

Farm & Forest

Working together to conserve active farms and forests in King County

May 2002

Fong Cha's Place by Stella Thurkill

Farming runs deep through the roots of the soil nestled between the northeast portion of Thailand and western Vietnam. Fong Cha is from that area of the world, the Southeast Asian country of Laos, but now, America is his home.

Fong Cha, his wife Ma Thao and their

children have farmed nearly 10 acres of land in Fall City, Washington for almost a decade. He recently renamed his place Shong Chao's Farm to honor his father and everything he learned from him.

Farming truly is a way of life, a family affair for Fong Cha, who is the son of a farmer. About 30 of his relatives are in the same line of work too.

Fong Cha sticks with his home-schooled methods of farming, even though the modern-day conveniences of machines make a tough job a little more doable on American soil. Fong Cha said it takes at least five people to do the work of one roto-tiller. Even with that knowledge, he still farms with his hands, just as he did in Laos.

Fong Cha starts his morning with farm chores; he squeezes in another day job and at night, it's time to focus on his land again. "Every day you have to do something on the farm," said Fong Cha of his life-size garden, which in-

cludes sweet peas, kale, collard greens, Swiss chard, beets, carrots, onions, asters, daffodils and tulips. "Mother Nature waters for us. In this area, Mother Nature is pretty good."



Fong Cha's family in one of their fields.

Aside from a few chickens, flowers make up 70% of Fong Cha's crop and vegetables take up

the rest of the space. Although everything has to look good when Ma Thao goes to a handful of Seattle-area farmers' markets to sell, Fong Cha said, "Flowers aren't picky. When you grow vegetables you have to watch the soil."

Fong Cha and Ma Thao spend just about every moment of every day doing farm work or thinking about it. "The average person would look at us and say, how can you take care of nearly 10 acres," said Fong Cha. "We know how to do farming on a large scale. We feel good about it."

Fong Cha and his family sell the fruits of their hard labor on the farm, but they don't advertise. To an onlooker, taking care of 10 acres may seem like a monumental task, but they have been doing it for years. It's a way of life.

To reach Shong Chao's Farm, take Interstate 90 to Preston, then take Highway 202 North. The farm is located about 30 minutes from Seattle.

USDA Grant Helps King County Preserve Enumclaw Farmlands

A \$260,000 grant from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is helping King County preserve important agricultural land in the Enumclaw area. The money has been combined with Farmland Preservation Program funds to purchase development rights on 80 acres with a high potential for residential development. The property, which is already parceled into eight lots, borders the southwest edge of Enumclaw.

By purchasing development rights, the County assures that the property will remain available for agricultural purposes in perpetuity. The land remains in private hands, but the right to develop is dissolved even if the property is sold, bequeathed or rented.

King County's Farmland Preservation Program was initiated in the 1970s to preserve high quality farmland. To date, the Program has acquired, through purchase and gifts, the development rights on over 200 properties encompassing more than 12,800 acres of prime farmland.

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King County

Four for The Forest

by Stella Thurkill

They are four men on a mission to improve the way forests are managed and marketed. David Warren, Fred Sayer, Joel Kuperberg and Jack Stewart are trying to sell the benefits of teamwork and environmental stewardship across the green hills of Vashon-Maury Island.

Considered by some to be modern-day pioneers in forestry, these four are looking for friendly cooperation and help from their fellow landowners. They want to keep the nearly 16,000 acres of forest on the Island in good shape now and in the future.

The men are in the early stages of forming a Forestry Cooperative. The group is formally known as the Vashon Forestry Cooperative Steering Committee. Their dream is not a fly-by-night proposition. They have been doing their homework on the best ways to achieve a sustainable forest.

Getting rid of large quantities of invasive plants like the over-abundant English ivy is an important part of the teamwork concept of forestry, at least on Vashon-Maury Island. The ivy's chokehold on Vashon's forest is one of the issues that led to the idea for a forest cooperative.

