

## **CO-OP** CONNECTION

## **Getting Back Together**

By Tom Boland, President & CEO



The crowd stood and applause filled the room as Allen Rozema called Dave Hedlin to the stage. The honoree spoke about a legacy of farming and the mission of the Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland (SPF), but the message was really one of giving. Giving time to a cause, giving credit to others, and giving thanks to the crowd for coming

together with purpose and generosity of spirit. The annual fall fundraiser for SPF sold out St. Joseph Center in Mount Vernon and might even have put a punctuation mark on our farming community as we continue to see large crowds return to in-person events. It seems necessary for our society to get back together.

This newsletter will highlight the many ways our employees and members are getting back together. Our summer appreciation picnics, (including one in late September for our Lynden growers who were busy with the berry harvest in July), employee retreats, our Skagit Farmers Supply (SFS) leadership retreat in Spokane and more. We recognized the need for in-person events, while also recognizing the exposure it could create. Our agronomy team was already back to live events last winter, and we came back together for our annual meeting in March—after going virtual once in March of 2021. It is nice to feel the enthusiasm in our employees and management, the same way those who attended the SPF fundraiser felt on September 17th.

We continue to face adversity in our business units. Inflation is hitting SFS's expenses and our balance sheet, especially in our cost of inventory and the higher receivables we're carrying. Neither of them is out of line on a percentage basis, but the dollars are higher due to higher energy and input costs. Fortunately, SFS's working capital is at a record level, our multi-year sales growth continues (assisted by inflation) but our sales on a unit basis is higher than it's ever been, and we'll have another strong year financially. We've closed our most recent fiscal year, and the board will find out from our auditors in December what the final numbers look like. It's been a strong year for many cooperatives across the country, and it's no different for us.

We're not the only ones getting back together. Our daughters are busy with school clubs and dances. As they plan events with their friends, it's good to see them celebrating their senior and junior years together with their classmates and not virtually from home. We're lucky to have Kelly's mom, Anna, still hanging out with us so our

kids can share those milestones with their grandmother.

I hope you get to enjoy a beautiful fall.

Large crowds return to in-person events.

SFS is adding a 100-ton finished goods bin to its feed mill in Spokane. We continue to make improvements at this facility around size, scale and speed, to meet anticipated future demand.









Olivia VanderVeen

Stephen Breckenridge

Amanda Lenssen

## Scholarships Fund Ag's Future

By Raelene Smillie, Company Administrator

Skagit Farmers Supply (SFS) offers an agronomy intern program, student tours of our operations, and strong support of FFA and 4-H clubs in communities where we do business. Our scholarship program is another tool we use to promote agriculture in upcoming generations.

Since 1991, the cooperative has offered financial support to students pursuing higher education in an ag-related field of study. The number of applications received each year ebbs and flows, but passion for agriculture among students applying never wanes.

Area youth bound for college tell us their choice of schools often depends on finding instructors who have broad knowledge and experience in today's ag world. As fewer people grow up in rural settings, there are fewer qualified educators, which limits our students' options. We're hopeful some of our scholarship recipients will help fill those roles.

We chose three students to receive \$1,500 awards for the 2022-2023 school year. They

are Olivia VanderVeen, Stephen Breckenridge, and Amanda Lenssen.

Olivia is the daughter of Jason and Meagan VanderVeen of Lynden. During high school, she was very active in both 4-H and FFA. She graduated this past spring from Lynden High School and, at the same time, received her Associates Degree from Whatcom Community College. Olivia is enrolled as a sophomore at lowa State University this fall. She plans to major in Animal Science with emphasis on pre-veterinary medicine. Her goal is to receive her veterinary degree and open her own large animal vet practice.

Stephen, son of John Breckenridge and Jennifer Schuh, is currently enrolled at Washington State University and majoring in Agricultural Technology and Production Management. He began his second year of studies there this fall. Steven graduated from Mount Vernon High School in 2021. He is interested in agriculture as a career

and values the knowledge of farming in the Skagit Valley that he gains from working on his grandparents' farm.

