

February 8, 2005

The Honorable Frank Chopp  
Speaker of the House  
Washington House of Representatives  
PO Box 40600  
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

*A joint message from twenty-one  
associations on behalf of the  
agricultural community in  
Washington State.*

Dear Speaker Chopp,

Working family farms are a key part of the backbone of the Washington state economy. There are several trends in Washington agriculture that should give state policy makers, local governments and conservationists pause for thought.

In Washington, agriculture provides jobs; food and fiber; state and local tax revenues; and economic vitality for our state and local communities. Agriculture provides environmental benefits including water filtration, fish & wildlife habitat, open space and flood control.

There are about 35,000 family farms in our state. More than 69% of Washington farms are smaller than 100 acres. More than 75% of our farms have gross sales under \$50,000 per year. The average farm owner/operator is over 55 with one or more person holding a non-farm job to keep the farm going.

Our state agriculture provides one in ten jobs, more than 170,000 in all, in direct farm and food processing activities. About 60% of the exports shipped through the Port of Seattle are agriculture-related. With more than 250 commodities, Washington is second only to California in terms of the diversity of agriculture. Our farms and related industries have a total economic impact of at least \$30 billion statewide. Much of the economic impact is generated on small working family agricultural enterprises.

Meantime, the farmer is earning a smaller percentage of the agriculture dollar. In 2002, the total farmgate value (prior to processing, etc.) was over \$5.8 billion and the net farm income was about \$970 million. In 2003, total farmgate value increased to \$5.9 billion, while the net farm income decreased to \$680 million. Contributors to this dramatic decrease in net farm revenue include energy, labor and regulatory costs.

In the 5 years between 1997 and 2002, a total of 425,000 acres of farmland were converted to other uses. Less farmland with increased costs and a dramatic reduction in net farm income foretell serious threats to agricultural viability in our state. Yet there are areas where the legislature and governor can take action to make a dramatic difference for Washington's agricultural families. After all, a healthy agricultural community is key to a healthy economy and environment.

The agricultural community has engaged in discussions these past few weeks to combine elements from the agendas of our diverse organizations into an “Ag Package” to present to leadership in each of the four caucuses.

This Ag Package represents areas of agreement and mutual support from the diverse agricultural interests in our state. There are other issues that individual groups will pursue outside the structure of this Ag Package.

We hope that you and the leaders of the other caucuses will embrace this package as a means to provide forward incremental steps to preserve and enhance the viability of one of the largest sectors of economic activity and employment in our state.

Our various groups will be very glad to meet with you and members of your caucus, testify in committee, work on legislation and amendments and any other activity necessary to pass policies and budget items to preserve and enhance our economy through the support of working family farms across our state.

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

We hope you will consider these priorities for agriculture in 2005:

### **Agriculture Package 2005**

#### 1. Investing in Agriculture

- a) Hop Technology Initiative (\$3 Million)
- b) Asparagus Mechanization Initiative
  - Packing Automation Programs (\$1.5 Million)
  - Harvester Technology Research at WSU (\$660,000)
  - Market Access/Trade Barrier Grant Program at WSDA (\$2 million)
- c) Center for Precision Agriculture Initiative (\$10 million)
- d) Poultry Disease Eradication Indemnity (through WSDA)
- e) Livestock Nutrient Management Program Funding
  - Technical Assistance through WA Conservation Commission (\$2.2 Million)
  - Cost Share Program through WA Conservation Commission (\$2.6 Million)
  - WSDA Inspection Program (\$280,000)
- f) Statewide Economic Impact Study on Agriculture
- g) Livestock Identification Funding
- h) Produce Railcar Initiative (\$500,000)
- i) Additional CREP Authority (\$2 Million)
- j) Cholinesterase Worker Training Program (\$200,000)
- k) Increase Conservation Districts Basic Funding (\$500,000)

#### 2. Regulatory Reform

- a) Expand Shorelines Act Agricultural Exemption to GMA
- b) Appropriately define Ag Lands of Long Term Commercial Significance
- c) *Avundes* Fix (SB 5546) [Seasonal Worker Benefits]

- d) Animal carcass disposal harmonization between agencies
- e) Farm raised fish definition in line with Federal definition
- f) Protect Farmers from Frivolous Complaints
- g) Pass HB 1553/SB 5632 to provide WISHA consultation, consistent with OSHA practices, to small farms with less than 10 employees
- h) Provide attorney fees for successful appeals of WISHA penalties
- i) Require employer notification of workplace injury claims
- j) Eliminate Relinquishment for Agricultural Water Rights
- k) Minimum Wage Trigger Reform

3. Tax policy

- a) Expand sales & use tax exemption for Dairy Nutrient equipment repairs & maintenance to all livestock sectors
- b) Tax exemption for equipment to reduce field burning
- c) Food Processor Warehouse Tax Incentives
- d) Exempt from sales & use tax the purchase of fish by WDFW & sales of fish by U-Fish operations

4. Farm Worker Housing Infrastructure Investment

- a) Provide Housing through the Housing Trust Fund (\$8 million)
- b) Create State Matching Funds for Infrastructure for Seasonal Housing (\$2.5 million)

*Cattle Producers of Washington*  
*Columbia-Snake River Irrigators Association*  
*Hop Growers of Washington*  
*Washington Asparagus Council*  
*Washington Association of Conservation Districts*  
*Washington Association of Wheat Growers*  
*Washington Cattle Feeders Association*  
*Washington Cattlemen's Association*  
*Washington Farm Bureau*  
*Washington Fish Growers Association*  
*Washington Friends of Farms & Forests*  
*Washington Growers Clearing House Association*  
*Washington Growers League*  
*Washington Potato & Onion Association*  
*Washington State Council of Farmer Cooperatives*  
*Washington State Dairy Federation*  
*Washington State Horticultural Association*  
*Washington State Nursery & Landscape Association*  
*Washington State Sheep Producers*  
*Wenatchee Valley Traffic Association*  
*Yakima Valley Growers-Shippers Association*

Cc: Caucus Leadership  
 House and Senate Agriculture Committees  
 Agricultural Organizations