

co-op connection

Summer
2018

Transitions



by Tom Boland, General Manager

Our youngest son, Tynan, recently made his first communion at St. Mary's in Anacortes. It was a beautiful day we celebrated with my sister, Mary, and her family and some close friends. It's a milestone that causes you to

spend time in reflection.

It's good to celebrate these transitional times. Celebrations help reinforce our purpose and refocus our life goals. Those goals can be as simple as being a role model for our kids, a mentor, or a friend to those in need. That is part of the beauty of transitional times. They come whether we are ready for them or not.

Some transitions are occurring in the lives of our co-op employees, as well. Long-time staff members who have faithfully supported Skagit Farmers Supply are retiring. Brad Ludwig has spent 43 years serving the farmers and homeowners in western Washington in various roles. Bruce Gaspard has kept families warm by delivering propane for over 35 years. Working in our propane service department for 22 years, Steve Kite has plumbed propane throughout Skagit, Snohomish and Island counties. Ron Hawkins has labored for 50+ years with three companies in support of farmers in four counties. He's spent the last 10 years with our co-op.

We've benefited from the strong work ethic, good humor and integrity of these long-time employees at work and at our company functions.



Long-time director Rick Williams is also retiring after serving our members for 14 years. A resident of Stanwood in Snohomish County, Rick Williams was the first member outside of

Steve Kite




Bruce Gaspard

Skagit and Island Counties to be elected to the Skagit Farmers Supply board.

Rick's familiarity with the history of Skagit Farmers Supply, his knowledge of agriculture and his care for the success of the co-op and its employees will be greatly missed.

Brad, Bruce, Steve, Ron and Rick join a growing list of baby boomers retiring across our country. The fruits of their labor have been enjoyed by countless people. I have no doubt they will continue to be a blessing to their communities and families.

These retirements will result in even more transitions, as we recruit and hire for these important roles. For parents, there are moments of pride as we see our children make meaningful strides towards maturity and growth. Likewise, at Skagit Farmers Supply, we see eager faces taking the heavy load from these boomers to move the co-op forward. It's good to have these transitional life events to help slow us down and hear the ticking of time.

We appreciate your continued support of your co-op and wish you good luck with your growing season. 

NOTICE

Skagit Farmers Supply paid out to its members and patrons a record \$2.4 million in cash patronage in June. Just under \$12 million in cash has been returned to farm owners, homeowners and businesses in western Washington over the past three years.

Sixty percent of the Skagit Farmers Supply workforce lies within the retail division, where turnover is generally greater. 30% of our retail store employees have at least five years in and some are nearing 30 and 40 years. Newer employees recognize this. It shows them we're a stable, appreciative employer.



Choosing the Right Applicant

by Mike Hunskor and Amanda Gray, Human Resources

We're working to hire talented people to serve you in an economy with the lowest unemployment rate in 10 years. It's a challenge, but Skagit Farmers Supply has a variety of tools in its hiring toolbox.

- We have a solid reputation and a sought-after workplace culture.
- We utilize assessments that test an applicant's math, verbal and computer skills and also evaluate aptitude in several areas including customer service.
- We look at each applicant's motor vehicle record and conduct drug tests on each finalist to ensure the best employees.

We have not seen a state unemployment rate as low as the current 4.7% since 2007. As baby boomers enter retirement, many companies find themselves with a number of key positions to fill.

One unique tool Skagit Farmers Supply has is its ability to search for full-time employees in its part-time and seasonal workforce. This spring, your cooperative employed 340 people across the Pacific Northwest.

The growth of the co-op in recent years has us looking for talent beyond Washington into Oregon, Idaho and Montana. In general, recruiting is more difficult in unpopulated areas



Mike Hunskor



Amanda Gray

like Oroville, Washington, and Stevensville, Montana, versus larger communities like Spokane and along the I-5 corridor in western Washington.

Besides the traditional employment avenues, Skagit Farmers Supply advertises job openings through sites like Indeed.com or Craigslist. Younger applicants expect to be able to apply online, a process we're working towards implementing.

We offer what others may not

Nothing beats word-of-mouth when a job opens up at Skagit Farmers Supply. Our culture attracts skilled people who have worked for years in big box companies that fail to provide a sought-after work-life balance. At Skagit, employees find they're not treated as a number. We celebrate our employees' successes, show them genuine care, and place great value on their personal and family life. An employee who recently joined us was thrilled to manage his work schedule and still be able to coach his child's sports team after work. Skagit Farmers Supply knows that is important.

While there is never a dull moment in this business, we tend to avoid many of the personnel issues a lot of businesses deal with. More often than not, we're getting the quality employees our members need when we do hire. That's what sets Skagit Farmers Supply apart. 🏡

Another Door Opens

by Brad Ludwig, Director of Retail Support/Purchasing

As Tom mentioned in his story on page one, I am retiring after a 43-year career in this business. My wife, Laura, and I have been married for that same 43-year period, and we have two married daughters and five grandchildren living nearby. They are a big reason for my retirement.