Amanda graduated from Lynden Christian High School in June. FFA was an influential aspect of her high school years, including state and national competitions. This past year, she served as the Whatcom County Dairy Ambassador, advocating for the dairy community and agriculture. Amanda will study Animal Science and Agriculture Business at lowa State University this fall. She is the daughter of Terry and Crystal Lenssen.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Students can qualify for an SFS scholarship each year of their two- or four-year post-secondary education by applying by April 1 of each year.

Application forms may be obtained at www.skagitfarmers.com

### **New Leader on SFS Board**

Jennifer Jones has been elected to Skagit Farmers Supply's board of directors.

Jennifer is an owner of 3 Sisters Cattle Company, LLC, a Whidbey Island multigenerational family farm with a diverse direct marketing business. She manages the production ag side of the business, including crops and animals.

Jennifer's father and grandfather have both served on the SFS board of directors. A representative on the regional Land O'Lakes council, Jennifer also serves on the board of Island County Farm Bureau. She and her husband, Tom, are parents to two young children.

Jennifer Jones





Emerald Downs racetrack.



## LMF Feeds A Winner

By Danna Darby Eoff, Category Manager

A Country Store customer and LMF feeds buyer since 2006 earned two top honors in the Washington Legislator Stakes and Governor Stakes race at Emerald Downs.

KD Thoroughbreds owner Darlyne Krieg (and her late husband Karl Krieg) secured a big win July 25, 2022, with their seven-year-old mare, Dontkissntell. This win added \$27,800 to the mare's record of lifetime earnings.

The Kriegs have been long-time customers of our Oak Harbor Country Store and have fed LMF feeds at their breeding and racing farm for 16 years.

KD Thoroughbreds had a second winner that same day in the Governor Stakes. Slew Tiz Whiz took home another \$27,500.

Starting all their mares and foals on LMF Development G has proven to be a successful recipe!

Slew Tiz Whiz (below) and Dontkissntell both won races with purses over \$25,000.





## **Equine Experts Go to School**

building skills by white water rafting on the Payette River.

By Melissa Weems, Administrative Manager

In late August, over 40 participants from multiple businesses across the country gathered in Boise, ID for the second annual Equine Nutrition Summit presented by Performance Horse Nutrition (PHN).

LMF representatives traveled from Washington, California and Texas to attend this event. They learned about new technology being added to equine feeds and the chemistry involved, commodity risk management and the trends in today's market, how to stand out from the competition and develope a sales story.

A team building exercise involved putting their lives in the hands of each other and the river guide and conquering Class 2 & 3 rapids on the Payette River! At the end of the meeting, they joined in a surprise 60th birthday celebration for PHN Nutritionist Dr. Steve Duren.

This nutrition summit provided a unique opportunity to learn about trends and research in the equine industry and also to network and brainstorm with others from similar businesses around the country.

LMF representatives traveled to Boise, ID for a PHN Summit where they studied trends and research in the equine industry.









# Agro-Tourism Alive & Well at Bob's Corn

Top: Bob's Corn and Pumpkin Farm was founded in 1982, when owner Bob Ricci started selling sweet corn on the roadside near his family's dairy.

Bottom: Bob Ricci owns Bob's Corn and Pumpkin Farm with his wife, Sarah. Four of their five daughters also help with the farm operations.

#### By Brianna Hackler, Graphic & Multimedia Specialist

Bob Ricci was only nine years old when he started selling corn. In 1982, he opened his first corn stand on the roadside near his family's dairy farm, selling 13 ears for \$1.00.

"That's how Bob's Corn started," he said with a laugh, adding, "Back then it was Bobby's Corn."

Today, Bob's Corn and Pumpkin Farm is an agro-tourism business based in Snohomish. Each fall, more than 100,000 people from across Western Washington flock to the farm to pick pumpkins, wind their way through a corn maze, take photos in the sunflower fields, purchase locally grown produce, and learn about the workings of a farm.

"Our whole thing is, 'this is where family memories grow'," Bob says. "People ask what our biggest crop is, and I say, 'People.' We're all about having fun."