"The ivy is like a plague," said Sayer. "In some places, there's nothing growing on the ground other than English ivy. It's climbing into the tree tops and killing trees."

Along with the ecological benefits of a cooperative form of management, a financial investment or timber barter by cooperative members will play a major role in the startup of the organization. This investment may be used to buy some low impact logging equipment or milling and drying facilities.

So far, it appears some people are listening. "By and large, the people living here are very interested in stewarding their land," said Warren.

The word is out, but the men are relying on some help from a few friends to spread their message far and wide. In November, the King County Department of Natural Resources & Parks awarded the group a \$1,000 grant to work with Jim Berkemeier, a Wisconsin forester and a well-respected expert on co-ops. The County Forestry Program and King County Washington State University Extension Service co-sponsored a Saturday workshop featuring Berkemeier.

During his visit to the island, Berkemeier recommended a hands-on approach to forest management, rather than hands-off, which some residents still believe is the best policy. "Jim (Berkemeier) takes out the dead, dying and diseased (trees). He takes out the at-risk trees," said Warren. The wood from the damaged trees then can be turned into flooring or other products.

Warren and Sayer agree: one of the toughest parts of their mission will be to convince people that leaving the forests alone is, in essence, neglect.

"The forest is way too overstocked, way too crowded, to the point that nothing's growing underneath the trees," said Sayer. "There's no diversity. It's like in a garden. If you don't thin your lettuce out, it's going to be weaker and more susceptible to disease."

The men plan to bring all parties to the table because eventually, even a small band of ambitious visionaries needs more brawn and brains to make a difference.



MEET THE NEWEST MEMBERS OF THE RURAL FOREST COMMISSION...

David Warren is the Washington Conservation Director for the Pacific Forest Trust. As a resident of Vashon Island, David served as the former Executive Director of the Vashon-Maury Island Land Trust. He worked to conserve forestland on the islands by assisting landowners with the development of forest plans and enrollment in King County's Current Use Taxation programs. David was honored with the King County Green Globe Award in 1999 for natural resource leadership and the Vashon Island Emma Award in 2000 for outstanding contributions to the island environment. He will serve as an advocate for the non-timber values of forestland.

Louis Kahn has served King County as a member of the Meadowbrook Farm Preservation Board and the Cedar River Water Commission. Louis and his wife, Lee, own a 40-acre tree farm outside of North Bend. They manage the land for timber production and Christmas trees. Louis is a retired teacher and former administrator at Bellevue Community College. With help from his wife, he will represent mid-size forest landowners on the Rural Forest Commission.

Matthew Mattson is the Tribal Administrator for the Snoqualmie Tribe. He worked as Director of the Tribe's Environmental and Natural Resources Program prior to his appointment as Tribal Administrator. Matt is extremely familiar with forest conservation issues in King County. He has a law degree from the University of Oregon and a background in environmental law. He will represent affected Indian Tribes on the Commission.

The Rural Forest Commission is accepting applications for an individual to represent consumers or users of local forest products, such as mill owners, lumber suppliers, craftsmen, florist suppliers or users of other alternative forest products. For more information, contact Benj Wadsworth at 206-296-7805 or benj.wadsworth@metrokc.gov.

MEET THE NEWLY APPOINTED MEMBERS OF KING COUNTY'S AGRICULTURE COMMISSION....

Judy Duff is the cofounder of Farmers Market at Work, a non-profit agency, dedicated to bringing farmers' markets to employment centers. Duff also is an active force in the immigrant farming community through her involvement with the Pike Place Market. She serves on the North Highline Unincorporated Area Council. Duff and her husband, Dave, own Duffield Farm, an operation that covers approximately 15 acres on several different sites in south King County (including the Torrance property).

George Irwin and his family are long-time residents and farmers on the Enumclaw Plateau. The Irwin family raises beef and hay on their 48-acre farm. Irwin has been attending Agriculture Commission meetings for about a year. He is an active member of many state and local agricultural organizations. He has held leadership posts in several of the organizations.

