

# co-op connection

Spring  
2017

## Using Public Interest to Tell Your Story

by Tom Boland, General Manager



I recently attended the Land O'Lakes annual meeting in Minneapolis and heard President and CEO Chris Policinski discuss why their cooperative started a new department called Land O'Lakes SUSTAIN.

In that presentation, Chris talked about how they were using consumer's desire to know more about where and how food is produced and how to use that as an advantage in the marketplace. We have the ability to track many types of food production and can proactively tell the story of how and where the food is grown. An added benefit to this could be that science and data may help large, commodity-driven producers save money by using less inputs. These are real concerns. Large companies such as General Mills and Walmart want to know more about the origins of the food they are selling because their customers are asking for that information.


Much of agriculture is concerned with the implied health benefits consumers are promised with a gluten-free label, a non-GMO label or an organic label. Even so, large retailers are asking for and promoting those products. By default, they support those "healthy" claims.

We at Skagit Farmers Supply are able to support both conventional and organic production—whichever makes the best sense for you, the producer. We have invested, and continue to invest in conventional and organic storage, blending and knowledge. Our new

fertilizer plant in Burlington will expand our conventional fertilizer capability, which will allow us to continue expanding our organic capacity in Conway. We continue to support sustainability and that can help you provide a more informed story in your operation. In addition to traditional crop protectants and fertilizers, we market a wide variety of organic solutions that have proven results.

For those of you who joined us at Farmstrong Brewing in February for presentations on organically approved crop production inputs and natural tools, you heard many of these good stories along with the results. Such solutions have an added benefit of being easier on the environment and are therefore considered sustainable by some consumers that are willing to pay more for their food. If you are interested in hearing about these products, our agronomists would love to hear from you!

Thanks to all of you who attended our annual meeting on March 14. We sincerely appreciate your support and interest in your co-op. Local governance is important to the continued success of Skagit Farmers Supply.

The winter weather has really helped out as we've had a good home heating season. Kelly and I took our family to Sun Peaks in British Columbia and found more snow than we knew what to do with! A few weeks later, we were practically in T-shirts while enjoying a day at Stevens Pass. The beauty of the Pacific Northwest is much appreciated, even on the rainy days. 



# COMING SOON: The Skagit Farmers Way



by Ashley Smith, Energy Office Assistant

In February, Tremayne Burdsal from the Mount Vernon Country Store, Evan Stiles from the Sedro-Woolley Country Store, Lauren Johnson from Retail Support, George Arnold, Director of Retail Operations, and I attended customer service training at the Disneyland Resort.

We learned how The Walt Disney Company made the “happiest place on earth.” We had classroom training as well as field experience in the park itself. We learned how many paces there are between garbage cans inside the park to ensure cleanliness. We also discovered why Walt Disney demanded mechanical birds breathe in the Enchanted Tiki Room.


We learned how a compass can tell more than direction. [A compass can help us view each customer by their needs, emotions,



Evan, Lauren, George, Tremayne and Ashley at Disneyland Resort.

stereotypes and wants.] We studied how Disney reaches exceptional service in their staff and how to recover from a service error. At the heart of what drives Disney’s success is the understanding that, in order to succeed, an organization must create a customer experience that is different from its competitors.

Starting this month, the five of us are meeting with several of our cooperative’s team members to define what customer service excellence looks like at Skagit Farmers Supply. If we truly believe it is our level of service that sets us apart, we must differentiate our service from our competitors.

We look forward to creating the “Skagit Farmers Way” for service excellence just like The Walt Disney Company created the “Disney Way.” 



Customer service training at Disney Institute.

## Record Propane Deliveries

by Bill Markus, Energy Manager

This past winter, our region experienced colder than normal temperatures, starting the first of December. The cold weather drove propane deliveries at Skagit Farmers Supply to all-time records. In December, January and February, we delivered over 1 million gallons every month. Our crews ran night and day to keep up with demand.


During a busy month, your energy department unloads 40 propane rail cars. Each car holds 31,000 gallons. We have two rail



unloading sites—one in Burlington and one in Mount Vernon. It’s the lifeblood of our energy department, because propane production in Puget Sound is just not enough to keep up with demand.

