



Whatcom County Planning
Attn: Becky Boxx
5280 Northwest Drive
Bellingham, WA 98226

Re: Comments for Comp Plan Economic Section from Sustainable Connections

Dear Ms. Boxx,

Sustainable Connections would like to see agritourism addressed as a key growth opportunity for economic development within the County's Comprehensive Plan, providing low barrier opportunities for local farmers and producers to maximize this budding industry and bolster economic development here in Whatcom County.

Whatcom County offers both locals and visitors alike many dynamic food and agricultural experiences. Though still in its infancy (especially compared to neighboring Skagit County), this area is gradually becoming recognized as an exceptional culinary and agritourism destination. Skagit County estimates its tulip festival draws 300,000 to 500,000 visitors annually, with direct spending by these visitors in 2000 amounting to \$14 million, accompanied by \$2.8 million in wages, \$192,000 in local tax revenue, and \$848,000 in state tax revenue.¹ A 2007 study found Whatcom County's agricultural economy is 32 percent larger than adjacent Skagit County.² These figures show significant potential exists for growing culinary and agritourism in Whatcom County, increasing good jobs in an important local industry.

Sustainable Connections' mission is to be the forum where businesses come together to transform and model a vibrant local economy built on sustainable practices. Within our Food & Farming Program, we're working with 250+ food & farming businesses each year to inform, empower & provide resources to producers & buyers; making connections between farmers, institutions, retailers & restaurants; and raise awareness and support of local farms. Whatcom County has been investing tourism tax lodging funds into agritourism related economic development activities for a number of years now , and it has been a growing focus of ours.

Whatcom County is well positioned to capitalize on its reputation of being an enjoyable place to visit, and support from Whatcom County could help our nascent culinary and agritourism industry to mature, drawing visitors year-round and generating significant economic impact similar to that which Skagit County experiences. We'd like to see the agricultural community here in Whatcom County continue to grow and flourish, preserving farmland, growing farmers and adding to the economic vitality of our place and appreciate this change to express our feedback to the Economic Section of the Comp Plan.

Sincerely,
Derek Long, Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Derek Long", is positioned below the typed name.

¹ [Economic Impacts of Agriculture in Skagit County, WA . August 2003](#)
² [Agriculture – A Hidden Whatcom County Treasure 2008](#)