

Being a Good Neighbor to Large Commercial Agriculture



By Don McMoran, Director WSU Skagit County Extension
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May 8th will mark the 100 year anniversary of Smith-Lever Act and the creation of Extension. We hope you can join us to celebrate this historic event at our Burlington office located at 11768 Westar Lane Suite A in Burlington with an ice cream social between the hours of 1 and 4 PM. WSU Skagit County Extension dates back to 1922 and during our 92 year tenure we have spent a good portion of time bringing information from the University to the farmers of Skagit County. Due to this good work many Skagit Valley farmers were able to prosper in their ability to grow quality products and market them around the world.

Although an article on the historical perspectives of WSU Skagit County Extension may be appealing that is not what this article is about. Over the past century the demographics of Skagit County and the United States has shifted from small rural agricultural communities to more urbanization. Improved technology has enabled farmers to produce more with less and because of this movement more people are able to take on careers outside of agriculture. This movement is both good and bad in that our society has advanced more in the past 100 years than it has in the past 1000 years. The downside is that WSU Skagit County Extension is now spending a good deal of time educating the community on proper plant and animal management practices in order to protect commercial production interests.

As you know Skagit County is a great place to raise animals and grow a variety of crops. Our wonderful soils and maritime climate bring in an estimated 250 million dollars of farmgate agricultural returns to area farmers and our economy. Unfortunately this number could be much less with a new pest or disease outbreak that could be spread by the average community member trying to do a good thing.

By the numbers Dairy and Livestock lead the area with a farmgate value of \$56 million dollars. This industry could be severely reduced with an outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD); a disease that was eradicated in the United States in 1929 but has been documented in the UK and Chile in this century. WSU Skagit County Extension encourages livestock owners to monitor the health of cloven-hoofed animals closely and not bring animal products into the U.S. from other countries. Be truthful at customs if you travel internationally and visited a farm--you should contain that footwear and clothing until it can be laundered (unless already laundered) and not visit a farm for at least a week.



Although it may be tempting to use potatoes left over from last year's crop, it is a good practice to only use fresh, certified seed potatoes to help insure that this year's harvest will be disease free. *Photo by Christine Farrow / WSU Skagit County Master Gardeners.*

The Skagit Valley potato industry is second on the economic driver list at \$45 million dollar farmgate value. The potato industry is very concerned with backyard gardeners failing to monitor and control insects and diseases in their potato and tomato plants. Diseases like late blight can be wind-blown and spread rapidly among potato plants during wet weather.

The Skagit County Pest Board is also monitoring for potato psyllids. This insect has worked its way up from South America; it

deposits bacteria into the potato plant while feeding. This bacterium causes zebra type striping throughout the potato and makes it undesirable for the processing industry. Although this insect has caused tremendous issues with commercial potato fields in Eastern Washington it has yet to be trapped in Western Washington and your local potato producers would like to keep it this way. Please purchase clean certified potato seed for gardens and maintain pest and disease controls; do not use potatoes left over from last year's crop as this year's seed potatoes.



Left: The potato psyllid can carry bacteria that in a potato tuber causes discoloration detectable only when the potato is sliced and fried. While the discoloration is not harmful, it can affect the value of a potato crop. *Photo by Gary McDonald / WSU Skagit County Extension.* **Right:** Honeybees can fly a distance of several miles in search of pollen. *Photo by Christine Farrow / WSU Skagit County Extension.*

The third largest agriculture commodity in Skagit County is the fruit industry, valued at approximately 12 million dollars. The fruit industry would like the community to assist them in controlling the apple maggot and spotted wing drosophila (SWD) insects that have been introduced to our area in the past 30 years. Both apple maggot and SWD deposit their eggs into fruit leaving a product that is less than desirable to the consumer. You can do your part to control these pests, especially SWD, by maintaining good sanitation in your own garden by removing ripe, rotting, or fallen fruits and vegetables. Also understand that judicious use of insecticides while not in everyone's favor, are

sometimes the only option available for our growers to protect their crops. For more information on apple maggot and spotted wing drosophila please go to the Skagit County Pest Board site at <https://extension.wsu.edu/wsprs/>

The fourth Skagit County commodity group that would like your assistance is the vegetable seed industry valued at approximately \$10 million dollars. It is known that honey bees can fly up to six miles. The vegetable seed industry encourages vegetable gardening but needs gardeners to destroy vegetable crops before they flower to prevent cross contamination of the hybrid varieties produced in Skagit County.

These are just a few of the things gardeners and livestock owners can do to assist Skagit Valley farmers. Perhaps the best thing you and your families can do to support our growers is to purchase and enjoy their products. Moreover, you can share your wisdom and promote our high-value agricultural products with visitors of Skagit County. Thank you with your assistance to keep Skagit Valley Farmers Farming. For more information please go to the local Extension website at <https://extension.wsu.edu/skagit/> or contact us directly.

Resources:

- Johnson, D. A., Potato Health Management, second edition. 2008. Pg 111.
- <http://www.nwpotatoresearch.com/IPMStuff/PDFs/PotatoPsyllid.pdf>
- <http://osu.libanswers.com/a.php?qid=212338>
- http://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal_health/2013/fs_fmd_general.pdf
- <https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2073/2014/03/2012AgStats.pdf>
- <https://extension.wsu.edu/wsprs/>

Note: some hyperlinks in this article have been updated since its initial publication.