Soon, we’ll be gearing up for the spring rush with an additional fuel truck to take care of our farmers and the high demand for diesel during spring planting.

Another beauty of our company is that the energy department shares employees with the agronomy department. When we move into spring, that department has need for veteran operators of tending, application and planting equipment. So five to six guys will come out of our propane trucks to help with spring crop inputs.

That’s the value of Skagit Farmers Supply. Our employees are cross-trained, and therefore of greater value to you. 



Crews ran day and night this winter to keep up with demand for propane.



Unloading a propane rail car at our Burlington office.

# Sedro-Woolley Store Honored by ACE

by George Arnold, Retail Manager



It's been fun to see how our Sedro-Woolley Country Store has grown over the past five years. In 2011, we moved from our old facility and built a new flagship store at 915 Moore St.

It was a difficult transition for many customers. We went from being a small store to the second largest in our chain. Over the years, however, we've grown into our new role. The community loves us, and we've become one of ACE Hardware's premium locations.

In recent years, the Sedro-Woolley Country Store has posted double-digit sales increases. Led by the energy and positive change of store manager Heidi Hamblin, the staff has taken care of their customers and community in a way that has produced some amazing results.

For the 2015-16 year, ACE Hardware awarded the Sedro-Woolley Country Store the Platinum Performance Award—the highest honor for sales growth, employee training and customer engagement.

The staff at Sedro-Woolley is doing many things right. Here are three:

**1. They serve the community.** The store and its employees contribute to and volunteer in local schools and civic organizations. For instance, they provide fertilizer for baseball and soccer fields, and help put on the Loggerodeo™ and parade every Fourth of July.

**2. They know customers personally.** Many employees have been in the community all their life and are very connected with the people they serve. The staff knows many of our customers by name.

**3. They are very service oriented.** Sedro-Woolley employees make sure their store handles what the community needs, and every customer gets the best possible deal. If you walk into the store with a rewards coupon, no matter who is at the register, you'll hear a collective "Whoohoo!" from the staff.

As a large-format country store, Sedro-Woolley is a full-blown hardware store, plus it carries all the pet, livestock, fencing, clothing, lawn and garden, pasture maintenance, wildlife and birding supplies you need on any farm or home. Sedro-Woolley is also local and personal.

Make a special effort to stop by the Sedro-Woolley Country Store next time you are in the area. You will be amazed! 🏠



*"The staff has taken care of their customers and community in a way that has produced some amazing results."*

# Holiday Events Build Relationships

by Raelene Smillie, Company Administrator



Over 500 Skagit Farmers Supply employees and their guests attended holiday celebrations in January. These gatherings offer a rare opportunity to get employees from different locations together and foster great working relationships between departments.

The weather this year kept some energy employees in their propane trucks, rather than at the celebrations. Those employees were missed and specifically thanked for their dedication to our patrons.

## Long-term staffers recognized

Jeff Walker and Bill Markus were recognized for 40 years of service to members and employees of Skagit Farmers Supply.

For many years, Jeff managed the retail store in Oak Harbor. He has spent the past seven years at our agronomy facility in Burlington, working with growers in nursery, greenhouse and specialty products.

Bill began his career at the Burlington store and has very successfully led our

energy department for many years. He grew the propane business from the ground up to market leader in our trade area.

Thank you, Jeff and Bill, for your many contributions to our cooperative.



Bill Markus, left, and Jeff Walker honored for their service.

## Employees rewarded

At the holiday celebrations, the Skagit Farmers board of directors distributed cash bonuses to 310 employees.

An additional profit sharing contribution will be made to qualified employee 401k accounts in June as part of the discretionary employee bonus plan. Each year, directors evaluate the financial success and position of the company and consider declaring funds for the employee bonus plan.

These incentives go a long way toward retaining valuable employees who put their heart and soul into serving you, the members. 🏡

# Learning to Understand Your Needs

by Shannon Perkes, Credit Department



In December, two of our agronomists, Dan Adamson and Jon Jarvis, and I had the opportunity to travel to Manhattan, Kansas. We attended an “Emerging Leaders” course taught by Brian Briggeman, professor at the Arthur Capper Cooperative Center at Kansas State University.

