



## CO-OP CONNECTION

### Throughout 2020 Our Focus Stayed on You

By Tom Boland, General Manager



Our fiscal year 2020 ended with the close of September, and now the calendar year 2020 has closed as well. Many are hoping to put the year behind us with the thought that things can only get better. While we certainly hope that will be true, we employees of Skagit Farmers Supply (SFS) will try to keep our noses to the grindstone and our focus on our customers. We'll leave it to the experts to decide (and guess) what all of this means for the future. We're in our wheelhouse when we manage things we can manage — moving commodities, providing needed services to members, and taking care of customers. Our focus needs to always stay on fulfilling your needs.

We do have some positive results to share regarding fiscal 2020. We hope to share them in person at our annual meeting in March, but I'll give you a sneak peek here. As many of you know, we've had a good run the past few years with growing sales leading to strong patronage and cash going to our members and patrons. Our board has seen our most recent audit completed by Moss Adams, and we have another year of good news to share.

Our sales hit new highs in fiscal 2020 as we manufactured record feed tons. We also set new record highs in retail sales, and we delivered more propane gallons. AFCO Wholesale delivered more pet food and feed, and our agronomy department once again topped itself in sales. Our supply chain was hampered, but we had more containers of fertilizer go to Hawaii and more containers of feed go to Japan than we've ever had before.

I want to thank you for your patronage. We would not be in business without your support and encouragement.

I also want to thank the employees of SFS for showing up each day amid all the uncertainty: kids home from school, the overwhelming crescendo of our information overloaded culture, real health concerns and an environment

that bred a terribly negative attitude in many.

An incredibly dedicated group of good people work for this cooperative. They showed great care for you, our customers, in trying times. Thanks to everyone for bringing in these tremendous results! As I mentioned earlier, if we can keep focused on you, we're in our wheelhouse.

In his story on page 8, Board Chair Nels Lagerlund will share more good news from this tough year.

Experts across the country report accelerating trends in online shopping and digital acceptance, but we at SFS still hang our hats on our local mission statement in support of agriculture, communities and businesses in Northwest Washington.

On behalf of the employees of Skagit Farmers Supply, we wish all of you a safe, healthy and prosperous 2021! 🌱



*SFS locations closed early on December 11th for our virtual holiday party.*

# When It Comes to Your Field, We're All Ears

By Jon Jarvis, Agronomist

SFS has been dedicated to serving our membership since 1934 with both goods and services. One such service which we have provided for over 20 years is corn planting. Over the years, our equipment and personnel have changed, but our commitment to providing quality corn planting services has remained the same.

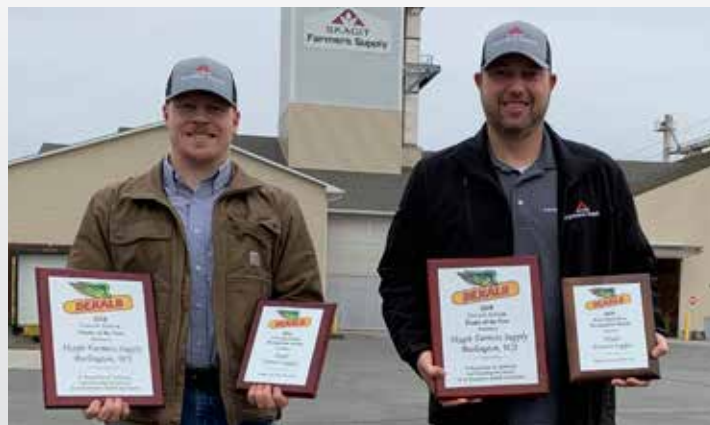
As a local, farmer-owned cooperative, we strive to source the best available products and equipment for our growers. In the fall of 2019, SFS purchased a 24-row John Deere 1770 corn planter. This planter is set up to use liquid fertilizer and is equipped with the latest technology.

With the JD 1770, we achieve the best crop stand possible by producing correct seed spacing, maintaining consistent seed depth, providing accurate planter-applied fertilizer banding, and ensuring optimum seed-to-soil contact.

One benefit of liquid fertilizer over dry granulated fertilizer is nutrients are more mobile in the soil water solution and are more readily taken up by plants. In addition, liquid fertilizer has a lower salt content, which is better on heavily manured dairy ground. It is easier on plant roots, and the nutrient content is much more consistent as every single drop contains identical amounts of nutrients.

