



WESTERN WASHINGTON AG REPORT

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PINK FLAG CAMPAIGN LAUNCHES

WWAA unites behind education of extreme riparian buffer impact on local farms and the local food supply. Impact disproportionately affects small, unique farms.

With autumn comes preparation for another state legislative session. Some new (and some old) challenges lie ahead as we work to protect Washington's right to farm. One of the biggest focuses of ag groups in northwest Washington and throughout the state will be the extreme buffer discussion. There are ideas from some legislative offices and state agencies that "site potential tree height" buffers are necessary to save salmon. This means mandating that farmers remove 235 feet of farmland on each side of a fish bearing waterway (streams, rivers, lakes, ponds, wetlands, even drainage ditches) in some areas. This massive amount could lead to a major reduction of farmland. It could also eliminate some farms completely due to the shadow effect from trees and other shade bearing vegetation.

This potential policy will impact near-

ly every farm in the Skagit River Delta, and it will disproportionately affect small, diverse, and beginning farms.

"While these extreme buffers no doubt affect every farmer in the region, they especially impact our small, niche market farms," explained Brandon Roozen, WWAA's executive director. "In some cases, we've seen farms that will be nearly wiped out if they are forced to implement a 200+ buffer on their lands."

Large buffers will remove thousands of acres from farm production throughout the state, and may eliminate an estimated 20% of Western Washington agricultural lands. This is privately owned land that the state would forcefully condemn and force farmers to plant trees and vegetation instead.

The average farm size in Skagit County is 94 acres. One single buffer of 200

feet along one mile of river or stream is equal to 24 acres of land. That equates to more than 25% of the entire farm.

To bring attention to this issue, WWAA and its members are visually showing the impact of large buffers in their fields throughout Skagit County. In the spirit of the old Burma-Shave ads from the mid-1900s, farmers are lining their fields with pink flags and road signs, indicating how much land 235 feet will remove.

"It's hard for most people to conceptualize just how much land 235 feet

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WWAA MISSION

To represent agriculture by providing services to the entire agricultural community

WWAA COMMITMENTS

Engage in internal and external (economic, environmental, regulatory) pressures on agriculture

Interact with county, state, and federal legislators and regulators

Pest and nutrient management control

Network with and support of the agricultural research community

Seek out and develop opportunities and technologies for agriculture

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covers," said Jenn Smith, WWAA's president. "We hope that by lining fields with pink flags, people will understand exactly how big these buffers would be. And that doesn't even take into consideration the shadow effect that large trees would have on the fields. In some cases, the shadow effect will eliminate another large chunk of farmable land in an area where land is already scarce."

Every acre of land matters, especially in northwest Washington. Farmers in Skagit, Snohomish, and Whatcom counties must be precise with their planning due to crop specifications and scarcity of land. The profit margin for farms in Western Washington is 1-5%, which leaves very little room for error and makes every inch of farmland valuable.

Skagit County is home to only about 80,000 acres of farmable land, managed by roughly 1,000 farming families in 10 to 100 acre "chunks" divided by irrigation and drainage ditches and small land parcels. Farmers here grow more than 80 different crops, and rotational farming allows farmers to break up disease, insect, and tillage cycles naturally. Every inch of farmable soil matters to the community and local food supply.

Extreme buffers will lead to a sell off of agricultural land in northwest Washington. Those sales will lead to urbanization, not wildlife refuge. A potato farmer who uses best management practices has land that is free of noxious weeds, urban runoff, and road pollution. Farms protect salmon and wildlife better than any other use on that land, especially urban zones.

WHY PINK?

Pink is a color of warning. Pink flags are those things or topics that you notice, that nag at you. There is time to change an opinion before a full decision is made. We want to encourage people to pay attention and better understand the impacts of extreme buffers. We want to educate our neighbors about the realities that will affect their local food supply and communities.

GET YOUR FREE PINK FLAGS

Contact us to volunteer one of your fields and we will supply you with a field kit that includes 100 flags, 4 road signs, and an instruction page. Swing by the office or call (360) 424-7327.



BUFFERS IMPACT OUR LOCAL FOOD SUPPLY

LESS LAND

LESS FARMS

LESS DIVERSITY





Farmers, industry members, and friends attended the recent Farm Show at Skagit's Best Produce in the Conway area.



WWAA CELEBRATES 1st ANNUAL FARM SHOW

This summer WWAA held its 1st annual Farm Show at Skagit's Best on Fir Island. The celebration and fundraiser was a success with more than 200 in attendance. Attendees enjoyed the multitude of tractors from every corner of regional agriculture.

"For our first year we are very pleased with the Farm Show," said Dan Gundersen, WWAA's secretary/treasurer. "We've already got a lot of ideas brewing on how to make it bigger and better next year. Thank you to everyone who made it a success."

The goal of the show was to honor and celebrate the region's farm industry and bring families together before the major harvest season began. It was a great new event for the community to enjoy.

"We often get so wrapped up in the day-to-day activities of farming and this event allowed all of us to take a breath and remember why we chose the farming lifestyle," said Gundersen. "There are so many people in our community who rely on agriculture every day. It's bigger than just us farmers, and we know that. People rely on us to do our jobs well and feed the community."





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TRACKING A BACTERIAL CULPRIT OF THE WARTY PUMPKIN

From CAHNRS News

On a Halloween pumpkin, warts and bumps have a certain spooky charm. But some unwanted bacteria-caused blemishes open the door to infections that rot and ruin this bright, seasonal fruit.

Pseudomonas syringae is a rod-shaped bacterium that infects a range of vegetables and fruits. A mild case lends pumpkins “a little character,” but doesn’t significantly hurt the fruit, said Washington State University plant pathologist Lydia Tymon.

In a bad year, however, spurred by wet, humid conditions, “warts provide an opening for other infections to invade,” she said. Tymon collaborates with scientists at WSU’s Northwestern Washington Research and Extension Center at Mount Ver-

non, Wash., as well as Pennsylvania State University, North Carolina State University, Auburn University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and industry partners to better understand *P. syringae*’s origin, disease cycle, and plant hosts.

Her work began several years ago, following an experiment growing pumpkins on biodegradable plastic mulch at WSU’s Northwestern Washington Research and Extension Center at Mount Vernon.

“We started noticing warts,” said Tymon, who decided to take a closer look at these unusual symptoms. “They look different from the warty pumpkins that people have intentionally bred.”

The first sign of infection, typically spotted in in early summer, is chlorosis, or yellowed leaves. “It’s such a bright yellow, I can drive by a pumpkin field and spot it right away,” Tymon said. Later, warts form on the fruit, cracking the rind and creating wounds that allow other pathogens to enter and infect.

Tymon suspects that raindrops play a role in bouncing the bacteria onto the fruit. She infected different varieties of gourds, including



tiny, white decorative varieties, pie pumpkins, and butternut squash, and learned that thin-skinned varieties are most at risk. Pumpkins with a thick, glossy skin seem to be resistant.

“We think the water rolls off, so there’s no time for an infection to develop,” Tymon said.

Partner scientists are continuing work to identify host plants and learn how the bacterium spreads. Their work could benefit important specialty crops in Washington’s Skagit Valley and other agricultural regions, along with this Halloween favorite, a preferred test fruit for Tymon.

“By understanding the epidemiology of the bacteria that damage pumpkins, we can help farmers better protect their crops,” she said.