This was a hands-on experience that showed us how to put on

our “producer hats” as we consider factors impacting you. During the training, we interacted with growers and learned techniques for building relationships with our current member-growers. We also acquired tools to conduct productive interviews with potential future producer-members.

As employees of Skagit Farmers Supply, Dan, Jon and I are grateful for the educational opportunities the cooperative offers to help us better serve you. 🏡



Dan Adamson (second from right) participates in a discussion group at the “Emerging Leaders” course.

# Applicators Learn Latest Techniques

by Jeff Walker, Specialty Products Manager



On Feb. 22 and 23, Skagit Farmers Supply held its annual pesticide recertification meetings at the Best Western Skagit Valley Convention Center in Mount Vernon.

The first day focused on workers in the greenhouse, landscaping and ornamental industries with 140 people attending, including some in roadside weed control. Topics ranged from integrated pest management to strategies for controlling invasive weed species in landscapes.

The second day, attended by 110 farmers, was devoted to agricultural crops grown in western Washington. They learned from speakers representing DuPont, Syngenta, Dow Chemical and other companies who are the major manufacturers moving into biologicals. Compared to older chemistries, these products are safer to use and give applicators a different set of tools for targeting certain pests.

A note of thanks to agronomist David Youngquist who did a great

job of introducing the speakers and making sure the program flowed well. Special recognition to Kirsten Dickson and Danica Lisle-Crawley, who managed the registration, oversaw the door prize drawings and served as the event's general coordinators.

## License renewal a focus of these events

The reason Skagit Farmers Supply has sponsored and hosted these pesticide recertification meetings for over 20 years is because our commercial pesticide customers, who have been certified and received various licenses to sell or apply pesticides from the WSDA, need continuing education credits to keep their licenses current. They must earn credits yearly and accumulate a specified number over a five-year period in order to renew their licenses.

These meetings offer the credits and keep them up-to-date on the newest and greatest products, techniques and strategies coming to market. 🏠

Tim Miller from WSU Northwest Research addresses the pesticide recertification meeting.



“We would like to thank all our patrons who attended our 83rd annual meeting in Mount Vernon on March 14.” Pictured are board members past and present: (left to right) Greg Johnson, Jeff Boon (current director), Danne Anderson, Ron Muzzall, Jenn Smith (board secretary and treasurer), Rick Williams (vice chairman), Steve Sakuma, Nels Lagerlund (board chairman). Not pictured are retired director George Wallace and newly elected director Cristina Waltner (inset).



# 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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## NACHURS® Distributorship Goes to Skagit Farmers

by Jeff Howe, Agronomy Manager



Skagit Farmers Supply recently gained distribution rights to NACHURS® fertilizers, both wholesale and retail, across Washington and Oregon.

A global leader in liquid fertilizers and application technology, the NACHURS distributorship will add considerable value to our members. It's a good product, and we're more than happy to represent it in the two-state region.

In conjunction with the assigning of this distributorship, Skagit Farmers Supply has just hired a new regional sales manager, Steve Groen.

Steve was raised on a dairy farm in Whatcom County and worked as an agronomy field man for Skagit Farmers Supply prior to going to work at NACHURS fertilizer, calling on customers in Whatcom and Skagit Counties.

Now that Steve is back with Skagit Farmers Supply as regional sales manager, in addition to



other duties, he will represent NACHURS to both our retail customers and to wholesale accounts throughout the two-state area.

### Walls going up

Our new Agronomy North dry fertilizer plant, under construction at the intersection of Avon Allen Road and Highway 20, is progressing well. Concrete work is complete and the millwrights are on site.

The tower is up and framers are putting up the walls. The contractor, Stueve Construction of Algona, Iowa, may have a roof on the 5,000-ton plant by the end of spring.

We're hoping for a June completion date. Drive by and watch the progress.

Aerial view of Agronomy North plant construction.

