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Whatcom County farm project gets boost from donor

DAVE GALLAGHER / THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

With the help of three nonprofit agencies and one anonymous donor, a major farm incubator project is getting closer to reality.

A donor will match funds up to \$750,000 to encourage major contributions to the project, which will help train new farmers about sustainable agriculture, said Mauri Ingram, president and CEO of the Whatcom Community Foundation. The fund already has nearly \$250,000 in donations.

The foundation is partnering with Kulshan Community Land Trust and Sustainable Connections on the Whatcom Farm Incubator Project.

The project would acquire farmland and use it to create a sustainable agriculture business while training new farmers.

Derek Long, program and development director at Sustainable Connections, said ideally the site would be between 80 and 100 acres of farmland near a community. The model includes having resident farmers teaching new farmers about production practices, profitability margins and other aspects of running the business.

"Increasing access to farmland and supporting new farmers will provide more locally grown food for Whatcom residents now and in the future," Long said.

Ingram estimates the three-year acquisition, improvements and operating budget will be up to \$3 million. The foundation will handle the fundraising, Kulshan CLT will focus on the land acquisition, and Sustainable Connections will implement the program. This will allow each group to focus on its expertise, Ingram said.

Sustainable Connections will draw its experience from its food and farming program to run the project. Among the program's projects is Food to Bank On, in which experienced farmers serve as mentors, helping people interested in learning about agriculture. Once the food is grown, it is delivered to local food banks and soup kitchens.

For information about farmland being sought for the project, call Ann Russell of Kulshan CLT at 671-5600. For details about the foundation and Sustainable Connections, visit whatcomcf.org and sconnect.org.