SFS is a dealer for DEKALB® corn seed, which gives us access to the newest and best corn hybrids produced anywhere in the world. Their specialized short-season corn hybrids offer proven performance and unmatched yield potential in our area. We have received numerous awards from DEKALB including "Largest Unit Sales West Side" and "Dealer of the Year" for several years in a row. SFS is also a dealer for Greenfield corn seed, which has a number of excellent corn hybrids that produce both high yields and great quality corn silage. Greenfield has excellent offerings for both conventional and organic corn growers.

Besides a great custom corn planting program, SFS offers a commitment to educate its members. Every spring the co-op attracts corn industry experts from across the country to speak on corn silage-related topics at our annual Corn Grower Meeting. This annual meeting is provided at no cost to our members.



*Agronomist Blake Carlson (left) and Jon Jarvis display our DEKALB recognition awards from 2018 and 2019.*

SFS employs experienced in-house agronomists and certified crop advisors who can conduct soil tests, perform stand counts, scout for insects and diseases, provide fertilizer recommendations, take plant petiole samples, and answer many questions about a grower's corn crop.

Recently, we've expanded our custom planting services into Whatcom and Snohomish counties. SFS has contracted with custom corn planters to service growers in all counties.

In 2020, Skagit Farmers custom planted over 5,000 acres of corn for our members. Whatever the need, SFS has the knowledge, experience, equipment, products and personnel to get the job done right. 🌱



## Co-op Financing



*Shannon Perkes*

For any questions regarding our in-house financing programs for the 2021 growing season, please contact Credit Manager Shannon Perkes at 360-757-6053 or [shannonp@skagitfarmers.com](mailto:shannonp@skagitfarmers.com). 🌱



*Stan Boon*

SFS has scheduled these Grower Recertification Meetings for Feb. 16 and Feb. 17 at McIntyre Hall on the campus of Skagit Valley College. As in the past, you'll be able to earn credits toward recertification. If meeting in person is still not possible, it will be held virtually.

Stan Boon from our Burlington Agronomy Center is coordinating the event. More information will follow and attendees will still need to pre-register for the event. Stan's e-mail is [stanb@skagitfarmers.com](mailto:stanb@skagitfarmers.com). 🌱



# WELCOME TWO AGRONOMISTS TO SKAGIT FARMERS SUPPLY!

Torey Wilson is originally from Ferndale and has lived in Lynden for the past nine years. He attended Washington State University, where he completed his degree in agricultural technology and management.

Torey has a background in youth services. Before engaging in agriculture, he was employed by the Boys and Girls Club and earned a human development minor in college.

For the past nine years, Torey served as farm operations manager for Ebe Farms in Lynden. Overseeing the day to day activities of a large seed potato business required him to wear several hats, providing agronomist services, managing staff and equipment.

Torey loves the outdoors, even when not at work. He and his wife have a camper van and take any opportunity to get outdoors with their three-year-old son.



*Torey Wilson*



*John Vander Veen*

John Vander Veen was born and raised in Lynden. After attending college at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, California, John came back to Northwest Washington to work with his father at the family dairy. He then worked for Ferndale Grain for 11 years, later returning to the family business to take over the dairy. During this time, he also started his own independent nutrition consulting business.

Over the years, John continued to work with his family, eventually getting into the raspberry business to start Clear Crest Berries with his brother and father. This past March, John's family sold the cows and closed the dairy, and after 20 years in raspberries, John said they are beginning to downsize. He is excited to start a new chapter with Skagit Farmers Supply.

John retired earlier this year from a 32-year stint coaching high school football. He likes to travel, especially to Arizona to visit his three kids.

## YOUR SFS AGRONOMY SALES TEAM



Charlie Anderson



Coby Beath - Wholesale



Stan Boon - Turf & Ornamental



Blake Carson



Jeff Howe - Wholesale  
Distribution



Jon Jarvis



Molly Pershing



Jose Rivera





Workers load trees into a truck for shipment to a retail garden center.



Bare root nursery stock trees are tied into bundles of five for shipment.



Nursery trees are heeled into sawdust while waiting to be loaded for transport.



## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: Biringer Nursery

By Brianna Hackler, Marketing Assistant

Driving through Skagit Valley, farming season appears to be drawing to a close for many producers. Crops have been harvested, fields are bare and snow geese have taken over for the winter. However, the team at Biringer Nursery is just getting started.

The wholesale tree nursery is hard at work digging up trees, counting and bundling them, and loading them on trucks to be shipped across the U.S. and Canada.

"We try to grow the best possible product for our area and our community," said Melissa Biringer.

Melissa and her brother, Joe, run Biringer Nursery in Mount Vernon. The nursery, which has been located on Beaver Marsh Road since 1989, specializes in fruit, flowering and shade trees, including apple, cherry, peach, maple, birch, oak, and deciduous shrubs, like lilac and hydrangeas.

