



A message from the Washington Agricultural Community

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Cattle Producers of Washington</i> • <i>Dairy Farmers of Washington</i> • <i>Franklin County Assn. of Wheat Growers</i> • <i>Franklin County Farm Bureau</i> • <i>Hop Growers of Washington</i> • <i>Northwest Food Processors Assn.</i> • <i>Washington Assn. of Conservation Districts</i> • <i>Washington Assn. of Wheat Growers</i> • <i>Washington Assn. of Wine Grape Growers</i> • <i>Washington Cattlemen's Assn.</i> • <i>Washington Farm Bureau</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Washington Friends of Farms and Forests</i> • <i>Washington State Dairy Federation</i> • <i>Washington State Grange</i> • <i>Washington State Hay Growers Assn.</i> • <i>Washington State Nursery & Landscape Assn.</i> • <i>Washington State Potato Commission</i> • <i>Washington State Sheep Producers</i> • <i>Washington State Tree Fruit Assn.</i> • <i>Washington State Water Resources Assn.</i> • <i>Western Washington Agricultural Assn.</i> |
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February 17, 2015

Honorable County Commissioners,

We, the above agricultural organizations, encourage you to accept Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) funding from the state Conservation Commission and move forward with the VSP process. For those counties that have already signed VSP contracts, Thank You! After many years of litigation and negotiation, Washington’s agricultural organizations supported passage of VSP legislation in 2011 and VSP process funding in 2015. The legislature’s objectives are clear: stop fighting costly court battles that divide communities and drain county budgets.

Truly voluntary—The VSP recognizes the importance of enhancing agricultural viability and growing the capacity for investment in voluntary projects and technologies that can improve both critical areas and the producer’s bottom line. Producers cannot be required to participate or take any action to enhance critical areas under the VSP. The VSP is truly voluntary.

Non-regulatory—The VSP protects agriculture from unneeded critical area regulations, focusing exclusively on voluntary actions by farmers and ranchers. To promote participation, promulgation of Ag-related critical area regulations is generally prohibited during VSP implementation.

Grassroots—The VSP calls for local work plans to be developed by, with and for producers, in cooperation with other local interests. Each work group has three years from the county funding contract date to get its work plan developed, submitted and approved. We are committed to helping each work group navigate that process.

Each plan must be designed so that, after 10 years, it will: 1) protect baseline critical area conditions as of July 22, 2011 (in the aggregate, not farm-by farm or ranch-by-ranch); 2) maintain and enhance agricultural viability; and 3) encourage voluntary critical area enhancements through incentive-based programs. We believe the VSP provides a reasonable and Ag-friendly approach to balancing the critical area protection and Ag viability objectives of the Growth Management Act.

We therefore respectfully request that you start your local VSP process and provide opportunity for our members to participate. We stand ready to partner with you, and to help county work groups develop successful VSP plans that will work for counties, and for agriculture.

Sincerely,

The Washington Agricultural Community