



Snohomish County

County Council

Megan Dunn, Chair
Sam Low, Vice-Chair
Nate Nehring
Jared Mead
Strom Peterson

County Executive Dave Somers

April 8, 2026

Senator Patty Murray
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Maria Cantwell
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Rick Larsen
1505 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Suzan DelBene
2335 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Kim Schrier
1207 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Members of the Snohomish County Delegation:

Snohomish County has a long and proud agricultural history. With more than 73,000 acres of farmland, partnerships between farms and government have allowed us to buck statewide and national declines: according to the AgCensus, our farms' income has increased over the last five-year period. Snohomish County continues to attract new and beginning farmers. We are second in the state for new farmers and 82% of our farms are smaller than 50 acres. Farmers have adopted new technologies, floodplain management, and partnerships to create one of the most successful agriculture sectors in the state of Washington. However, our farming community is not benefiting from federal support designed to help farms after disasters.

Washington State experienced record flooding in December 2025. At peak flood levels, 36,000 acres of Snohomish County were under water. The Snohomish River spent multiple days at record flood levels. Levees overtopped, spilling flood water into surrounding agricultural lands.

The impact on our agricultural community was devastating. Vehicles and equipment were submerged, requiring repair or replacement. Fences, hoop houses, and infrastructure were destroyed by flood water. Feed, including hay, was submerged and ruined. In many cases, wrapped hay bales floated away, creating debris for later cleanup. A single Snohomish Valley farm lost almost 700 bales of hay in this one event. Plant nurseries and flower and produce growers lost entire stocks of plants, bulbs, and overwintering crops. Flood water deposited debris across farmland. It scoured away soil and left behind silt deposits too heavy for plants to break through. All of this needed cleanup before planting and repairs could begin.

As you can imagine, the economic impact of this damage is significant: the 45 agricultural businesses that completed our flood and impact survey reported a combined estimated profit loss of \$7.8 million. However, aerial estimates from the Washington State Department of Agriculture quantify county crop loss closer to \$18 million.

As we work with our community to recover from these floods, we are concerned by the lack of support available through USDA Disaster Assistance Programs. The **Emergency Conservation Program (ECP)** is designed to provide immediate relief to farmers recovering from disaster events. The program supports activities to return cropland to a farmable condition, such as debris cleanup, land-leveling and refilling, and fence repair. However, in practice, certain program features have negated the potential benefits it might provide to Snohomish County farmers. Two key issues are outlined below:

Lag Times for In-Person Assessments

The ECP requires an on-site assessment, completed by USDA staff, before cleanup or repair work can begin. Those assessments cannot happen until the program is activated, which can take months. For example, it was activated in February for this disaster, which began in early December. Additionally, the USDA does not have mechanisms to bring in surge staff to help conduct onsite assessments outside of a FEMA declaration. There is currently one person responsible for conducting onsite visits in both Snohomish and Skagit counties. That's one person responsible for assessing more than 150,000 acres of farmland in two counties which experienced record flooding in heavily agricultural areas.

Farmers' schedules are dictated by seasons; there is no pause button for bureaucracy. Our federal systems should not be built to expect them to wait months before starting their recovery work. The structure of this program results in a lose-lose situation for our farmers: those who started repair work as soon as the flood waters receded are now ineligible for assistance because the damage is no longer intact; those farmers who waited for the declaration have now missed critical spring planting windows.

Recommendations:

- Improve the USDA's ability to bring in surge staff to assist with the onsite assessments or allow representatives from trusted agencies to complete the assessments on their behalf.
- The ECP program should allow farmers to submit photo documentation and/or allow the onsite assessments to occur before the ECP has been officially activated.

Semi-Permanent Structures

The ECP program does not cover semi-permanent structures. In the Snohomish Valley, hoop houses, a type of semi-permanent greenhouse, are a critical part of our agricultural infrastructure. They represent a significant, multi-season investment for farmers, and their loss can be devastating to small farming operations. However, because they don't count as "permanent conservation structures," they are ineligible for any federal support.

Recommendation:

- Consider ways to make semi-permanent structures eligible for ECP support.

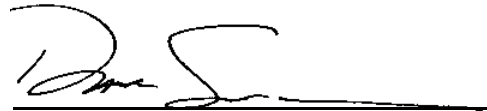
Snohomish County is committed to maintaining and strengthening our future in the agriculture industry in coordination with our farmers, government, and community. Unfortunately, our changing climate will only increase the incidence and severity of natural disasters in our region, and our farms will bear these impacts. This creates economic hardship for the farmers and food security risks for the region if our local produce growers are unable to recover. As our federal partners, we ask for your assistance in ensuring that our federal programs benefit small and niche farmers as much as they do larger farming operations. Thank you for considering these modifications to USDA's Emergency Conservation Program.

Respectfully,

Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers
Snohomish County Council Chair Megan Dunn
Snohomish County Council Vice Chair Sam Low



Megan Dunn
Council Chair



Dave Somers
County Executive



Sam Low
Council Vice-Chair