#### A family legacy

The Ricci family history plays a big part in the origins of Bob's Corn. His great grandfather homesteaded on nearby land in 1888, and the family has been working and living in the same area for nearly 135 years. In 1969, Bob's father bought the enterprise's current location, opening a dairy farm.

In 1982, his father planted four rows of sweet corn for Bob to harvest and sell. Bob opened "Bobby's Corn" as a roadside stand. There are still John Deere technicians in the area who know him as "Bobby" thanks to his humble beginnings.

After graduating from Washington State University, Bob began to wholesale his corn through Safeway. But in 2001, when his father decided to sell the dairy cows, Bob saw a chance to reach his customers in a different way. That same year, Bob built his first corn

maze on the farm. He saw the opportunity to bring people out into the country and to transition both Bob's Corn and the family farm into an experience-based business.

Bob says his dad was skeptical.

"He said, 'Who is going to pay us to walk through corn? You're an idiot!' "
Bob recalls his dad's words with a laugh. "I said, 'Let's just see what happens.'
But we never imagined it would morph into what it is today."

Bob purchased the land from his father in 2018. Today, he operates the farm with his wife, Sarah. Four of their five daughters also participate in the farm's operations (the eldest daughter is a doctor in San Francisco.)

This year, the farm has about 45 acres of pumpkins for customer U-pick, 20 acres of sweet corn, including the corn maze, eight acres of sunflowers for photo ops and customer U-pick, and 60 acres of hay. In addition to the crops, the farm offers plenty of opportunities for families to make memories, such



as fire pits in the corn mazes that groups can rent, hayrides, apple cannons, a working combine which Bob retrofitted into a kids' playground, and a country store.

"In our business, we're all about fun," Bob says. "In fact, on my business cards, I'm the Director of Fun."

During peak season, the farm has about 200 employees. A majority of these employees fill important customer service roles. Skagit Farmers Supply provides the fertilizer and chemicals for most of the crops on the farm. The co-op also sprays the pumpkin fields.

The farm opens to the public in mid-August with its sunflower festival. After about three weeks, the farm transitions to pumpkins and the corn maze for about six to eight weeks. Bob's Corn and Pumpkins is open through Halloween.

Bob likes to evolve and do something different each year. A few years ago, they planted sunflowers, starting the sunflower festival. This helps draw a new type of crowd to the farm, mostly young women or couples searching for the perfect Instagram photo. This year, they started to renovate the former dairy barn into an event space, recently hosting their first Daddy/Daughter Dance.

The key to growth for Bob and his team has been knowing their values and staying in their lane. For instance, Bob says he knows he could make a lot of money if the farm put on a haunted corn maze. However, that doesn't fit with the wholesome family fun image that the farm has cultivated.

"We stay in our lane, we keep it simple, and it works," he said.

#### Working together

Bob credits two resources with his ability to be successful year after year. The first resource is North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Association, NAFDMA, an international agro-tourism association. Each year, the team from Bob's Corn attends the NAFDMA conference, where they talk with other agro-tourism farms and businesses to learn about what they're doing and get new ideas.

NAFDMA is where the idea for the sunflower festival came from. Bob heard about a farm stand that added a few rows of sunflowers and were surprised at how many people stopped to take photos of the flowers. This grew into a sunflower festival that drew new types of people to the farm.

Bob also credits a contingency of Snohomish pumpkin farmers that work together to ensure they all succeed. There are seven pumpkin farms in the county, but they realize there are more than enough customers to go around. So they all help each other out.

"' 'A rising tide raises all boats' – that's us," says Bob. "There are so many people in the Seattle area to go around, we all benefit from helping each other. We don't have to be cutthroat whatsoever."

Bob has noticed that competing farms in other parts of the country don't seem to have the same mentality. He's proud of the Snohomish pumpkin farmers for banding together to help one another out.

For example, Bob doesn't have a tractor small enough to mow through his sunflowers, so he borrows a Kubota and rototiller from neighboring Thomas Family Farms. In turn, the team at Thomas Family Farms couldn't find their sunflower clippers this year, so they borrowed some from Bob's Corn until they could get more ordered.

