

December 22, 2006

The Honorable Richard DeBolt  
Washington State Senate  
PO Box 40600  
Olympia, WA 98504

*A message from twenty-five  
associations on behalf of the  
Washington agricultural*

Dear Representative DeBolt,

Viable family farms are a critical part of the Washington state economy. However our farms and farmers are under considerable threat from increased input costs, regulatory pressures, and loss of competitiveness with other states. To ensure that the industry remains viable and that farmers have the opportunity to earn enough to support their families, the agricultural community has engaged in discussions to present a single "2007 Ag Package" to leadership in each of the four caucuses, as well as to the Governor.

This Ag Package represents areas of agreement and mutual support from the diverse agricultural interests in our state. We have endeavored to identify policy and budgetary items that will enable us to compete. There are, of course, other issues that individual groups will pursue outside the structure of this Ag Package.

We hope that you and other leaders within our state will embrace this package that provides incremental steps to preserve and enhance the viability of family farms and ranches. These agricultural producers represent not only one of the largest sectors of economic activity and employment in our state but also provide stewardship of our natural resources.

Our groups will be glad to meet with you and other legislators, testify in committee, and work on legislation in order to encourage the passage of policies and budget items that will preserve and enhance our economy through the support of working family farms across our state.

We hope you will consider the following priorities for agriculture in 2007.

***Key issues for agriculture in the 2007 legislative session***

**Budget/Tax Fairness**

- Support \$10.8 million in operating funds for the WSU 2007 Agriculture Initiative.
- Support increased funding of the Trade Barrier and Market Access program in WSDA.
- Support Conservation District funding.
- Expand WSDA pesticide training program for growers and workers.
- Support affordable farm-to-market transportation infrastructure funding.
- Support funding for construction of the WSU Life Sciences Building.
- Exempt farm machinery from the sales tax.

### **Land Use**

- Support clarifying that the Right to Farm statute protects all types of agriculture from nuisance suits, regardless of what agricultural activities are conducted on the farm as long as the farm was there first.
- Support exempting existing agriculture from critical area ordinances.

### **Restoring Competitiveness in Labor-Intensive Agriculture**

- Support additional funds for the infrastructure loan program to fund farm worker housing, including infrastructure improvements to existing structures..
- Support the ESD proposals to streamline the U/I system, consistent with good public policy for agricultural operations.
- Preserve the current farm labor contractor laws to ensure the successful use of farm labor contractors and the federal H2A and guestworker programs.
- Support innovative ESD workforce programs including expansion of the ESD flexible funding proposal so that the agency can continue to operate its agriculture initiative.

### **Water Management**

- Support repeal or at least modification of the relinquishment statute.
- Support allocation of water and creation of storage projects to ensure irrigation water supply, including providing relief to the Odessa aquifer.

### ***Other issues agriculture agrees are very important to the industry***

### **Budget/Tax Fairness**

- Support reducing/eliminating the public utility tax on natural gas and electricity used for agricultural industrial uses.
- Exempt farm-related services provided by farmers from the B&O tax.
- Support legislation to exempt on-farm propane sales from the sales tax.
- Support legislation to extend the current B&O tax exemption for sales of certain unprocessed commodities to all unprocessed agricultural commodities.

### **Land Use**

- Support clarification that property taken through eminent domain may only be used for the purpose for which it was taken, or else it must be offered back to the original owner/heirs at the original purchase price.

- Ensure that no private property is taken or restricted in use by government for habitat protection, enhancement, etc., unless it is purchased through the eminent domain process.
- Support clarifying that eminent domain may only be invoked for a specific project, not for general purposes like blight.
- Support amending Chapter 7.48 RCW and RCW 36.70A.060 to clarify that new regulations adopted under Chapter 36.70A RCW cannot require removal of land from agricultural production, whether in terms of production or total acreage.
- Support amending GMA to clarify that existing and allowable uses cannot be prohibited, or determined to be non-conforming uses by new GMA regulations.
- Support legislation exempting wetlands converted to cropland prior to 1985 from regulation as wetlands.

### **Restoring Competitiveness in Labor-Intensive Agriculture**

- Support the present retrospective rating system as a successful public/private partnership that benefits workers and employers and oppose efforts to interfere with the contract between an employer and association.
- Support efforts to improve accountability and reporting of workers' compensation fund diversions to ensure that fund diversions are used only for programs that directly benefit workplace safety.
- Support a \$100 gas voucher for out-of-state workers who register with the Employment Security Department and verify they have accepted a seasonal agricultural position with a grower registered with WorkSource.
- Support increased funding for housing vouchers for seasonal workers.
- Support a workers' compensation wage simplification proposal providing workers with 66% of the wage at time of injury for the first ten weeks after a claim was filed tax free, and 66% of the total prior year's earnings thereafter in order to make Washington's system competitive with surrounding states.
- Support a joint resolution asking the federal government to implement immigration and guest worker reform.
- Support a program that encourages teen workers in agriculture by offering a "scholarship" of up to one quarter tuition at an in-state institution for each complete summer worked on a farm.

## Other

- Support funding for agricultural automation and mechanization initiatives.
- Support the federal regulatory process for crops developed through the use of biotechnology.
- Support actions to deter theft of metal from farms.
- Support wildfire management reform, including more local input.
- Support \$440,000 for rangeland monitoring.
- Support \$915,000 for an elk fence in Garfield County.
- Support allowing trapping of predators that threaten livestock
- Support amending WDFW predation compensation package.
- Ensure that agriculture has the tools necessary to deal with pests and diseases.
- Support completion of the purchase of the Palouse River-Coulee City railroad as directed by the 2006 Legislature and reestablish a connection between the BNSF and UP lines either by replacing the burned trestle or rebuilding alternative track.

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

Sincerely,

*Columbia Basin Development League Association*      *Columbia-Snake River Irrigators Association*  
*Farwest Agribusiness Association*      *Hop Growers of Washington*  
*Washington Asparagus Council*      *Washington Asparagus Commission*  
*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 Fryer Commission*  
*Washington Growers Clearing House Association*      *Washington Potato & Onion Association*  
*Washington State Council of Farmer Cooperatives Federation*      *Washington State Dairy Federation*  
*Washington State Horticultural Association*      *Washington State Nursery & Landscape Assn.*  
*Washington State Potato Commission*      *Washington State Sheep Producers Association*  
*Washington State Turfgrass Seed Commission*      *Wenatchee Valley Traffic Association*  
*Yakima Valley Growers-Shippers Association*

cc: Caucus Leadership  
House and Senate Agriculture Committees  
Governor Christine Gregoire  
WSDA Director Valoria Loveland  
Agricultural Organizations