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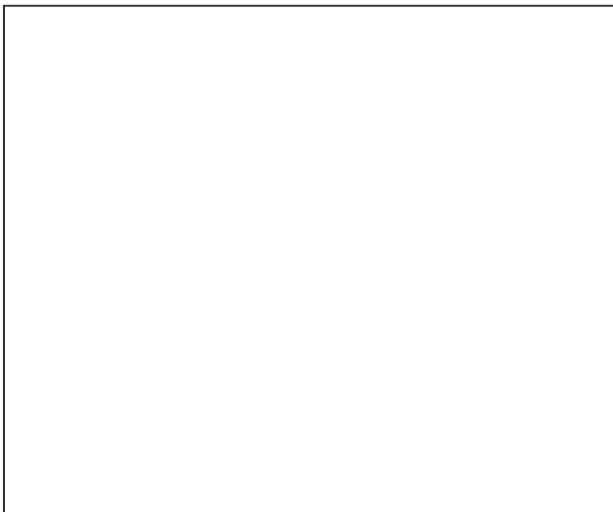
Farmers recognized for salmon efforts

'Salmon-safe' program aims for peaceful coexistence

BY JOHN DODGE

THE OLYMPIAN

Farming and saving salmon don't have to be at odds with each other.



That's the underlying premise behind "Salmon-Safe," a farm certification program that recognizes farmers who take the necessary steps on their land to protect and restore salmon-bearing streams.

Here in Puget Sound, 18 farms have qualified for the eco-friendly label, including three in Mason County, since the program was introduced in this state last year from Oregon by Stewardship Partners, a Seattle-based nonprofit group that works

with landowners on a voluntary basis to enhance natural resources.

"The only way for salmon recovery to be successful is to engage the farmers," said Larry Nussbaum, Salmon-Safe project manager for the Stewardship Partners.

One out of every five stream or river miles in Puget Sound is bordered by farmland, according to Stewardship Partners.

Salmon-Safe certification is awarded through a third-party review of a farm's practices. To qualify, farmers must limit soil erosion to streams, conserve irrigation water, use natural weed and pest control methods, protect or restore vegetation along streams and promote biodiversity on their property.

In return, farmers can use the eco-friendly label to market and sell their produce.

The program is akin to green certification programs available to foresters and the



Enlarge Photo

Photos by Steve Bloom/The Olympian
Giggling Goat Gardens manager Katrinka Hibler harvests tomatoes on her Mason County farm, which has secured designation as an environmentally "Salmon-Safe" farm.



Enlarge Photo

Skokomish River Valley farmer Jonathan Pavley raises the sides of his greenhouse, which he hopes will provide protection even during the flood seasons. Pavley and Nicholas Browne hand water rows of broccoli, medicinal herbs, soybeans, tomatoes and other crops on a 10-acre farm in the frequently flooded valley.

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timber industry, noted Kirsten Workman, who works with small farmers in Mason County on behalf of the WSU Mason County Extension and the Mason Conservation District.

"It's been a good thing for our farmers," she said. "It should help farm sales."

Three certified

The three farms certified so far in Mason County are: Giggling Goat Gardens, a 40-acre family farm in Shelton Valley; High Water Agriculture, a 10-acre farm in the Skokomish Valley; and Delande Dan Farm, a five-acre certified organic farm near Hood Canal.

The certifications can cost a farmer anywhere from \$150 to \$800, Workman said. But in this case, they were financed by a grant from Stewardship Partners.

Giggling Goat Gardens manager Katrinka Hibler is the third generation on the family farm, which features rolling pastures, forest land, vegetable patches beef cattle, goats, chickens and salmon-bearing Gosnell Creek.

"Grandpa has always seen salmon in the stream," she said during a break from picking sun-ripened tomatoes.

"Salmon-Safe is a way to let people know that agriculture can be good for fish," said the former Peace Corps volunteer, now in her fourth year on the farm. "And it fits with my clientele."

Hibler sells her produce to 21 Community Supported Agriculture customers, restaurants and at the Shelton Farmers Market.

She has one of the largest asparagus gardens in South Sound, along with Cascade blackberries, raspberries, blueberries and many seasonal vegetables.

She considers herself an organic gardener, but hasn't jumped through all the regulatory hoops to be certified organic by the government.

Out in the lower Skokomish River Valley, Jonathan Pavley and Nicholas Browne are breathing life back into an old 10-acre farm.

They, too, grow their crops without chemical fertilizers or pesticides.

They hand water the rows of broccoli, medicinal herbs, soybeans, tomatoes and other crops they grow.

In a flood zone

And when the Skokomish River floods in the fall, which it is prone to do, it's not uncommon to find chum salmon stranded on the farm.

Farming in a frequently flooded valley is a mixed blessing, Browne said.

On one hand, the floodwaters deliver rich soils to the farm.

On the other hand, it can be hard to grow early and late season crops.

"We're looking for some flood-resistant crops like chard and kale," Pavley said.

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High Water Agriculture opted for the Salmon-Safe label as an education tool to promote sustainable agriculture.

"We're not out to conquer the world market," Pavley said of their low-key farm operation. "But these bioregional certification programs are the way to go for education and public outreach."

Nussbaum agreed.

"Do we really need another eco-friendly label for farm produce?" Nussbaum asked. "The farmers say, 'Yes, bring it on.' "