Another farm may run out of firewood or need a shade tent, so Bob will send some over. In the past, Bob has run out of sweet corn or gourds, so another farm will supply them to help him out.

Bob says his farm feels flood pressure before the other area farms. In the past, when his pumpkin fields have flooded, other area pumpkin farms will call him.

"My pumpkins will be floating, and I'll get that call from the other farms saying, 'Hey, what do you need? We have guys, we have trucks, what can we get you?'



The farm includes a country store where customers can get.

food, local produce, and Bob's Corn swag.

## 2022 AGRONOMY UPDATE Customers Celebrated at Conway

By Kris Black, Admin Manager/Agronomy



In July, our Conway Agronomy Center hosted the 2022 Customer Appreciation BBQ. Approximately 600 people attended, despite temperatures over 90 degrees.

The Skagit Farmers Supply (SFS) "pit crew" did an excellent job cooking up the salmon fillets, steaks, oysters, hot dogs and beans, while other team members kept the guests supplied with salads, rolls, cake and beverages. It is safe to say

that we went through more water this year than in years past!

The Alan Hatley Band (featuring the propane department's own Alan Hatley) entertained the crowd with a broad selection of rock and roll classics. This year, in addition to face painting and a caricature artist, we added cotton candy artists and the Toppin's frozen yogurt truck (which was a big hit on this hot day!). All this, plus yard games and visitng, kept kids of all ages happy!



Photo clockwise from top: Attendees going thru the serving line for side dishes and cold beverages

Scenes from the picnic. The picnic was held at our Conway agronomy facility

Dallas Wylie enjoys a cotton candy creation.









# Agronomy Events And Staff Promotions

By Jon Jarvis Agronomy Sales Manager & Ryan Hill Agronomy Manager

#### **Conway Corn Plot Largest Ever**

Our 2022 Skagit Farmers Supply corn plot was planted next to the Conway fertilizer plant on May 25th. Due to a wet spring, the plot was planted later than we would like, but it's our biggest plot ever. Many employees pitched in, so planting proceeded quickly. In our Conway corn plot, we planted 28 different hybrids from seven seed companies: Dekalb, Greenfield, LG Seeds, Blue River, Foundation Seed, Kussmaul and Legacy Seed. We also planted sweet corn for field day attendees to eat!

Seven organic corn hybrids were planted to showcase to our organic dairy customers. Our vendor partners are happy with the big plot in a prominent location. The Conway Corn Plot Field Day was held on September 20, and we look forward to evaluating the performance of these corn hybrids in such a challenging year.

#### **Lynden Grower BBQ**

It was great to hold the Annual Skagit Farmers Supply Grower Appreciation BBQ in Conway on July 30th. Many members look forward to that event every year; however, due to the late berry harvest, many Whatcom County growers were unable to attend. Because of that, SFS held a Grower Appreciation BBQ at our Lynden Agronomy facilities for the growers in that area.

This second BBQ was held on September 29th. There was lots of great food and fun enjoyed as we celebrated the tremendous growth we have seen in Whatcom County over the past three years.

#### **Upcoming winter meeting**

As a follow-up to last year's successful Winter Grower Meeting, SFS will again be hosting this meeting in beautiful Leavenworth, WA on December 7-8, 2022. The event will include presentations from many highly knowledgeable industry representatives and product vendors. Topics will include soil health, new ag technologies, innovative farming techniques, improving crop nutrition, insect/disease identification and control, and more.

The Winter Grower Meeting is an opportunity to offer our grower/members information on the newest innovations in agriculture. It provides an opportunity to listen to and ask questions of some of the most knowledgeable representatives in our industry. SFS will soon be sending out invitations for this event. Space is limited so be sure to register as soon as you receive the invite in order to secure a spot. We look forward to hosting this event again this year.



Ashley Norberg

#### **Agronomist Introductions**

Ashley Norberg began working with SFS in an administrative position at Agronomy South (our Conway location) in January of 2021.

