

Farms Protected From Development - Legislative Funding Will Help Keep Wash. Farms in Production

Cookson Beecher, Capital Press, Apr. 4, 2008
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The Washington state Legislature has approved a total of \$4.7 million in state grants that will allow counties to preserve 10 farms.

The funding comes from the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, a state grant program that funds farmland projects, wildlife habitat and parks.

The WWRP is a nationally recognized grant program that has funded the protection and preservation of more than 300,000 acres of parks and wildlife habitat throughout the state since 1990.

In 2005, the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition, chief advocate for WWRP funding, passed an amendment to expand the grant program to help cities and counties preserve farmland.

WWRP officials say that the farms qualifying for the program are valuable for what they produce, while serving as wildlife habitat, as buffers against urban expansion and as a filter for clean water.

Farmland preservation projects and the amount of the grant money for each project:

- Peoples Ranch, Snohomish County, \$750,000

Peoples Ranch, the center of operations for the Hollandia Dairy Farm, milks 500 cows, grows and harvests 130 acres of green chop and raises heifer cattle.

The WWRP grant will help preserve 240 acres of farmland at the ranch.

- Glendale Farm, Jefferson County, \$546,737

Glendale is an organic beef farm that has been in operation since 1857. Its proximity to the busy Chimicum intersection on the Olympic Peninsula makes it vulnerable to commercial and residential development.

The WWRP grant will help preserve 150 acres of pasture of prime soils, as well as 23 acres of forest and a half-mile of Chemicum Creek, which provides habitat for salmon, trumpeter swans, eagles, hawks and many other species.

- Ebey's Reserve Farmland, Engle Farm, Island County, \$750,000

Ebey's Reserve Farmland, which has been actively farmed for more than 155 years, produces alfalfa, wheat, barley, corn and produce.

The WWRP grant will help protect 83 acres and connect the farm with hundreds of acres of farmland already protected by the National Park Service.

- Terry's Berries Farm, Pierce County, \$291,370

Terry's Berries Farm hosts hundreds of students every year who want to learn about sustainable farming. The WWRP grant will help in the purchase of Terry's Berries' development rights, allowing the owners' heirs to handle the family property when the farm is passed on to them. This will ensure that the farm is protected in the future.

- Orting Valley Farms, Pierce County, \$750,000

This WWRP grant will help private organic farmers establish five working farms within the 100-acre Orting Valley farm. The county will purchase development rights, which will reduce some of the economic pressure on the farms. Located on the Puyallup River, the farms have been active since the late 1800s and also provide habitat for White River elk.

- Willie Greens Organic Farm, Snohomish County, \$78,210

Willie Greens is an integral part of Snohomish County's agricultural economy. It produces 50 varieties of organic fruits, vegetables and berries, and it wholesales them to companies in the Seattle area and at regional farmers' markets.

The WWRP grant protects 42 acres of historic farmland.

- Rattlesnake Hills Working Rangelands, Yakima County, \$576,650

Yakima County will use the WWRP grant to purchase development rights on 1,229 acres of private livestock grazing land in the rapidly developing Rattlesnake Hills.

This protection will help the landowner counteract offers from developers who would have built a golf course on the land.

The grant will also help preserve a wildlife corridor for sage grouse, jackrabbits and hawks, and it will keep the land in active operation for generations to come.

- Useless Bay East Farmland, Island County, \$500,000

Useless Bay East Farmland on Whidbey Island has supported crops and pasture since 1915. The property, which contains agricultural fields, wetlands and riparian areas, is adjacent to 500 acres of protected wetlands at Deer Lagoon. This makes it a vital component of the watershed ecosystem and valuable wildlife habitat. It was at immediate risk of development.

The WWRP grant will preserve this ecologically valuable farmland from being divided up into six home sites.

- Crown S Ranch Farmland, Okanogan County, \$213,750

As the Methow Valley in Eastern Washington continues to grow more and more popular for residential development, its historic farmlands become more threatened.

The WWRP grant will help protect 50 acres of the Crown S Ranch Farmland, located two miles south of Winthrop, through a permanent conservation easement that will prevent subdivisions and limit development on the ranch land, whose organic products support the local economy.

- Biderbost Farm, Snohomish County, \$280,710

The Biderbost Farm in the Tualco Valley has been a family-operated farm for the past 100 years.

Snohomish County will use the WWRP grant to purchase the development rights on 59 acres of the farm so that it can continue to be highly productive and support the local economy.