noted that Coles and LaCourse seemed to be receptive to the ARC Regulatory Subcommittee suggestion that there be a process for farmers to be more active in regulation monitoring by self-testing and sending results to WSDA. Farmers would sign a legal document that their testing meets specific WSDA standards thus making results binding. Coles recommended that such a proposal be sent to the state legislature in order to enact it.

Jim Sesby reported the Coles agreed to send farmers inspection test results if they send a written request to her office. She will flag the farmer's file and make sure that test results are sent to the farmer.

Tom Schultz reported that the new language on pastured chickens would be changed to include other species of poultry –ducks, turkeys, etc. The term “poultry” will replace “pastured chicken” in the revised code.

Coles handed out the dairy producers licensing handbook and asked ARC members for comments for revision of the document, which will be published in the next few months.

Most significantly, Coles said that farmers should use their best safety practices unless they receive a cease and desist order from the state or county.

Report on County Council presentation on February 10, 2009 – Eliza B. said that she presented a quarterly update and the 2009 work plan to the Council. The Council chose to formally approve the work plan. This was a first for the Council since they usually do not take formal action on committee work plans. Bob Myhr expressed great concern about the Ag Open Space program audit and the fact that over half of the current enrollees are not eligible to be in the program. He knows of at least two farms on Lopez that do not qualify though he knows that they are actively being farmed. They are not meeting the income criteria. The Council encourages us to continue to work with the Assessor and to continue our mapping project. [In ARC meeting, Danna Kinsey pointed out that all roads traverse AG lands so there is a misperception by many residents that there is an abundance of AG land in the county.] Howie Rosenfeld expressed interest in increasing the visibility of agriculture and the work of the ARC in the county. [Madden Surbaugh said that the Ag Guild has talked about increasing visibility of agriculture in the county and is working on it.]

NEW BUSINESS

Future of WSU Extension – San Juan County – Tom Schultz gave the ARC a report on the possible budget cuts that the WSU Provost has recommended in response to the state budget reduction. Provost Bayly stated to the media that WSU would consider taking budget cuts primarily from “community service and engagement” programs, which translates into Extension Programs. Such cuts could mean 41% to 75% of Extension Program budgets. San Juan County will not be severely impacted by such an action because WSU pays very little of our Extension’s budget, however, the Extension Program system would be devastated. Ultimately, it could dismantle the whole program. Letters of concern should be addressed to the WSU President Floyd, Provost Bayly and Vice-President Gardner.

Move the Islands Certified Local (ICL) program to the Ag Guild? Madden S. asked the ARC if they would consider moving the ICL program to the San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild (SJIAG), which is a 501c3 that could provide a bit more longevity for the program.

Peter Corning moved to have Madden Surbaugh ask the SJIAG if they would like to take over the ICL program. Jim Sesby seconded. The motion was unanimously approved.

Tom Schultz brought up the issue of ARC funding. He reported that the Economic Development Council would consider becoming an umbrella for the ARC and apply for .09 Funds on our behalf. The ARC requested that Ralph Hahn or someone from the EDC attend the next ARC meeting to answer questions about the possible move.

Discussion: What will have changed in San Juan County’s agricultural sector in the next ten years because of the ARC’s efforts? [This question was posed to the ARC Coordinator by Pete Rose, SJC Administrator at the ARC quarterly update to the County Council on Feb. 10, 2009]

Peter Corning offered the following observations: There is a prior question, which is “what is changing in the rest of the world in the next ten years that could measurably impact agriculture in San Juan County?” Specifically rising fuel prices, cap and trade and government actions, and population growth and climate change will be big factors. Water will also be a big issue. Food prices will dramatically increase by at least three times the current level, and island grown food will be about half of that; therefore, we will be very competitive in the county marketplace. This will provide an incentive for an

increase in farming in the county. The ARC will be an encouragement to more farms and for more competent and effective farms because of the information activities for farmers. The ARC will also protect farmers by representing them on regulatory issues, and protect farmers from intrusive interests, other kinds of non-farming interests in the county. There will be a growing Victory Garden movement and the ARC will foster people being able to grow more food for themselves. With the assistance of the ARC, there will be at least three times the amount of farming and home food production in San Juan County ten years from now.

Other projections of change in the county agricultural section over the next ten years include: cool and cold storage facilities, permanent farmers' markets on Orcas, Lopez and San Juan islands, processing facilities, new policies to encourage and facilitate farming, and there will be two new USDA Ag Census published (2012 and 2017).

The ARC discussed the need to capture information about food production in the county. Eliza B. will be create a flyer about the garden survey and send to ARC members to distribute.

NEXT MEETING

The next ARC meeting will be Monday, March 23, 2009 from 12 – 2 PM at the Whidbey Island Bank Community Room. The April and May meetings will be at Whidbey Island Bank in Friday Harbor from 12 – 2 PM on the following days: April 27 and May 18.