Ashley grew up in Bothell before attending Washington State University. At WSU she worked for the entomology department on beneficial and pest insect interactions in potatoes, along with pollinator studies. She graduated in 2014 with a Bachelor of Science in Animal Sciences.

After graduation, Ashley worked in the research field; however, her true passion for agriculture, ag outreach and sustainability, soon had her returning to school and changing her career path. She graduated in 2020 with a Master of Science in Agriculture and a graduate certificate in sustainable agriculture. During her program, she studied sustainable cropping systems, farm sustainability, taught youth classes and wrote technical bulletins for WSU Extension, to name a few of her favorite experiences.

Throughout her time with our company, Ashley has not only performed administrative duties but has also focused on learning products, operational systems, plant operations, field sampling and trials, making recommendations and helping customers with their fertilizer and chemical needs. She obtained her pesticide commercial operator and dealer manager licenses as well. In addition to her passion for ag, Ashley brings a wide array of educational and professional experience. She looks forward to getting into the field and working to support, preserve and further agriculture in the Pacific Northwest.

When she is not working, Ashley enjoys spending time with her husband, John, their son Jaeden and their two dogs, Whitney, and Jojo. She also enjoys backpacking, hiking, camping, gardening, and riding her horse, Starlight.

Mike Hawley joined the co-op in March 2020. He was born and raised in Whatcom County and grew up working with his dad and grandfather on the family seed potato farm (which was started by his great grandfather in 1922). After high school, Mike attended Washington State University, graduating in 2004 with a Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice before returning to the family farm.

On the farm, Mike grew his passion for agriculture and gained experience growing potatoes, corn, and small grains. He attended the Potato Industry Leadership Institute, served a term on the Potatoes

USA board, and also served on the Washington State Seed Potato Commission.

Mike began working for SFS as a commercial driver and shortly thereafter took on the role of TerraGator operator. In 2021, he obtained his Pesticide Commercial Applicator license and began spraying in Whatcom County, gaining more valuable experience about crops grown in the area.

Mike is deeply rooted in the area and brings his own farming, fertilizer and spraying experience, as well as knowledge of the area and his relationships with farmers in the region to transition into an agronomist role for Skagit Farmers Supply.

When not at work, Mike enjoys spending time with his wife, Shalaney, and two children, Olivia and Cole. He likes to go camping, spend time with friends, hunt deer, golf, coach youth sports, and follow WSU Cougar football.



Last spring, the agronomy department welcomed Elissa Nelson, from Carnation, WA, as the newest member of our agronomy internship program. Elissa joined the program in mid-May and spent the summer working between our three agronomy locations. She learned from SFS agronomists, took soil and field es. scouted for crop insects and disease, made deliveries, and learn

samples, scouted for crop insects and disease, made deliveries, and learned how our agronomy department operates. In her senior year at Washington State University, Elissa decided to pursue a career as an agronomist.

This is the fourth year Skagit Farmers Supply has hosted an agronomy internship program. Applicants can be in any level of secondary education, from a freshman in college through graduate school. They must be pursuing a degree in agriculture.

The SFS internship program is yet another example of the value that we place on both educating the youth in our community and training the next generation of farmers in our area. Your co-op takes this program very seriously. It is a great way to teach our local youth more about our system and to introduce them to possible careers in agriculture.





## Staff Events Set Us Apart

After a two-year hiatus, Skagit Farmers Supply (SFS) was pleased to resume holding its employee retreats. The company held four employee retreats: two for employees west of the Cascade Mountains and two for employees on the east side. We typically switch between the west and east side every year, but it was agreed that there was a need this year for everyone to get together again.

It was exciting to gather and enjoy a fun day outside of our typical day-today work lives and interact with others who work at different locations. West side employees enjoyed watching Mariners games at T-Mobile Park. East side employees enjoyed the thrills and excitement of the Silverwood Theme Park.

We started our mornings with a light breakfast and presentations.

