

December 20, 2007

The Honorable Lisa Brown
Washington State Senate
PO Box 40403
Olympia, WA 98504-0403

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

Dear Senator Brown,

Protecting the future of agriculture in Washington is key to the survival of many small communities in our state as well as a critical component of a vibrant statewide economy. However, farmers and ranchers face considerable threats from increased input costs, regulatory pressures, loss of competitiveness with other states, and the intense pressure of a global economy. To ensure that the industry remains viable, the agricultural community has engaged in discussions to present a single “2008 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 happy to engage at any level to encourage the passage of policies and budget items that will act to preserve and enhance the economy through the support of working family farms across our state.

We hope you will consider the following priorities for agriculture in 2008.

Key issues for agriculture in the 2008 legislative session

Budget/Tax Fairness

- Support sales and use tax exemption for the non-highway use of propane by farmers.
- Support \$3.85 million from general fund to WSU to address emerging global animal health and agricultural issues.
- Support elimination of sales tax on farm equipment purchased at off-farm auctions.
- Support a program that encourages teen workers in agriculture by offering guaranteed education tuition credits for working on a farm.
- Support appropriations to implement Lake Roosevelt Drawdown.

Land Use

- Exempt agricultural buildings from building permit and structural code requirements.
- Clarify that right to farm protections apply within urban growth areas.
- Support expedited permitting related to protecting property and people from flooding and erosion.

Restoring Competitiveness in Labor-Intensive Agriculture

- Protect Washington agriculture's overtime exemption.
- Support workers' privacy rights by protecting the right to a secret ballot on the issue of representation.
- Support the right of employers to freely communicate with employees.

Water Management

- Support repeal or modification of the relinquishment statute.
- Support new allocation of water and creation of multi-use storage projects, including flood control.

Other

- Support funding for agricultural automation and mechanization initiatives.
- Support creation of a compensation package for wildlife damage to livestock.
- Oppose additional restrictions on pesticide use that compromise growers' ability to protect crops from insects, diseases and weeds.
- Support rehabilitation of the Palouse River-Coulee City railroad as originally intended by the Legislature including rebuilding the Thornton to Oaksdale track to re-establish the connection between the BNSF and UP lines.
- Support market mechanisms (i.e., cap and trade) as the preferred method for achieving greenhouse gas reductions providing that carbon sequestration is fully recognized as a unique market opportunity for Washington state's total land base (42.5 million acres), with over 35% in production agriculture (15 million acres) and more than half forested (22 million acres).

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

Sincerely,

Columbia Basin Development League

Farwest Agribusiness Association

Washington Asparagus Council

Washington Association of Conservation Districts

Washington Cattle Feeders Association

Washington Farm Bureau

Washington Friends of Farms & Forests

Washington Growers Clearing House Association

Washington Potato & 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

Columbia-Snake River Irrigators Association

Hop Growers of Washington

Washington Asparagus Commission

Washington Association of Wheat Growers

Washington Cattlemen's Association

Washington Fish Growers Association

Washington Fryer Commission

Washington Growers League

Washington St. Council of Farmer Cooperatives

Washington State Grange

Washington State Nursery & Landscape Assn.

Washington State Sheep Producers

Washington State Water Resources Association

Western Washington Agricultural Association

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

Senator Mike Hewitt
Speaker Frank Chopp
Representative Richard DeBolt