



Ranking Republican, Senate Agriculture and Rural Economic Development Committee

**Sept. 23, 2009**

Dear Neighbors,

Harvest rarely qualifies as a piece of cake – and that was especially true this year, between the weather and some mechanical trouble. Planting didn't go quite to schedule either (more lack of cooperation from the weather), but I think we're finished. Now if we could get about 10 days without rain...

I've had to stay pretty close to the farm, of course, but it was nice to slip over to Pullman on the Saturday of Labor Day weekend. The occasion was not the Cougar football game but a lunch to recognize the efforts of the Friends of Animal Science – think of them as a booster group for livestock producers in the state. I was honored to say a few words and am already looking forward to next year's event.

I also made it to Wenatchee and Cashmere yesterday, meeting up with Sen. Bob Morton, R-Kettle Falls, and the chairman of the [Senate Agriculture and Rural Economic Development Committee](#) for a visit to fruit-growing operations. Looks like the pear harvest has just peaked while apple harvesting is on the upswing. It's a busy time of year all across agriculture in our state, with farmers and ranchers starting the weaning of calves and other commodities being harvested, including potatoes and dry beans in my area.

Hopefully your summer went at least as well as ours. On to autumn!

**Hey, UW: How about the whole story on fertilizer regulation?**

Tomorrow and Friday the University of Washington School of Public Health will conduct a forum called "Public Health Puzzles and Perspectives: An Integrated Case Study of Industrial Waste, Fertilizer, and Food Safety."

The subject is the use of industrial by-products as fertilizer additives. The case being studied was the subject of a *Seattle Times* investigative series centered in Grant County in 1997, and the book [Fateful Harvest: The True Story of a Small Town, a Global Industry, and a Toxic Secret](#) by the reporter who wrote the series (does the book title give you an idea how the story goes?).

I don't know whether it was done out of ignorance, bias or both, but whoever created the [orientation material](#) included this question: "*How much evidence do we need before this current – and legal – practice is regulated or banned?*" Apparently the author is unaware of the fertilizer-regulation law created by Senate Bill 6474 more than 10 years ago!

That bill also led to Washington State University being commissioned to do a multi-year study of how plants take up metals. Yet you won't find anyone from WSU on the schedule for Thursday or Friday.

As Sen. Mike Hewitt, leader of the Senate Republican Caucus, and I noted in a letter to the UW president this week, it looks like only one side of the fertilizer-additive story is being presented. The slant even shows in little things like the use of quotation marks to set off the word "additives," as though it was an opinion rather than factual, and questions like "Do these waste-derived contaminants show up in our food?"

Food safety is of vital importance to the agriculture industry, and it's reasonable for a university school of public health to study it. But the goal should be *education*, not *indoctrination*.

### **Snake River dams under fire *again***

Let's see: the four Lower Snake River dams facilitate shipping, produce "green" power when the wind isn't blowing and the sun isn't shining, make water available for agriculture and even provide flood control. And people in high places, like one of our state's own congressmen, still want to do away with them?

Now consider the [Howard Hanson Dam](#), which has protected the Green River Valley (in King and Pierce counties) from flooding since 1962. It doesn't generate power or make the Green River suitable for barge traffic. It can't be good for the threatened Puget Sound chinook salmon.

Now that the Hanson dam's integrity is in question, due to a damaged abutment, government officials are falling all over themselves to get repairs made while warning residents to prepare in case the dam leaks. That's because a flood in the Green River Valley would threaten all the industry and houses that sprang up in the 47 years since the regular flooding was stopped.

Imagine how U.S. Rep. Jim McDermott, D-Seattle, would react if someone proposed breaching the Hanson dam, putting part of his district at risk. Yet McDermott introduced a bill to breach the Snake River dams. The Obama administration is open to studying the idea of breaching the dams, a 180-degree turn in the feds' approach.

The jobs and quality of life enabled by the Snake River dams are no less important than what is made possible by the Hanson dam. How about we keep all the dams in place?

### **Speaking of renewable energy...**

A ceremony marking the opening of the state's newest anaerobic waste-digesting power plant is scheduled Monday (Sept. 28) in Skagit County.

Yakima, Whatcom and Snohomish counties already are home to anaerobic digesters, which convert manure to methane and the methane to electricity. The Skagit County plant, which began operating at the end of August, is different in that it uses both livestock waste and other organic waste, like waste from food processing.

The plant's operators needed an exemption from the state's solid waste handling requirements for their dual-feedstock approach. They came before the Senate ag committee, on which I'm Republican leader, and obtained the necessary exemption later in the session with the passage of [Senate Bill 5797](#).

### **On the calendar:**

#### **September**

Sat., Sept. 26 – Chillin' and Grillin', Washington Cattle Feeders Association, Pasco (Preston Premium Wines; for information contact Ed at (509) 398-6253 or [ed@wafeeders.org](mailto:ed@wafeeders.org))

Sat., Sept. 26 – Annual Convention, Cattle Producers of Washington, Spokane Valley (Avenues Event Center, 9320 E. Mission; for registration information visit <http://www.cattleproducersofwa.org/newsletter.html> or phone 509-347-6655)

#### **October**

Thurs., Oct. 1 through Sat., Oct. 3 – Lamb 300 three-day, hands-on short course, Pullman (WSU Department of Animal Sciences; visit [www.animalag.wsu.edu](http://www.animalag.wsu.edu) or phone 509-335-2880)

Tues., Oct. 27 through Thurs., Oct. 29 – 117<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, Washington State Dairy Industry, Pasco (Red Lion Hotel; Oct. 4 is cutoff for special hotel rate, registration fee goes up after Oct. 12, click [here](#) for more information or phone 360-482-3485)

Fri., Oct. 30 and Sat., Oct. 31 – Annual Convention, Washington State Sheep Producers, Spokane Valley (Mirabeau Park Hotel & Convention Center; visit <http://www.wssp.org/HTMLobj-331/09regform.pdf> for registration form or phone 509-888-3003)

#### **November**

Wed., Nov. 11 through Sat., Nov. 14 – Annual Meeting and Trade Show, Washington Cattlemen's Association, Pasco (Red Lion Hotel, registration deadline Oct. 5, visit <http://www.washingtoncattlemen.org/conventioninfo.htm> to register or phone 509-925-9871)

Thurs., Nov. 19 and Fri., Nov. 20 – Annual Convention, Washington Association of Wheat Growers, Spokane (Davenport Hotel, registration fee increases after

Oct. 28; for more information visit [www.washingtongrainalliance.com](http://www.washingtongrainalliance.com) or phone 509-659-0610)

**Share Ag Alert! and suggest items for the calendar**

If you have a meeting or other newsworthy event to submit for the calendar, or know someone who may want to receive Ag Alert! on a regular basis, please have them contact my legislative assistant Krista Winters at [winters.krista@leg.wa.gov](mailto:winters.krista@leg.wa.gov) or phone my Olympia office (1-800-562-6000 or 360-786-7620). To receive Ag Alert! please provide an e-mail address and residential address. Thanks.

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