CEO Tom Boland greeted everyone and presented an update on the cooperative. That was followed by updates from Safety Director Sally Merenz, Information Technology's Tremayne Burdsal, and Human Resources' Stephanie Hanson and Mike Hunskor. Participants at Silverwood also heard updates about AFCO and LMF Feeds from Wholesale Director Lloyd Campbell. Guest presenter Tara Wear of Associated Industries, a Spokane HR

consulting firm, spoke on implicit bias and the importance of inclusion in the workplace. Whether in a catered suite or at Silverwood's BBQ buffet, employees enjoyed plenty of food before watching a ball game or riding on roller coasters!

"Over the last two years, we've welcomed new employees to the co-op who had yet to participate in such a great event," says Mike Hunskor, SFS's human resources director. "It was an opportunity to interact with coworkers beyond one's local worksite and to learn about the larger scope of the company, while enhancing comradery through fun social activities.

"The employee retreat is a significant component that increases morale and contributes to the great culture that is SFS," continues Mike. "In particular, 2022's retreats were very much welcomed back, especially after enduring the challenges of COVID-19. It is rewarding for our staff to host these types of events. They certainly set us apart from companies that don't take the time to show their appreciation."

"We are thankful the retreats were a success," Mike added, "and we look forward to holding them again next year."



West side Country Store employees Joslyn Cassidy, Adam Murphy, and Matthew MacDuff purchased moose mascots at the Seahawk game.



Oroville Country Store employees Stacey Moser, Kyra Koepke and Serena Carper ride the Tremors roller coaster at Silverwood Theme Park.



## **Another Fair Year** in the Books

By Michelle Schell-Muir, Director of Marketing

Oh, what a year it was! It was great to have everyone back doing in-person shows and auctions. There wasn't a mask in sight, so we could see the kids' smiling faces. This year, we attended 11 livestock auctions where we purchased a record number of steers, hogs, lambs, goats, rabbits, chickens and turkeys. In addition to market animal purchases, we also handed out many "add-on" checks.

With rising gas, housing and food prices at the top of everyone's mind, we decided to take our support one step further in 2022. We took a few animals from each fair, and had them butchered. We then donated 10 tons of pork and beef to 15 different food banks in the communities we serve. The response from the food banks was incredible. They are seeing record need and less donations, which results in bare shelves. Their greatest need is good protein, which is rarely received. We were very proud and happy to help support our neighbors

in need through our donations.

It was especially meaningful for the Youth Rewards kids and their families to see that the animals they raised and cared for were being turned into food for their local communities. Skagit Farmers Supply felt very fortunate to be able to provide this extra level of support this year for our community members in need.

All in all, it was an amazing year. We had a record number of youth sign up for the program, a record number of youth that qualified for support, and with that a record number of animals purchased and add-on payments. We are now winding down after a very busy summer and getting ready for our Youth Rewards Essay Contest and our Photo Contest this fall. We're already looking forward to next fair season!



Salvation Army with meat from fair animals purchased by SFS.



Country Store customer Lukas Main wins Grand Champion Beef at Skagit County Fair.



Skagit County Fair awards Grand Champion FFA Goat to Country Store customer Helena Almli.

A record number of kids signed up for the co-op's Youth Rewards Program.



Skagit Farmers Supply employees, Candi Thomas and Wendy Couch with Youth Reward Members.



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## Food Banks Supplied with Meat

By Michelle Schell-Muir, Director of Marketing

In total, SFS donated to local food banks over 10 tons of meat from fair animals we purchased in 2022. We took a beef or two and a hog or two from different fairs and paid for them all the way through processing. The kids that raised them would usually show up for the donation, letting them experience seeing the animal they raised feed people in need.

Many of these animals were raised on our feed, and the kids and their families shop our Country Stores.

Read more about this in Michelle Schell-Muir's article "Another Fair Season in the Books" on page 9.

#### **MISSION STATEMENT**



To preserve and enhance viability of the local agriculture economy through cooperative profitability.

#### VISION STATEMENT

To be the premier cooperative in the Pacific Northwest by being:

- The producers' first choice
- The consumers' first choice
- The employees' first choice



#### **CORE VALUES**

Customer Commitment - People - Integrity Performance - Quality - Safety - Community

#### **DIRECTORY**

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