

Skagit Agricultural Advisory Board

1800 Continental Place
Mount Vernon, Washington 98273

August 19, 2026

Skagit County Board of Commissioners
Peter Browning, Joe Burns, Ron Wesen
1800 Continental Place
Mount Vernon, WA 98273

(Via email to pdscomments@co.skagit.wa.us)

Re: Skagit County Proposed Code 9.08 — Single Outdoor Events

Dear Commissioners,

The Agricultural Advisory Board appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed code to replace SCC 9.08 under a new title concerning SINGLE OUTDOOR EVENTS and it wishes to bring farmer perspective to the discussion through this letter.

This proposal has been anticipated since the completion of the years-long code development process that incorporated essential policy into law governing agritourism in Section 14 of county code. The Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB) actively participated in the discernment of agritourism policy and resulting regulations.

The Agricultural Advisory Board supports many of the refinements that a new Section 9.08 offers both event organizers and public participants in activities left unspecified in Section 14. Clarity in Section 9.08 will create the pathway for new, well-planned and carefully designed public entertainment events in our communities.

In particular, the long-established Festival of Family Farms must be identified as the poster child of county-wide outdoor events. It obtains well-deserved recognition for engaging local and distant visitors in the special and unique operations of Skagit County farms. The festival provides an important opportunity for residents and visitors to learn directly from farmers, experience the working landscape, and better understand the economic and cultural importance of agriculture in Skagit County.

This family-friendly and educational festival must fit the template contemplated by a redesigned Section 9.08. Other public celebrations of county agriculture should be encouraged by the proposed regulatory structure. The eventual determination of annual application fees paid by family farm participants must not be a disincentive to the festival's famed success.

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The AAB held the position throughout the agritourism dialogue and it holds now that activities designed for public participation and occurring on agricultural lands be principally agricultural in nature and consistent with the purpose of protecting Skagit County's productive agricultural base. Protections means uses.

The proposal suggests a new vehicle for non-agricultural commercialization of the agricultural lands and throughout the county. The Growth Management Act regulates non-agricultural accessory uses of natural resource lands, as was addressed during the earlier agritourism deliberations, and the AAB encourages careful investigation of the relevant statutes and judicial decisions related to GMA so as to avoid conflict with state statutes. This issue could be easily sidestepped by restricting event activities in the agricultural zones to those that are accessory to agriculture.

The proposed Section 9.08 contemplates important standards in the permitting process that will insulate farm production from potential impacts by large-scale events. These controls are essential. The proposal, however, reflects little concern over potential conflicts between events and the potential disturbing impact of farming like dust, noise, smells, chemicals, movement of farm equipment on access roads, livestock presence, and other customary agricultural practices. Three concerns are noteworthy: 1) the Right to Farm should be addressed upfront in the code and be incorporated in the permitting process, 2) the notification to neighbors of planned events should extend beyond the proposed 300-feet in agricultural zones and in farm communities, and 3) large events anticipating more than 1,000 participants (no maximum is provided) must be conditioned on the production season and activities in local farm operations when events would be targeted for agricultural parcels (if allowed under GMA).

The AAB appreciates the exemption of private activities from the reach of governmental regulation. A clear distinction between activities that are non-commercial and those designed to be revenue-generating would be useful. Private, truly non-commercial activities may avoid encountering the permitting regimen by voluntarily providing notice to the department for events at the highest level of guest participation, above 1,000. Otherwise, private events should be allowed without permit, as indicated in the proposal.

The AAB notes that the proposed title to the new Section 9.08 could be misleading. "9.08 SINGLE OUTDOOR EVENTS" suggest a notion inherently in conflict with the internal language that allows permitting for two events per year of three days each. The AAB supports the foundational idea that one, single event is a best fit for the agricultural zones when commercial in nature. Allowance for more than a single event by a single promoter veers toward non-agricultural commercialization. Single means one.

Agricultural Advisory Board Members:

Terry Sapp (Chair), Kraig Knutzen (Vice Chair), Justin Hayton, Michael Hughes, Cindy Kleinhuizen,
Nels Lagerland, John Morrison, Kim Mower, Matt Steinman, Michael Trafton, Steve Wright

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The AAB is alert to discussion that organizers of some kinds of events may not be able to control the number attendees. The proposal lays responsibility for attendance in the moment of activity to the private organizer. Any insufficiency could call for county resources. Indeed, single, annual outdoor events in other regions of the country are known to draw many thousands of revelers. The planners should be aware of the potential for truly big events and review the permitting guidelines with this in mind.

Overall, the AAB finds the general structure of the proposed Section 9.08 to be both appropriate and timely following the rigorous effort to create agritourism code. Effective code for outdoor events envisions the pleasure that many yet unknown special activities can provide for the citizens of Skagit County and visitors.

Respectfully,

Terry F Sapp

Terry Sapp, Chair
Agricultural Advisory Board

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