

To: Kittitas County Planning Commission – October 7, 2014

Re: Farm Bureau proposed amendment to GMA Chapter 16.09

From: Lila Hanson, Swauk Prairie Farms – 674-2748

I urge you to support the amendment to 16.09 as it provides a way for small, lower income farmers to retain their farms, especially for those whose prior zoning had been 3 acre lots sizes now facing the loss of 20 acres of farmland for each residential lot sale. It allows the retention by the farmer of acres in excess of that needed by the home buyer while providing flexibility in locating the house lot so as not to harm the economic viability of the farm and respecting the compliance decision that limits rural density to one house per 20 acres.

It also respects a compliance decision that conservation and diverse groups be consulted in advance discussions of innovative processes to retain working lands. Because I have a proposal docketed for 2017 that has some similarities to this amendment, I have been attending meetings and discussions with Farm Bureau and KCCCoalition and others and find that despite some mistrust by disgruntled individuals and some disagreement on minor things, they seem willing to work together to prevent the waste of farm ground and loss of rural landscape that a rigid grid of 20 acre house lots will cause.

So who will benefit? The farmer forced to sell a lot or two to stay in farming or maximize use of his assets does. The buyer who is relieved of excess acres that he may or may not manage properly does. Conservation folks who do not intend to cause 20 acre house lots but prefer a varied and farming landscape. Planners and county officials who do not want the responsibly and cost of managing neglected open space will. The taxpayers will benefit by prior consultation instead of expensive and time-consuming after-the-fact legal challenges.

Studying land use regulations for many decades, including a Land Studies degree from Central in the 80s, I've been dismayed by its adverse effects on agriculture. So often it leaves farmers thinking that they will lose all the asset value that generations in their family have built because regulations won't let them farm and zoning won't let them sell. This proposal and the process I've seen so far encourages me that we can reassure our farm families that their concerns can be met and that there might be a future for them in Kittitas County after all. I hope you approve this amendment.