Biringer Nursery was started by Joe and Melissa's father on their farm in Marysville. The Biringers planted 1,500 apple trees in 1974, with their first harvest three years later. Now, Biringer Nursery has well over a million trees in the ground; they harvest about 350,000 trees each year.

"We always specialized in the fruit tree part of it," Melissa said. "We just gradually expanded to meet the needs of landscapers and homeowners, with the flowering trees and shrubberies."

When the nursery first opened, Joe said they focused on selling in Western Washington. Now, the nursery sells to retail stores and landscapers across the Pacific Northwest, from Vancouver to Quebec in Canada, and along the East Coast in the United States.

"Our catalog used to just be a one-page sheet," Melissa laughed. "Now we have 30 pages of product in our catalog."

The Biringers said they focus on products that grow well in Western Washington, but those products translate well to growing in Canada and along the East Coast. One such product is their Frost Peach Tree, a staple for their business from the start.

The Frost Peach Tree came from Frost Nursery in Granite Falls. The owner of that nursery was getting out of the business around the same time the Biringer family started. He mentored the Biringers and gave them the rights to propagate and trademark the peach tree.





At left: Joe Biringer with his sister and co-owner, Melissa (Missy).



Longtime employee Dave Weymouth sprays nursery tree stock with specialized GK elevated self-propelled sprayer on tracks.

## Biringer Nursery

Because it is so wet, peaches don't normally do well in Western Washington, but the Frost Peach Tree is immune to many of the issues that plague typical peach trees.

"It's one of the best leaf-curl resistant peach trees in the world," Joe said, adding that it is the top peach tree sold across the Northwest.

Another Biringer Nursery specialty is Hanna's Heart, a Katsura tree with heart-shaped leaves. The Biringers discovered and patented the tree type around the time Joe's daughter, Hanna, was born with five holes in her heart. Hanna pulled through, and now the Biringers donate 50¢ to Children's Hospital from every Hanna's Heart tree sold.

The nursery is currently in its busy season, which starts at the beginning of November and runs through April. Their customers, mostly retail garden centers, will begin receiving trees by January or early February, bare root and ready to be planted.

The nursery normally has about 20 employees with up to 30 in the busy season. While their parents are mostly retired, Melissa said both her children and Joe's kids are heavily involved in helping with the business, from paperwork and shipping to production in the field.

Joe said they were worried when the COVID-19 pandemic struck earlier this year, but the pandemic has provided a silver lining for the nursery. More people are staying home and spending more time in their yards.

"People seem to be getting back in love with gardening," Joe said. "It seems like people weren't too worried about gardening before, and I'm hoping this actually helped people remember or learn that they really enjoy gardening. I'm hoping that trend continues."

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *Biringer Nursery purchases the following from Skagit Farmers Supply: Fertilizer and chemicals, fuel and propane, delivery and application, and Country Store services.* 🌲

At right: A cab view from the tree digger machine.



Workers use a GK Bare Root Tree Digger to harvest nursery tree stock in the field.





## Country Store Officially True Value®

*By Allene Stuller, Manager, Stanwood Country Store*



When I started working at the Stanwood Country Store 12 years ago, I remember helping a customer who wanted a hammer. All we had at the Stanwood location at that

time was one multi-fencing tool.

A few years later, we decided to bring in some True Value® products. Our customers could get some tools, not a lot. But that has changed.

Today, the primary customers of the Stanwood Country Store — homeowners, hobby farmers, local farms and equestrian centers — can purchase almost any tool they need, and if we do not have what they want, they can order anything the national hardware company offers.

We began our reset to become an official True Value Hardware store in October. Now we have the pipe fittings and the actual PVC pipe to finish any plumbing job. We also carry copper pipe and fittings for setting propane tanks (we encourage you to talk to our propane department for all your heating needs).

We inventory a wide selection of brand name tools including Master Mechanics, Bosch, DeWalt and more.

In addition to horse feed and dog food, you can pick up everything you need to repair a toilet, fix a faucet, or install gutters. Our associates are trained to order the exact color of gutters needed, and your order will be delivered right to our store. That's another advantage of flying the True Value Hardware flag.

We've been working on these upgrades and additions since October. We still have a few departments to set, such as outdoor, fishing and camping equipment, but the majority of the store set is complete.

Call or visit the Stanwood Country Store to see the difference. 



## Stanwood Hours Back T

"Store hours returned closer to 'regular' on the 23rd of November," says Allene Stuller, manager of the Stanwood Country Store, which is one of the largest retail spaces of SFS and tops all of the cooperative's Country Stores in sales.

