

December 12, 2008

**A message from 32 associations
on behalf of the Washington
agricultural community**

The Honorable Christine Gregoire
Office of the Governor
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Gregoire,

Like the rest of our state and nation, Washington's farmers and ranchers are facing extremely difficult times. Wildly fluctuating prices, coupled with skyrocketing input costs and difficulty in accessing financing, have pushed many producers and processors to the edge of financial ruin. Increasing disease and pest threats have made it more difficult to produce food and fiber. All of these pressures threaten to compromise Washington's position as a leading agricultural state. This is especially true when Washington's farmers and ranchers are trying to compete with foreign producers that have significantly lower costs and regulation.

Protecting the future of agriculture in Washington is key to the survival of many rural communities in our state, as well as a critical component of a vibrant statewide economy. Our 32 billion dollar food and agriculture industry is 12 percent of the state's economy and employs 160,000 people. To ensure our industry remains viable, the agricultural community has developed a "2009 Ag Package" which is being presented to the executive and legislative leadership of this state. This Package represents areas of agreement and support from the incredibly diverse agricultural interests in our state. We have identified key policy and budgetary items we believe will be critical if our producers and processors are to continue to compete and make significant contributions to our economy.

We hope you will embrace this Package. We believe it identifies the key actions necessary to preserve and enhance the viability of family farms and ranches. Many of these recommendations track proposals found in the work of the Office of Farmland Preservation and its report to the legislature. We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the priorities identified in this Package.

Key issues for agriculture in the 2009 legislative session.

1) Avoid increasing taxes, fees, or regulations, which would hinder the ability of Washington's farmers and ranchers to remain economically viable.

Many producers and processors are on the edge of financial viability. Any proposals, no matter how well-intentioned, that make it more difficult for our farmers and ranchers to successfully compete with other states and nations will compromise their ability to provide jobs and contribute to the economy.

2) Encourage water conservation by repealing or significantly modifying statutory relinquishment of water rights.

The current "use-it-or-lose-it" relinquishment policy prohibits and discourages water right holders from participating in any discussions regarding water right transfers, efficiencies and conservation programs at any level. This runs counter to the desire to meet existing and future demand through transfers and efficiency measures. The elimination of partial relinquishment or

limiting the period to which relinquishment applies will help provide needed certainty and incentives to conserve water.

Water is key to Washington's economic vitality and quality of life. **Washington has 268.7 billion gallons of water passing through the state on a daily basis with a consumptive demand of only 4.7 billion gallons per day (or 1.75 percent).** With this tremendous amount of water, we can meet the needs of in-stream and out-of-stream users by carefully managing the resource. This means eliminating practices that hinder efficient, predictable water supply availability and use.

3) Promote a stable, legal, competitive agricultural labor supply by enacting an essential worker program and enhancing programs for seasonal workers.

Agriculture is an economic engine that employs more workers than any other industry in our state, and the number one agricultural employer is the tree fruit industry. A vital component of labor intensive agriculture is the 50,000 migrant and seasonal workers who toil in our apple and cherry orchards, pick grapes, harvest berries and hops, and perform all of the other seasonal jobs that exist mainly in the six month period from May through October.

Every year our industry does more to make the workplace safer for seasonal workers; several innovative programs are underway. We need safe and affordable housing for seasonal workers, we need this workforce to be more stable, and we need to fix our immigration system so that the workforce is legal as well as stable. In short, we need to protect our migrant and seasonal workforce. Because the federal government continues to debate the issue without resolution, we feel that Washington state should take steps to provide for a stable, legal workforce.

4) Protect funding for agricultural research, education and outreach.

Publicly funded agricultural education, plant and animal research, and outreach are critical to the short- and long-term viability of Washington agriculture.

Thank you for your leadership and your interest in assisting agriculture.

Sincerely,

Columbia Basin Development League
Far West Agribusiness Association
Northwest Food Processors Association
Washington Asparagus Commission
Washington Association of Wheat Growers
Washington Blueberry Commission
Washington Cattlemen's Association
Washington Farm Bureau
Washington Friends of Farms & Forests
Washington Growers Clearing House Association
Washington State Council of Farmer Cooperatives
Washington State Grange
Washington State Nursery and Landscape Assoc.
Washington State Sheep Producers
Washington State Water Resources Association
Western Washington Agricultural Association

Columbia-Snake River Irrigators Association
Hop Growers of Washington
Washington Asparagus Council
Washington Association of Conservation Districts
Washington Association of Landscape Professionals
Washington Cattle Feeders Association
Washington Christmas Tree Growers
Washington Fish Growers Association
Washington Fryer Commission
Washington Potato and Onion Association
Washington State Dairy Federation
Washington State Horticultural Association
Washington State Potato Commission
Washington State Turfgrass Seed Commission
Wenatchee Valley Traffic Association
Yakima Valley Growers-Shippers Association

cc: WSDA Acting Director Bob Gore
Senate & House Members