



Whatcom Community
Foundation

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NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release
Mauri Ingram
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Contact:

(360) 671-6463

Whatcom Community Foundation Announces New Fund to Benefit Whatcom Farm Incubator Project

A joint venture between two local nonprofits, jump-started by a gift to the Whatcom Community Foundation, will provide support for new local farmers and more affordable access to farmland in Whatcom County.

"We are delighted to announce that one of our donors established the Whatcom Farm Incubator Fund with a substantial gift. We anticipate the Fund balance will soon be \$250,000 as well as \$750,000 in matching funds to encourage other major gifts as well as broad community participation. Grants from the Fund will be used for farmland acquisition, capital needs, and operations for the Whatcom Farm Incubator Project," said Foundation president and CEO Mauri Ingram. "This project is an outstanding example of what nonprofit organizations with similar values – Kulshan Community Land Trust and Sustainable Connections, in this case -- can accomplish when they collaborate."

The Whatcom Farm Incubator Project (WFIP) is a land-based project dedicated to the promotion and growth of local, sustainable, and socially responsible farm businesses. The three-year acquisition, improvements, and operating budget is expected to be up to \$3 million; others who wish to donate to the Whatcom Farm Incubator Fund may do so by mailing a contribution to the Foundation at 119 Grand Avenue, Suite A, Bellingham, WA 98225, or on the Whatcom Community Foundation website (whatcomcf.org)

"As Whatcom County continues to grow and development pressure increases on agricultural land, it is increasingly clear that we need to act now to protect and nurture farmland and ensure that farming remains a sustainable and economically viable way of life in our county, particularly for young farmers just getting started," said Ann Russell, project coordinator at Kulshan Community Land Trust.

KulshanCLT strengthens community by holding land in trust for permanently affordable homeownership and other community needs, and by offering financial and educational services to people of limited means. In a recent update to their five-year strategic plan, the KulshanCLT board and staff decided to move forward with exploring options for creating affordable access to land for farming, and partnered with Sustainable Connections.

"Creating and preserving a base of organic agricultural land and developing the next generation of Whatcom County farmers will pay off in many ways, " noted Derek Long, Sustainable Connections program and development director. "Increasing access to farmland and supporting new farmers will provide more locally grown food for Whatcom residents now and in the future, diversify and strengthen our agricultural economy, foster cultural diversity in our local agriculture industry, and help protect the natural environment we cherish."

Sustainable Connections Food & Farming program, one of five organizational focuses, takes action to support and build a sustainable local food system. Among the program's projects are "Food to Bank On," in which fledgling sustainable agriculture farmers – 25 of them over the last six years – partner with experienced farmers, who serve as mentors; receive business planning and technical assistance; attend trade meetings; and are paid market rates to deliver their produce to county food banks and soup kitchens, preparing them to grow and deliver for business clients in the future and providing fresh, high-quality food to hungry local residents now.

The Whatcom Farm Incubator Project is seeking a suitable farmland site on which to begin the project (contact Ann Russell at 360-671-5600). Looking to the future, the WFIP partners envision offering technical assistance and customized business development assistance to all farmers, not just those involved in the program, as well as taking steps to increase market access for Whatcom County agricultural products, such as a site for consolidation and distribution to larger customers or for value-added food production.

SIDEBAR

Whatcom Community Foundation
whatcomcf.org

Kulshan Community Land Trust
kulshanclt.org

Sustainable Connections
sconnect.org