

## **Farmland Preservation in San Juan County**

To survive, people need air, water, food, and shelter. Farmland provides our air, filters our water, and grows our food. Houses tend only our need for shelter. Yet we value fresh air and clean water and healthy food far less than a house. It is only because they are free or common that we consider these necessities to be worth less.

Perhaps as our farmland becomes rare, we will learn to value it more. In the fifty years after 1954, San Juan County lost almost three-quarters of its farmland. We lost 9% just from 1997 to 2002. Ours is no longer a ‘rural’ county, with farmland down to one acre out of seven. Unfortunately, this relatively recent housing boom, where a view is valued more than a productive farm, tends to be a one-way street. Nobody plows down houses to plant potatoes.

But there are ways to keep our productive soil available to produce food, water, air, and yes, even views. Something as simple as sitting a house in the trees instead of in the middle of a field can make all the difference. San Juan County is also fortunate to have the county Land Bank and the San Juan Preservation Trust, both of which work hard for farmland protection. These organizations use “conservation easements”, which are voluntary agreements to limit the uses of land in order to protect its best features. The San Juan County Assessor also provides a way to save farmland through the statewide Agricultural Open Space taxation program. All of these programs have financial compensations, as well as emotional rewards and gains for the community.

Preserving our remaining farmland is just a single, but very necessary step in preserving our working farms. If you have questions or interest in these programs, please contact the organizations listed below.

San Juan Preservation Trust -- 468-3202 [www.sjpt.org](http://www.sjpt.org)

San Juan County Land Bank – 378-4402 [www.co.san-juan.wa.us/land\\_bank/](http://www.co.san-juan.wa.us/land_bank/)

Agricultural Resources Committee – 378-6621 [www.sjcarc.org](http://www.sjcarc.org)

San Juan County Assessor—378-2172 [www.co.san-juan.wa.us/assessor/](http://www.co.san-juan.wa.us/assessor/)