Regular now means 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Sunday. Before COVID, the store opened at 8:00 a.m. and stayed open until 7:00 p.m. Monday through Saturday. "We didn't have a lot of business in that last hour, and some of our associates do online learning with their children," says Allene, explaining the earlier closing.

The longer hours are welcome news for customers of the Stanwood store who saw hours reduced in March as the Country Store's staff dwindled.

"At first we had several people self-quarantine and then one of our staff members decided to retire," recalls Allene. At the same time, the store got very busy as customers, confined to their homes, purchased more and more merchandise. Employees were putting in long days, and it just became too much for some of them.

"We had 22 associates when I became store manager at the end of February," says Allene. At one point, that number dropped to 13 and now is back up to 18 with 15 full-time associates. A staff of 25 would be even better, she admits. Considering the increased stocking, sanitizing and handing out masks, Allene says, "Sometimes, there are not enough hours in the day."

Allene started at the Stanwood Store 12 years ago as a cashier, then moved to clothing and gifts. She transferred to the Burlington



# True Value.

Together to serve you better!



## o Normal – Almost

store as store manager in November of 2017 and returned to manage the Stanwood store earlier this year.

Allene says her experience at the Burlington store helped her make changes to Stanwood's staff and merchandize when the pandemic hit. "I had to figure out how to be efficient very quickly," she states. Sales boomed as Stanwood's customers found they had more time on their hands, and they wanted the supplies for new hobbies like gardening and raising chickens.

The stores' curbside pickup service, non-existent before COVID-19, grew out of a demand for social distancing and contact-free purchasing.

Often arriving at the store at 5:30 am during the summer months, the phone would start ringing at 6:30 am with orders to be picked up later in the day at the warehouse. The customer would be invoiced as the merchandise was being loaded into their car. That service continues.

Allene praises the Stanwood Country Store staff. "With only a few exceptions, the employees I have now are the ones I started with," she states. "They've come in early and helped any way they could during this difficult time."

As for herself, Allene says, "I'm happy to have been here for the community and our associates during this time."

"I'm grateful to have been considered essential and been able to work through this pandemic," she adds. "It's been hard but it's heartwarming and I'm happy I was able to do it." 🏠



## Board Reports Good Year Despite Challenges

By Nels Lagerlund, Board Chairman



I hope everyone enjoyed the holidays, even if they weren't as "normal" as we would have liked. COVID-19 has impacted much of our lives, but I am happy to report that SFS is still moving forward.

By now, voting members should have received information regarding the upcoming director election. Nominations have been called for and must be vetted by the nominating committee. Again this year we'll be mailing our votes for the one board seat up for election.\*

The winner of the election will be announced at the annual meeting in March. We are planning to hold the meeting in person in Mount Vernon. If Skagit County does not allow such a meeting, we will virtually host an informational meeting, complete with audit report and election results, rather than postponing it.

Despite the pandemic's challenges, SFS had another strong fiscal year. Our business units had a strong half-year prior to the pandemic, and our staff and management kept the organization on track through the shutdown. Total patronage dollars generated set a new record, with 50% again paid in cash. Again this year, we will do a nonqualified distribution on the stock portion. This advantage of doing business with SFS is for all voting grower members. The cooperative pays the taxes with the intent to retire this portion on a 10-year revolvment.

On behalf of the board of directors, I want to thank you for your continued support of Skagit Farmers Supply and to wish you a healthy and happy New Year. 🌱

*\*EDITOR'S NOTE: The seat up for election is held by the author of this article, Nels Lagerlund, who is seeking re-election to the board.*

### 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

#### Main Office-Burlington

360.757.6053

#### AFCO Distribution & Milling

800.538.8700

#### Agronomy-Conway

360.445.5015

#### Agronomy-Lynden

360.755.3615

#### Agronomy-Burlington

360.757.7870

#### Energy-Main Office

360.757.6053

#### Petroleum & Propane Delivery

360.757.6053 // 888.757.6053

Emergency: 360.209.0310

#### Country Stores

##### Farm • Pet • Home

Burlington	360.757.4055
Coeur d'Alene (Idaho)	208.772.2715
Colville	509.684.2232
Freeland	360.331.1970
Mount Vernon	360.424.4207
Oak Harbor	360.675.2277
Oroville	509.560.7088
Sedro Woolley	360.856.6567
Spokane Central	509.534.1412
Spokane Valley	509.926.6603
Stanwood	360.629.7033
Stevensville (Montana)	406.777.5527