Karen Kinney is the manager of the Columbia City Farmers' Market. She is an Associate Director of the Neighborhood Farmers' Market Alliance, the organization that runs the University District and West Seattle Farmers' Markets and those in Columbia City. Kinney is a board member of the Washington Farmers Market Association. She believes the markets offer smaller farmers a viable option to stay in business and make an income. She would like to see the markets gain support at the regional level.

Martin Nyberg is the co-owner of Greenman Farm CSA on Vashon Island, a two-acre farm where organic vegetables are grown. A CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) farm allows clients to pay a premium at the beginning of the year and receive produce throughout the growing season. Nyberg has served as president of the Vashon Island Growers Association. He also has been a member of the Board of Directors of the Vashon Island Chamber of Commerce. Nyberg is committed to protecting, nurturing and growing the agricultural infrastructure and food system of western Washington.

Dr. Michael J. Konecny serves on the Agriculture Commission as a representative of the thoroughbred horse breeders in King County, specifically horse owners. Dr. Konecny is a board member of the Washington Thoroughbred Breeders' Association. He and his family operate the 30-acre Czech-Mate Thoroughbreds farm on the Enumclaw Plateau. Dr. Konecny was a field investigator for the National Geographic Society and an adjunct Assistant Professor of Zoology at the University of Florida.

Since 1961, **Ewing Stringfellow** has been raising cattle and Christmas trees on his farm in North Bend and hay at his farm in Kittitas County, near Ellensburg. He has been a member of several local, state and national agriculture organizations. Stringfellow is a professional in the real estate and property management industry.

Roger Calhoon is a member and the general manager of Farm, LLC, a 49-acre farm managed by a community group that farms the land and leases it to other farmers. Calhoon has been an active member of the Cascade Harvest Coalition, an organization that oversees the Puget Sound Fresh and FarmLink programs.

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Farm & Forest NEWS

This newsletter is an annual publication of King County's Office of Rural and Resource Programs in the Department of Natural Resources and Parks.

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ORRP Welcomes A New Fish and Ditch Coordinator

Elizabeth Weldin joins the Office of Rural and Resource Programs as Manager of the Agriculture Drainage Assistance Program, also known as the “Fish and Ditch Program.” Elizabeth most recently worked for the City of Bellevue as an Associate Planner, focusing on environmental permits. She previously held a position at the King Conservation District as a Farm Planner. Elizabeth received a Bachelor of Science degree in En-



vironmental Science from Huxley at Western Washington University and a Masters of Environmental Management from Duke University. She holds a certificate in Wetland Science and Management from the University of Washington. Elizabeth’s experience includes work in regulatory arenas and in assisting farmers and landowners on a variety of issues. Elizabeth can be reached at 206-296-1979 or email at elizabeth.weldin@metrokc.gov.

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For more information about the King County Farmland Preservation Program, contact Judy Herring at 206-296-1470, or visit the county’s Web site at: <http://dnr.metrokc.gov/wlr/lands/farmpp.htm>.

The information in this newsletter is available in alternative formats upon request by calling Rick Reinlasoder at 206-263-6566 or Relay Service 711.

Check out King County’s Forestry Website at <http://dnr.metrokc.gov/wlr/lands/forestry> for updates, information, workshops and more!



Look for the Puget Sound Fresh label at your local market.

It means the products you buy are grown, raised or harvested on our local farms in one of the 12 counties that border Puget Sound.

Protecting and preserving our local farms is vital to our communities. Local farms mean fresher produce on your table. Open green spaces, economic diversity and most important, a safe, continuing food supply.

When you buy locally grown products you help keep our farmers farming.

For more information on local farms, visit the Web site www.pugetsoundfresh.org

You’ll find:

- Farm listings/products and directions
- Farmers Market locations/times
- Special events
- Recipes
- Information on how to become a farmer
- Product harvest chart
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms
- Participating retail grocers
- On-farm markets



King County

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