

## **Agricultural Resources Committee**

Minutes of November 13, 2007

2:00 – 4:00 PM

Skagit Valley College – Friday Harbor

**ARC Members Present:** Jane Burton Bell, Peter Corning, Christine Dahl-Sesby, Todd Goldsmith (via phone), Bruce Gregory, Eliza Habegger, Sara Jones, Jim Lawrence, Julie Miller, Rebecca Moore, Ron Zee

**ARC Members Absent:**, Katie Hover, Danna Kinsey, Chris Lohman, Tom Schultz, Mark Tompkins

**Friends Present:** Richard Anderson, Westcott Bay Orchards, Lincoln Bormann, SJC Land Bank; Owen Cheevers, Orcas; Linda Degnan-Cobos, SJI Slow Food Convivum; Dean Dougherty, Preservation Trust; Paul LeCrampe, Lacrover Farm; Bill Watson, SJC EDC

**CD/ARC Staff Present:** Eliza Buck

### **MINUTES**

The minutes of the October 23, 2007 meeting were unanimously approved with a few corrections. Peter Corning moved to approve minutes and Jim Lawrence seconded the motion. Rebecca Moore suggested clarification of language in the TDR section. Ron Zee corrected Steward Island to Stuart Island.

#### *Announcements by Eliza Buck*

San Juan County Council has earmarked \$35K for the ARC in 2008. SJC and the ARC also received a \$25K grant from the Office of Farmland Preservation for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Education Campaign.

#### **Definition of Farming Conversation:**

Eliza B. handed out definitions of agriculture taken from the San Juan County code. Ron suggested that the ARC either make amendments to the code definitions or move on. Jim Lawrence expressed concern for the omission of language specifically excluding horses and other recreational animals. He feels it opens the door to more hobby farms. A long discussion ensued. The ARC would like to encourage productive uses of farmland and discourage non-productive uses of farmland. Ron suggested that any further discussion could be via email.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Linda Degnan-Cobos announced that the San Juan Island Slow Food Convivum is organizing an event on December 1 & 2, 2007 on San Juan Island and will bring Tom French as a guest speaker who brought local foods into institutions around Skagit County. To contact Linda email her at [westboy@rockisland.com](mailto:westboy@rockisland.com).

## **OLD BUSINESS**

### *Farm Marketing*

Eliza Buck presented for the Marketing Subcommittee.

The Marketing Subcommittee met on Nov. 6, 2007 and talked about expanding the ICL program to include producers and food processors. They reviewed the survey and letter to go out to processors and decided to leave the percentage of local ingredients an open question rather than give a range of percentages. Next steps are to get a mailing list of processors from WSDA. Members also want to promote ICL program. Eliza B. will ask Gretchen Allison (Duck Soup Inn), Brian Kvistad (Blossoms Grocery), Anna Marie (Harrison House B&B), and Laurie Paul (Market Chef) to write articles about the ICL program.

Follow up on the SJI Permanent Farmers Market Summit. Liz Illg will facilitate. Other islands should be encouraged to participate.

A Fall Harvest Dinner prepared by local chefs using local food has been proposed by Anna Marie from Harrison House B&B as a benefit fundraiser for local foods & farming promotion. The subcommittee will consider.

Julie Miller shared news that the Orcas Farmers Market will receive \$5K from the San Juan County Council as relief for high venue fees. At the Council meeting, agriculture and the ARC were favorably mentioned numerous times by the Council.

### *Farmland Preservation*

Eliza Habegger presented for the Farmland Preservation Subcommittee. The subcommittee met on Oct. 31, 2007. The group felt that they should break into smaller groups focused on projects. There are three high priority projects and three other projects:

1. Working with the Assessor's office as they are going through a process of reviewing lands in agricultural exempt status. Some lands might be in jeopardy of losing their designation. They want to insert ARC members in the review process and create "rapid action teams" on each island who could meet with landowners to help them find ways to keep their land in ag deferred tax status.
2. Leasing agreements. Modify extant documents for local use.  
Katie Hover and Jim Lawrence are working with the SJC Land Bank to develop leasing criteria for the King Sisters property.
3. Templates for possible farming operations (also known as enterprise budgets). To help farmers get started in different enterprises. Market analysis of consumer demand in partnership with WSU.
4. Farm worker housing
5. On-line Bulletin Board enhancement
6. Looking forward project: gathering information on impacts on farming (i.e. climate change, new markets).

Ron recommended that the ARC focus on two or three major projects per year. He asked the ARC whether they wanted to maintain subcommittee structure or designate task groups to work on specific projects. After lengthy discussion, the group determined that members will receive a list of projects identified by the two subcommittees and asked to prioritize projects for 2008. Ron and Eliza will send out a list before the Dec. 3, 2007 meeting.

