

## **Shoppers get more ways to help salmon**

**Veggies, fruit, wine and even eggs to carry new logo**

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**By ROBERT MCCLURE**  
P-I REPORTER

Eco-conscious shoppers have long known to buy local and buy organic. And Seattleites have a fair amount of local, organic produce to choose from at grocery stores and farmers markets.

Now the latest local twist on the eco-labeling trend allows consumers to go a step further and buy vegetables, fruit, herbs and wine certified not to harm salmon.

This week ads went onto local buses featuring one of the latest products to go "salmon-safe" -- eggs. Farmers such as Andy Wilcox, a fourth-generation egg and dairy farmer in Pierce County, are banking on consumers to look for foods bearing the salmon-safe label.

"Salmon-safe lets us communicate to customers that we are doing things that are good for salmon and the local waterways," said Wilcox, 34. "The only way we're going to be able to continue to farm in (the) Puget Sound (region) is to brand ourselves and let people know that we're local and not someone from the Midwest."

It's a 45-minute drive from where the buses carrying ads for Wilcox's eggs snake their way through the bustle of downtown Seattle to the bucolic Snoqualmie River Valley in eastern King County, where a local non-profit group called Stewardship Partners has enlisted 15 farms in the program.

Elsewhere across the Puget Sound region, Wilcox and 16 other farmers and wine makers have allowed inspectors to verify that they take precautions to keep streams healthy for the region's signature fish.

A fall promotional campaign at PCC stores was well-received by consumers once it was explained, said Laurie Lombard, PCC's director of marketing.

At first customers "say 'I don't understand -- how can lettuce be salmon-safe?' " Lombard said. "When you explain it's the farm and their practices, they're into it. It's so Washington."

Actually, the program started in Oregon in 1995 under the Pacific Rivers Council. It has since morphed into its own group, Salmon Safe, Inc., which agreed to allow Stewardship Partners to oversee the program here starting in 2004.

More Washington wines will get the salmon-safe label next month, and in the spring the program will probably expand to other grocery stores, said Larry Nussbaum, who manages the salmon-safe program for Stewardship Partners.

The salmon-safe program is one of a growing number of eco-campaigns designed to promote environmental responsibility through market mechanisms rather than through rules.

"The regulations only go so far," Nussbaum said. "In order to really improve the environment and recover the species, you need to engage private landowners and provide them with incentives."

In helping some farms get the salmon-safe label, Stewardship Partners provides hands-on help, such as planting native vegetation along streams. The plants shade the stream, helping keep the water cool enough for salmon. The shrubs also provide a home for bugs that salmon eat, and offer other environmental benefits.

Operating on government and private grants, Stewardship Partners is trying to keep McMansions and shopping centers from swallowing the 20 percent of land in the Puget Sound region still in agriculture. The salmon-safe program complements another Stewardship Partners initiative to preserve agriculture in the Snoqualmie River Valley.

"The way we're going to keep this valley in agriculture is using farming practices that protect the streams, that protect the habitat, that protect the water quality, and use that as a tool for farms to market themselves," Nussbaum said earlier this week as a bald eagle flew overhead at Blue Dog Farm near Carnation.

One of the earliest and biggest supporters of the Washington salmon-safe program was organic farmer Andrew Stout. The son of a Minnesota window salesman, Stout built Full Circle Farm in eastern King County from a \$40,000 annual gross a decade ago to nearly \$4 million this year.

"Agriculture can be a progressive and environmentally sensitive and profitable operation," Stout said as workers sorted carrots, turnips, fennel and cabbage. "Because of the marketing and the way we have positioned ourselves, our business can thrive."

Consumers Union, the publishers of Consumer Reports, evaluated the salmon-safe label, finding it "meaningful and clear with standards that are consistent with the concept of sustainable agriculture and protecting salmon habitat."

Inspectors on contract to Stewardship Partners grade farms on water use, erosion control, animal management, pesticide and fertilizer use, management of sensitive areas and preservation of biological diversity.

The criteria don't forbid every single farming practice that's bad for salmon. They simply seek to ensure that, on balance, the farmer is helping the fish because the operation earns a positive score in all six categories, Nussbaum said.

For example, instructions to inspectors list more than three-dozen pesticides known to be harmful to salmon. The inspection guidelines say the pesticides "require special consideration," but don't ban them. Their use could be permitted if the farmer can prove "a clear need for use of the pesticide, that no safer alternatives exist, and that the method of application (such as timing, location and amount used) represents a negligible risk to water quality and fish habitat."

Pesticides are out of the question for a fair number of salmon-safe farms because they're also certified organic, a more demanding standard.

Take Blue Dog Farm, a blueberry and raspberry operation where Stewardship Partners hired workers to remove thickets of blackberry bushes along Ames Creek and replace them with native plants. The work was paid for by Puget Sound Energy to make up for native vegetation removed for a power line, said David Burger, executive director of Stewardship Partners.

Those native plants will provide homes and dinner plates for amphibians such as tree frogs, reptiles such as garter snakes, birds such as robins and for bugs that are eaten by salmon. They also help stabilize the waterway's banks and filter out creek-clouding sediment in water draining into the stream.

They'll also help the farmers. Amy Turner, who launched Blue Dog with her husband, Scott, nine years ago, expects the plantings will increase the number of insects that help with pest control, such as syrphid flies, which eat aphid larvae.

"We thought it was going to cost us a lot of money," Turner said. Instead, getting certified salmon-safe has turned out to be a financial boon because of the stream work contributed for free by Stewardship Partners.

"They handed it to us on a platter," Turner said.

## LOGO SAYS IT ALL



This label signifies that inspectors from the non-profit group Stewardship Partners have verified that, on balance, the farming operation producing the product in question is helping salmon. For more information, see [stewardshippartners.org](http://stewardshippartners.org) or call 206-292-9875.

### WHERE TO BUY SALMON-SAFE

- PCC carries wines and herbs and has a few produce items year-round.
- Herbs from the Snoqualmie River Ranch are available at numerous markets.
- Wilcox eggs are carried by Costco, 7-Eleven, Trader Joe's, Top Food & Drug, Metropolitan Market, Whole Foods and other grocery stores

- Produce is available at the Ballard Farmer's Market, open Sundays 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. year-round, and the University Farmers Market, open Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. through Dec. 30.

- Whole Foods, Madison Market and Metropolitan Market have expressed interest in the program and may promote additional products as early as next spring.

- Many of the farms involved have their own community-supported agriculture program. Typically CSA customers get a delivery of

produce every week, every two weeks or every month.

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