I have projects planned or already begun with each grandchild at various locations on our property. There is a treehouse project with the oldest grandson that continues to grow. Other projects include a trail to a “secret garden” for our only granddaughter, a bridge over a low area, a large sandbox and more trails. They all enjoy being involved in their own project. It’s teaching them how to use tools and gives me a chance to have an influence on their lives. I don’t want to look back and say I missed the opportunity to be involved.

A snapshot of my career

Over 43 years, I have had the special privilege of being involved in several aspects of the co-op’s business, including agronomy, retail, dairy, advertising, purchasing and management.

My career began when I joined Western Farmers Association’s (WFA) management training program in 1975. Store management positions in Everett and Mount Vernon followed, along with a western Washington agronomy position. My years with WFA also involved bulk feed, selling pole buildings, energy and retail.

In February 1982, the board members and general manager Mert McKee, Jr. of Skagit Grange Supply made the bold decision to purchase the former WFA Mount Vernon location and to lease the Oak Harbor Store from Cenex. Practically overnight, Skagit Grange with its five original employees grew to three locations. They added feed, propane, more petroleum gallons and an agronomy plant. Mert offered me the location manager position and the task of hiring a crew. I accepted, and I’ve been with Skagit ever since.



I ended my career doing central buying and retail support for all 13 Country Stores owned and operated by Skagit Farmers Supply in three states.

Why did I stay for 43 years? I stayed because my job has always been interesting. I have been permitted to wear a lot of different hats. By the same token, I have been offered a lot of opportunities to go other places, but I turned them all down. I liked the ethics here at Skagit Farmers Supply and how we are respected in the communities we serve.

Parting words

To our employees: Take pride in Skagit Farmers Supply. It’s a great company and really cares for its employees. Don’t take it for granted. It has provided a wonderful career for me and my family. *To our members:* While your company has diversified and grown significantly over the course of my career, it is still community oriented, locally owned, responsive to members’ needs and strives to provide excellent service.

I appreciate the opportunity to have played a small role in the success of Skagit Farmers Supply. Thanks for the memories. 🏠



Spokane: Our Wholesale Buying Show

Our AFCO Wholesale & Milling Department, based in Spokane, Washington, provides farm store goods and pet foods to a network of independent retailers across seven states. Once a year, we host a buying show. We bring in our vendors/suppliers and offer programs and one-time discounts to those store owners. 🏠

To the left is a peek at the 2018 Buying Show. AFCO Sales Manager Dave Underwood (on the left) and our Lead Buyer Gary Wilson (right) meeting with Cara Haight & Taylor Pagiaro of C.H. Farm & Ranch Supply located in Kamiah, Idaho.

Spreading Youth Rewards to the East

by Michelle Schell, Director of Marketing, Country Stores



The Country Store's Youth Rewards program fosters community, youth, knowledge and agriculture.

When Community Outreach employee Bailie Welton was charged with overseeing the Youth Rewards program a little over a year ago, she knew she wanted to include the east side locations. In addition to rolling out add-ons (additional financial support) and market animal purchasing to the

Eastside, we established structure and set purchase guidelines to qualify for benefits within the whole program.

In 2016, we had 140 Youth Rewards members. In 2017, we had 326. So far in 2018, we have 485. Our goal is to break the 500-member threshold this year and with about 30 days left to sign up, it looks very promising.

This year, we rolled out a new program benefit: Youth of the Year. Gabi Sweetster of the Davenport, Washington, FFA Chapter was our grand prize winner. She received full sponsorship of her hog, which equates to an \$800 account credit to use for any purchases she makes for her project this season.

The first weekend in May, we attended the Spokane Jr. Livestock Show where we purchased Gabi Sweetster's hog and paid add-ons to Youth Rewards members for their projects. The following weekend, we attended the Washington FFA Conference in Pullman where we had the opportunity to visit with FFA leaders and youth from all over the state.

We generally attend and support four to five Westside fairs. We will continue to do so, but are adding 10 fairs or livestock shows in Eastern Washington, Couer d' Alene and the Bitterroot Valley in Montana to our schedule this year.

Check out <https://www.countrystore.net/youth/> for details on the program, and stay tuned for more updates on Youth Rewards. 🏠



Youth of the Year Gabi Sweetster and her hog at the Spokane Jr. Livestock Show. Skagit's Country Stores purchased the hog.



Steve Kite, propane service department



Propane Tank Monitors Coming

by Ryan Nootenboom, Energy Manager



Skagit Farmers Supply prides itself on customer service. We are excited to offer remote tank monitors so our customers and the co-op can monitor the level of propane in their tanks.

Here's what the co-op will do. When your propane level gets low, the monitor will send a cellular signal to our monitoring system, allowing us to dispatch a delivery truck so you do not run out.

Here is what you can do. You can use a mobile app to check your own tank level from a distance or from the comfort of your home.

"With technology advances from smart phones to smart cars all around us, it only makes sense to apply this technology to the residential propane customer and offer a remote tank monitor," says Vicki Manry, propane supervisor.

Tank monitoring adds a level of security and safety to the system, too. If an unusual change in propane volume is detected, the monitor will alert the co-op's system that there may be an issue with the equipment or system. We'll send a technician out to perform a safety check to ensure everything is working correctly.

