

Farmland Preservation Task Force Appointed for State

Tuesday, 16 October 2007

An 18-member Farmland Preservation Task Force has been appointed to provide the first statewide guidance for such efforts in Washington.

"Maintaining

the capacity to provide adequate food and fiber resources is essential

to the long-term sustainability of the state's citizens and economy,"

stated Substitute Senate Bill 5108, which was passed by overwhelming

majorities of the state House of Representatives and Senate and signed

by Governor Chris Gregoire. (Substitute Senate Bill 5108 is now encoded as Chapter 89.10 Revised Code of Washington.)

Formed in response to a bill passed in the last legislative session, the Task Force consists of six farmer representatives from around the state along with legislators, county commissioners and key officials from local, state and federal agencies. The

bill created the Office of Farmland Preservation

within the State

Conservation Commission. The Task Force will provide policy input to that office as it pursues several farmland-preservation goals outlined by lawmakers.

{xtypo_quote_left}Maintaining the capacity to provide adequate food and fiber resources is essential to the long-term sustainability of our citizens and economy{/xtypo_quote_left}Sheryl Cox of Walla Walla will represent farmers in Southeastern Washington.

She and her husband operate Klicker Mountain Cattle Company on land

settled by her great grandmother in 1896. Her extended family is

involved in producing strawberries, cherries, Christmas trees,

blueberries and wheat. They have incorporated what she calls

"farm/ranch recreation" into some of their operations.

Farmers

in Northeastern Washington will be represented by Jeff Emtman. He is "a

37-year-old fourth-generation dry-land farmer and rancher from

Valleyford, Washington," according to the Washington Association of

Wheat Growers, which recommended his appointment. On Emtman Brothers

Farm, his family grows wheat and raises cattle on over 10,000 acres of

land.

Richard

Thomason of Brewster will speak for farmers in the North Central part

of the state. After an engineering career, he returned to run Maverick

Orchards, producing tree fruits, primarily apples. "I view the farm

life experience as a wonderful character builder," Thomason said. "I'm

a strong believer in the strength it bestows on kids."

A third generation farmer and livestock producer in Klickitat County will represent farmers in South Central Washington. Jacob Anderson, a diversified operator who runs Anderson Ranch and Anderson's Custom Sawing, is already involved in farmland preservation work with other farmers and state and local officials.

Greg Schoenbachler of Silver Springs Cattle Company and Silver Springs Organics will bring the perspective of farmers in the Southwest portion of the state to the Farmland Preservation Task Force. After receiving an Animal Science degree from WSU, he rehabilitated farmland originally held by his grandparents. He currently grows hay/haylage and raises more than 200 cow/calf pairs on 1,100 acres outside of Tenino. He focuses on the economics of farming for sustainability.

"It's strategically important to be able to keep agriculture secure in the Puget Sound region," said Bob Hart, appointed to represent farmers in Northwest Washington. A producer of vegetable crops and nursery stock, he is vice president of Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland, and chair of that organization's Land Protection Committee. He is a former Skagit County commissioner.

The Washington State Legislature will be represented on the Task Force by Senator Mary Margaret Haugen of Camano Island, Senator Jim Honeyford of Sunnyside, Representative Joel Kretz of Colville, and Representative Larry Springer of Kirkland. Senator Haugen was the prime sponsor of SSB 5108.

County governments will participate on the Task Force through the appointments of Commissioner Rudy Plager of Adams County and Commissioner Don Munks of Skagit County.

The state's 47 conservation districts, which are involved in farmland preservation and many other land and water conservation activities, will be represented by Fred Colvin. A rancher and supervisor of the Thurston Conservation District, he was appointed by the Washington Association of Conservation Districts.

The Washington Conservation Commission will be represented by Commissioner

Lynn Bahrych of Shaw Island. The Washington State Department of Agriculture has appointed Policy Assistant Lee Faulconer to provide input.

State

Conservationists R.L. "Gus" Highbanks will serve in a non-voting Task Force seat for the Natural Resources Conservation Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Dee Caputo, a senior planner, will fill a similar role for the Washington State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development.

An announcement about the first meeting of the Task Force is expected soon. Further information is available through Steve McGonigal
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