

Half Full

If the world were ending soon, I would stop flossing my teeth. It's a pain in the neck, repeated daily for a distant reward. I would eat more chocolate and sleep later.

But I wouldn't sell my farm.

Even though someone else is working the land and the financial returns are minimal, there is a fundamental security about the ability to grow your own food. Some may see this as pessimism in the light of current global realities. I prefer to think that it's optimism, that there is something good around the corner ---something growing, green, and edible.

I'm not alone. The results of the ongoing informal survey on home gardening being done by the San Juan County Agricultural Resources Committee (ARC) have been a pleasant surprise. Not only are many San Juan County residents supplementing their diet by growing their own food, but a number of them grow most of their food. On these gray days when photovoltaic technology struggles, the photosynthetics of green leaves hold their own. I'm no longer worried about whether San Juan County could feed itself in a crisis, only that we may have to do without some important foods such as avocados and chocolate.

Washington State is also optimistic about saving farmland. The Office of Farmland Preservation (OFP) Task Force includes farmers, ranchers, county commissioners, state legislators, and key state and federal representatives, all looking for ways to save our farmland. I attended one of their bi-monthly meetings recently and spent twelve hours in a chair. These people are serious, they work hard, and they think we can save farmland. Many of their concerns echo those of our farmers in San Juan County, just as the OFP Task Force is similar to our ARC. In December, they considered legislative recommendations regarding water rights, agricultural open space tax laws, building regulations, marketing, and mapping our farmland. For a better picture of what the OFP is up to, go to <http://ofp.scc.wa.gov/index.php/ofp-task-force> .

Our economic times may help us to revalue what is important – not only food, shelter, and water, but community, fun, and beauty. Agriculture plays a part in all of these. It's not surprising that the Latin root for culture (“cultus”) came from tilling the soil, as in cultivating. Farming enabled the first cultures and defines our island culture today. Sixty years ago, farms were more important than scenery. Rocky, windswept perches of land were worth very little compared to flat, open, productive fields. In forty more years, the pendulum may swing back. After all, you can't eat a waterfront view.

So farmland preservation, in spite of the gloomy statistics, is fundamentally an optimistic undertaking. It's a task done for the children, like a seed placed in a furrow. Kids, plants, and saving farmland all take effort, but who can argue with the outcomes?

And it's much more fun than flossing.