This tank monitoring technology will also support our farming community by allowing you (and us) to check commercial propane tanks, refined fuel tanks and mobile fuel units from your office or mobile device.

Our monitoring system will be available in the near future. If you are interested, give us a call at 360-757-6053. *Note: Minimum fees may apply for each monitor installed.* 🏠

Unique Products for Our Way of Farming



by Steve Groen, Crop Advisor

The members and the Agronomy Department of Skagit Farmers Supply continue to benefit from partnerships with **Nachurs**®, **Agro Research International**® and **Yara**®. One of the advantages of our independent cooperative is our ability to search for the latest technologies that benefit the diverse Skagit River Valley, which is home to over 60 different commercial crops.

Nachurs

We continue to partner with Nachurs as a wholesale and retail partner. Our forage growers are able to capitalize on this company's research-based, performance-driven products.

Nachurs imPulse® has become a standard in-furrow fertility practice for our corn growers. imPulse allows us to safely seed apply a small amount of NPK with the inclusion of an organic acid. This allows for quicker emergence, optimal yield and forage quality.

A foliar application of **Nachurs Finish Line**® when applying herbicide helps ensure the proper micronutrient nutrition corn needs for proper starch and stover development.

Our potato growers are benefiting from the research-driven specialty fertility programs developed nationwide. Skinset, yield and improved storage quality are some of the results you can expect when including **Nachurs Bio K**® and **Nachurs Rhyzo-Link**® products in fertility plans.

Agro Research International

Weed Slayer and **Thyme Guard** continue to be a big hit with our organic growers. Weed Slayer is the first non-selective, organic-based herbicide to hit the U.S. market. Weed Slayer even allows conventional growers an alternative to glyphosate.

Thyme Guard provides growers with a tool that is an insecticide, fungicide and bactericide. Thyme Guard promotes plant health by stimulating and supplementing phenolic production within the plant. These are just two of many products we are introducing in the PNW.

Agro Research International is a fast growing, innovative

company we are proud to partner with as their wholesale distributor in the PNW.

Yara

YaraVita® **Procote**®, **YaraLiva**® **Tropicote**®, **YaraVera**® **Amidas**™, and **YaraVita Solatrel**® are just a few featured Yara products many of our farmers have incorporated into their nutrition programs. Yara is a global company based in Norway and is the oldest and largest fertilizer manufacturer by sales in the world.

In the near future, our agronomists will be able to benefit from **Yara's Megalab**®, which is the largest privately held plant nutrition database in the world. Megalab will ensure your agronomist will be able to meet the nutritional needs of plants based on timing and physiological needs throughout the growing season.

Contact any Skagit Farmers Supply crop advisor or agronomy location to discuss incorporating these products in your farming operation.

NOTE: In the future, our Country Stores will be stocking Weed Slayer and Thyme Guard in quantities suited to small acreages or hobby farms. 



Skagit Crop Advisor Dan Adamson and Jimmy Rigway of Yara evaluating yield and tuber quality of Tropicote-applied spuds.

Fertigated baby raspberries with Agro Research and Nachurs products.

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—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 North | 509.466.1300 |
| Spokane Valley | 509.926.6603 |
| Stanwood | 360.629.7033 |
| Stevensville (Montana) | 406.777.5527 |



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A Great Pleasure to Serve

Board Vice-Chairman Rick Williams has decided to retire as director of Skagit Farmers Supply. Rick was elected to his first term in 2004. Anticipating his departure in the coming months, we've asked Rick to share his thoughts.

It has been an honor and a privilege to witness the phenomenal growth of our cooperative over the past 14 years. My service on the board began when Ken Kadlec was at the helm of Skagit Farmers Supply. Ken had a keen eye for opportunities. In 2007, we purchased the UAP agronomy plant off Highway 20. *Note: Skagit Farmers recently rebuilt that facility to be a premier agronomy plant in western Washington.*

Skagit Farmers Supply is a very unique co-op because of our proximity to rapidly growing residential areas. Under the guidance of recently retired energy manager Bill Markus, our energy division played off that growth. I have little doubt that our new energy manager, Ryan Nootenboom, will lead that division to continued success.

The expansion of Skagit Farmers Supply into the Spokane area created new opportunities to increase our buying power through the AFCO distribution system. Our Spokane milling facility is also opening new markets.



The Williams Family (left to right): Bill, Rick, M'Lisse, Garrett, and (top to bottom) Leif, Grayson, Olin and Melissa.

It has been my great pleasure to serve with the gifted and dedicated directors you members have elected. The formula for our success has been to research and make the best decisions we could for the opportunities our general managers presented us.

Your current general manager, Tom Boland, has the same vision as Ken. The detail he put into the new agronomy plant and all our country stores has put us a big step ahead. Nothing can be accomplished without top administration guiding the ship down the right channels. Staffing with the best talent has always paid off.

My years on the board with this awesome group have been years I will always cherish. I leave knowing that the newer directors will continue the voyage. 🌱