### *Coordinator's Report*

Skipped to use time for guest presenters.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

Guest presentations by Steve Simpson, Port of Friday Harbor; Lincoln Bormann, SJC Land Bank; and Dean Dougherty, San Juan Preservation Trust.

Steve Simpson gave an overview of port districts. San Juan County has 3 port districts – San Juan Island, Lopez and Orcas. Steve has been at the Port of Friday Harbor for the past 21 years and will be retiring at the end of the month. Port districts were created as economic development entities. The Port's primary directive is to maintain a healthy economy with family wage jobs that improve the social, economic and natural environment of the islands. Investment capital comes from taxes. Port districts are run by elected commissioners. Port of Friday Harbor (PFH) has three commissioners. PFH's focus has been on the airport and the marina. They have also done land leases. Port districts are very flexible; they can also do storage facilities. In eastern Washington, the ports are very involved in agriculture. Port of Olympia was instrumental in creating their farmers market. Commissioners must be persuaded to get involved in the agricultural sector. They need to be presented with a good case for the economic and social value of agriculture in the islands. The Economic Development Element is a document that could be helpful in making a good case. The Port can offer land to lease and support for infrastructural development. They can provide leverage to get resources and grants for ag projects. The Port has put its support behind a cut and wrap facility but public sentiment was against it.

Steve recommended that we speak to Barbara Merritt, Port Commissioner, about the permanent farmers market to champion our cause. The two things that the Port does are to operate the airport and the marina beyond that they facilitate economic development projects. Maps of Port properties are available to review at the Port office. Most of the structures on Port property are owned by the lessee.

Lincoln Bormann stated that the SJC Land Bank has been interested in open space and agriculture since its inception in 1990. Their initial tool has been conservation easements where certain rights are purchased from the landowner. The landowner then gets to put the money back into farm operations. Property values are reduced because the number of units will be restricted. It is a temporary solution. When there is a generational transfer of the land, land values rise beyond the ability of new farmers to purchase the land. Another problem with conservation easements is that it is static and restrictive rather than being proactive in prescribing land management practices. The SJC Land Bank has decided to try to preserve agriculture by acquiring land with good agricultural resources and lease it out to people who want to farm. This takes land costs out of the equation, which is the number one impediment for farmers here in the islands. Currently, they are looking at the King Sisters property off of San Juan Valley Rd. They are willing to develop basic infrastructure such as fencing to make farming viable. There is another 70 acres property near American Camp. They also are working with the Coffelts on Orcas. The Land Bank is purchasing the underlying fee (the title) on the farm and leasing the property to a third party. They are also looking at a "Farmstead" concept, which would include infrastructure plus housing, and lease it as a workable farm. They may be able to try the farmstead concept on a piece of the Coffelt property. The Land Bank staff needs to do a market study to determine lease rates. When they are ready to lease farmland, they will put announcements in the local media and send out the word via FarmLink, etc.

Dean Dougherty gave an overview of the San Juan Preservation Trust, which was founded in 1979. Preserving agricultural lands, open space, wetlands, and habitat is central to the organization's mission. They have a couple thousand acres of farmland under conservation easements, some of the stellar properties are Lacrover Farm on SJI and T&D Farm on Lopez. They also have an easement on the 700 acre Gann property in San Juan Valley. The SJPT Board has worked hard to consider how they can preserve farmland and determined that their mission is to preserve land but not tell owners how to manage their lands. They did raise funds to save a piece of property in Crow Valley, which is not being farmed but could be. They feel their role is preserving land that could be farmed. There are great models in the East, such as the Vermont Land Trust and Equity Trust. The latter published a book about different models in the Northeast. Eliza H. will send out the book citation. [Here's what Eliza emailed: "Holding Ground: A guide to Northeast Farmland Tenure and Stewardship", published 2004 by the New England Small Farm Institute. It gives some case studies of alternative ways - other than outright "fee" ownership (!) - that farmers can have secure use of land].

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Eliza B. received a called from Mark Tompkins of the Health Dept. that the new fee schedule for farm stores and farm stands will go into effect on Nov. 26, 2007.

Candace sent word that the Ag Recycling Program collected over 3 tons on the three islands!

The GMO Forum will be held on San Juan Island on November 17, 2007 from 2-4 PM at Mullis Senior Center. Guest speakers will be from WSU and The Campaign.

### **NEXT MEETING**

Our next meeting will be **Monday, December 3** at the Skagit Valley College - Room C - in Friday Harbor from **9:30 – 11:30 AM**. The ARC will share a **potluck lunch from 11:30-12:30** followed by a **Permanent Farmers' Market Summit** from **1-4 PM** in the Skagit Valley College Community Room.