



ANNUAL UPDATE

AUGUST 2010

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



CULTIVATING A HEALTHY & RESILIENT COMMUNITY

How do you go about restoring and strengthening an entire agricultural economy? The ARC has turned to its farmers and food professionals for answers. Besides the annual work plan, the ARC is involved in a long term strategic plan that will prioritize our limited resources to help farmers, agricultural workers, restaurant owners, and institutional food managers to produce, sell, buy, and use local food. The plan will also address priorities for protecting our farmland, the resource that food comes from.

But the reason for our work is not to create more plans, or acres, or institutions; it's to help our community stay healthy and resilient in changing times, and to strengthen and diversify our local economy. A case in point is the state legislation passed this year setting up a farm internship pilot program. The focus is on education rather than regulation, on people rather than paper. Another project is the promotion of local food, from farmers through restaurants and stores to people. Yet another undertaking is the coordination of what schools need for food with what we can grow. All these are win-win-win solutions. They help our community at its core by promoting health and resilience, they help the agricultural and overall economy, and they help preserve the resources we depend upon.

Tim Clark, Vice-chair

ARC PRIORITIES FOR 2010

The ARC's mission is to strengthen and protect our agricultural heritage and economy. The ARC is comprised of up to 15 members of the farming community. The ARC seeks to advise SJC Council, educate citizens, advocate meaningful solutions, and promote programs that will strengthen and expand the agricultural economy. In 2010, the ARC has identified the following priorities:

- ✂ **Farm Business Development and Support:** Developing and expanding local and regional markets through expansion of the Island Certified Local program; development of farm friendly agritourism events such as Farm & Feast and the Fall Farm Festival; and offering business support for farmers.

- ✂ **Farmland Preservation:** Linking farmers with farmland; conserving valuable farmland for the future; promoting tax programs that encourage management of farmland for future commercial use,

- ✂ **Farm Regulations and Policies:** Promoting land-use policies and regulations that expand and strengthen opportunities for local farmers, including ongoing coordination to advance the Small Farm Internship Program recently adopted by the state; and promoting changes to county code to allow farm stands on Agricultural Resource Lands.

- ✂ **Looking to the Future: Developing an Agricultural Strategic Action Plan.**

The ARC, in collaboration with San Juan Preservation Trust and San Juan County Land Bank was recently awarded a **grant from the state Office of Farmland Preservation** to identify key goals and strategies that will result in the preservation of priority farmland in San Juan County, and strategic actions for enhancing and strengthening our local agricultural economy through promotion of markets, training of new farmers, and models for linking farmers to conserved farmland. The input of local farmers, landowners, and other stakeholders will be used to help identify priority actions. The plan will be finalized by June 2011.

Implementation of these priority actions will support continued growth and diversification of SJC's agricultural sector, contributing broad economic, cultural and community benefits to islanders and tourists. ARC's position within the Economic Development Council enables further support for economic growth and expansion of agriculture.



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ARC SUCCESSFULLY PROPOSES INTERN LEGISLATION

Small family farms are a vital part of San Juan County's economy and culture. Yet with an aging farming population, the need to train and mentor new farmers is critical in ensuring continued stability and growth in our agricultural sector. Nationally as well as locally, internships are a time-honored tradition that offers farm based experiential training for new and emerging farmers. Yet state labor laws do not recognize small farm internships as a valid unpaid worker category, and requires that farm interns be paid minimum wage and workmen's compensation unless the interns are matriculated at a recognized educational institution.

In 2009 and 2010, in response to a state audit of a local farm and in recognition of the critical need for interns working on our local farms, the ARC worked closely with state Senator Ranker to propose groundbreaking state legislation that would allow small farms to have unpaid interns on their farms. SB 6349, establishing a Small Farm Internship Pilot Program proposed that changes be made in state labor law to create a new worker category, "farm intern," that could be paid less than minimum wage. Only small farms with gross sales less than \$250,000 per year could employ farm interns. The proposed Small Farm Internship legislation was designed to adhere to the purpose and spirit of the existing internship classification by requiring farmers to provide an explicit and structured learning experience for their interns.

SB 6349, establishing an intern program on small farms was signed into law by Governor Gregoire in spring 2010. This program is a pilot program for small farms in San Juan and Skagit Counties and is scheduled to sunset in December 2011, unless adopted as a statewide program. The ARC will continue to work closely with state Labor & Industry to develop procedures and criteria to ensure success of the program. Passage of the Small Farm Internship Program is of national significance, offering a model for other states to adopt in support of internships on small family farms.



The San Juan County Agricultural Economy Is Expanding:

12% increase in revenue
29% increase in number of farms
34% farms operated by women
21,500 acres under cultivation



PROTECTING WATER FOR AGRICULTURE

The availability of adequate water is essential for our farms, today and into the future. Towards that purpose, ARC has worked closely with county staff and the Water Resources Committee to develop recommendations in the Water Element of the Comprehensive Plan to ensure that policies address the mutual goals of protecting water availability for agricultural use and engaging the farming community in the conservation of water quantity and quality for all users. This included a proposal to prohibit the transfer or export of water from lands that are designated for their agricultural resource potential (Agricultural Resource Lands). With anticipated impacts of climate change affecting our agricultural practices, the protection of adequate water for our farmlands is necessary for protecting our food supply, improving our community's resilience, and strengthening our agricultural economy.

ISLANDS CERTIFIED LOCAL (ICL) PROMOTING LOCAL FOODS

In recognition of the economic benefits of building and restoring a strong agricultural economy, SJC Agricultural Resource Committee (ARC) launched the Islands Certified Local Program in 2007. Island Certified Local Program (ICL) seeks to strengthen and diversify market opportunities for local farms, to expand consumer awareness of the health, environmental and economic benefits of purchasing locally grown food, and to connect consumers and visitors to food establishments and businesses that source local products. To date, ICL includes thirty four members, including 13 farms, 20 food establishments, and 1 farm-related business.

ARC is currently working with Northwest Agriculture Business Center to evaluate and grow ICL, seeking to increase membership and to expand member benefits and networks. By cultivating ICL to promote and strengthen our local markets and farm economy, we also serve to protect and utilize our precious farmlands. To join the ICL program, contact Peg at (360) 378-2906 or info@sjcarc.org.



The Agricultural Resources Committee is housed at the San Juan County Economic Development Council. This partnership emphasizes the ARC's focus on strengthening the agricultural economic sector of San Juan County.