



# WESTERN WASHINGTON AG REPORT

WINTER 2023



## PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

*Jenn Smith*

Another year is upon us and we again have a lot to celebrate on the farm lands we manage. We have a new Legislative session, a new weather pattern, and many new local leaders who are making their voices heard. We also have a strong set of traditions that guide us into some new territory. The goal of protecting our delicate lands and infrastructure throughout the northwest corner of the state is still our top priority as an organization.

As some of you may know, our Executive Director, Brandon Roozen, has announced his resignation. We are so thankful for his years of service and dedication to the landowners and farmers of this region. He will be

greatly missed by us and the partners we work with on a regular basis. His knowledge and determination helped protect dike and drainage ditch infrastructure over the past decade and he has promised to continue to serve the best interests of agriculture in his future steps. I also want to thank our long-time advisor Gary Jones. Gary's wisdom has been invaluable to the farmers and communities of this region. I doubt there is a way to quantify the impact his career has had on the Skagit Valley. Finally, I want to thank Debbie Danielson, our dedicated office manager. Debbie is as loyal an employee as you will ever find. That is rare today and we have appreciated all of her work on behalf of agriculture.

I want to also ensure our membership that we are diligently working to find our new staff leader. We have just posted the executive director position

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- Annual meeting highlights
- Agriculture bills die in legislature
- Skagit features on Washington Grown

online (<https://www.westag.org/staff>) and I encourage you to circulate this information to people you think would be interested and qualified. We are committed to finding someone who fits our vision for the future of WWAA, and who can serve our farmers well in the delicate balance of policy work and relationship building.

We just held our annual meeting, and I want to thank all of our members for your continued support and involvement. We have a sincere and energetic board of directors who lead with good intentions. We are working on many

## 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

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### President

Jenn Smith

### Vice-President

Tyler Breum

### Treasurer

Dan Gundersen

### Secretary

Aaron Taylor

### Directors

Owen Peth

Jay Renwick

Andrew Schuh

Steve Strand

Jon Vanderkooy

## STAFF MEMBERS

### Executive Director

Brandon Roozen

broozen@westag.org

### Assistant to Executive Director

Gary T. Jones

gjones@westag.org

### Communications

Kara Rowe

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issues on your behalf: ag tourism, buffers, ag in the educational system, VSP, and TFI budget legislation. Admittedly, we are only as strong and knowledgeable as those sitting around the table with us. As always, I encourage you to get involved on one of our committees to help us lead this organization into the future. If you have any interest in the topics above, please reach out to me to work on one of our committees. We need more input as we make decisions, and we hope to not drain your valuable resource of time. Committees are a good way to be involved, but not overwhelmed. Please reach out to us for more information.

## WWAA ANNUAL MEETING HELD

On February 3rd, WWAA held its annual meeting at the WSU Mount Vernon Northwestern Washington Research and Extension Center. Members from Skagit and Snohomish counties attended. Membership reviewed WWAA's revised role in the TFI and DFI agreements. Since withdrawing from the TFI as well as professional service agreements with the county's dike and drainage districts in March 2022, WWAA's role has changed significantly. The organization has instead been representing membership on these issues by interacting with partners and agencies one-on-one.

WWAA shared on its many successes in 2022 notably, holding our inaugural tractor show, and our legislative agriculture tour through the Skagit Delta in October. Executive Director, Brandon Roozen helped organize the tour and arranged for multiple farmers and stakeholders to showcase the unique farmland of the region. More than two dozen agency staff and legislators were on the tour, learning more about the challenges of food production in the Skagit Valley.

After hearing a short year-in-review presentation, the membership also made a few changes to the bylaws of the organization. "The Legislative committee did a comprehensive review of our bylaws," explained WAWA's Treasurer, Dan Gundersen. "I am encouraged by the changes that were



WWAA members and staff at the recent annual meeting held in the Sakuma Auditorium at the WSU Mount Vernon Research and Extension Center.

recommended and adopted.” A few notable changes were to allow for an eleventh board position and expand our leadership team to four. For more information on the new bylaw changes, visit the WWAA website, westag.org.

The members also heard about upcoming changes within the organization, including staffing. Brandon Roozen, Debbie Danielson, and Gary Jones announced their resignations. The WWAA board of directors will be actively working to find their replacements in the coming weeks.

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR POSITION OPEN

WWAA is actively looking for the next executive director of the organization. If you are interested, or know someone who is interested and qualified, please visit our website at westag.org to find the job description and details for next steps.

the bill did not make it out of its policy committee before cutoff and is considered dead for the remainder of the session.

Similarly, the bipartisan attempt to make riparian buffers completely voluntary through HB 1720 made it through the original committee, but died in the House Capital Budget Committee on February 20. The bill had support from some tribes and agriculture. The Governor’s office, however, wants more regulatory backstops and maintained strong opposition.

## SKAGIT SPOTLIGHTED ON WASHINGTON GROWN PROGRAM

In January, the Washington Grown education effort supported by the farmers of Washington and Washington State Department of Agriculture high-



Washington Grown host Val Thomas-Matson visits with Dave and Annie Lohman for Season 10 of the Emmy-winning television show.



Flowers & Tulips  
Season 10, Episode 2



Skagit County Conservation District’s Emmett Wild and Washington Grown host Val Thomas-Matson explore a local farm that has implemented voluntary stewardship practices.

## AGRICULTURE BILLS DIE IN STATE LEGISLATURE

Two important state policy attempts on behalf of agriculture did not make it through the committee process. On February 9, SB 5476 was heard in the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee. This bill would have allowed farmers to choose up to 12 weeks in a calendar year to employ workers for 50 hours without paying overtime. This would have helped agriculture employers during the time-sensitive weeks of harvest or calving seasons. More than 1,000 individuals signed in support of the bill, but unfortunately



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lighted the challenges of mandatory buffer ideas on both the television show and magazine. The show featured the region's unique vegetable seed industry and interviews both Sierra Hartney of Sakata Seed and Dave and Annie Lohman.

The television show also highlighted the Voluntary Stewardship Program in Skagit County and interviewed both Emmett Wild of the Skagit Conservation District and CJ Jones, former VSP coordinator in Skagit County. That month, with all of the efforts surrounding the Washington Grown brand, the topic reached nearly 1.4 million.

The Washington Grown brand targets urban audiences in the greater Seattle area and Spokane. The upcoming April issue of the magazine will also feature the Skagit Tulip Festival and Skagit River history. For more information about Washington Grown, visit [wagrown.com](http://wagrown.com).



## WWAA REVISES PURPOSE

At the annual meeting, WWAA unveiled its new purpose statement. The board and staff have been working to update the organization's purpose over the past few months.

The new purpose statement is:

*"We are champions of agricultural opportunity in Northwest Washington. By cultivating a collaborative environment, we help agriculture flourish and community prosperity to rise."*

The group also revised its principles and priorities, however their traditional values have remained. They continue to protect agriculture in Northwest Washington and be a voice on policy, research, and innovations for the farmers of the region.

### Western Washington Agricultural Association's

#### Purpose Statement

*"We are champions of agricultural opportunity in Northwest Washington. By cultivating a collaborative environment, we help agriculture flourish and community prosperity to rise"*

#### Principles:

- We're guided by our absolute commitment to Integrity. Count on us to be respectful and worthy of trust in all that we do.

Priorities- three strategic imperatives command our near-term focus for improving outcomes:

1. Sustain and strengthen our capacity to analyze complex challenges and innovate sensible solutions.
2. Engage and align members, allies, and other to understand issues and collaborate on solutions.
3. Continuously improve systems and processes to enhance organizational proficiency.