

As a business we strive to feed our community with safe, delicious food. We use growing practices that help to improve our environment, follow FDA guidelines for safe harvest and storage of foods, and get the proper permitting for our USDA meat, WSDA cottage food business, business licenses, and county event permits. Despite managing our business safely the Island County Public Health Department, over the past year, has made it their mission to target farm stands. We were inspected and told at the beginning of the pandemic that we would need a Retail Food Establishment permit to continue operating, even though we are an unmanned honesty farm stand, they wanted us to get a permit that large grocery stores have. Not only does this permit not make sense for our business but we worry about the greater impact this would have on all the amazing farm stands, CSAs, egg stands, and more on our island. We attended commissioner meetings and had private meetings with commissioners and the Health Department to find out what the safety concern with farm stands is specifically and for an intentional planning session to decide 1) If farm stands even need to be regulated at a county level and 2) if permitting should happen that it be drafted specifically for this issue and not try and shove us into an ill fitting permit. The county originally agreed to do this but the DOH has continued to harass our employees at the Farmers Market, has actively told other businesses not to work with us as we're "operating illegally without a permit," and has gone beyond their scope to the WSDA to tell them not to issue us a WSDA warehouse permit. They have yet to tell us the safety concern and have made no plans to work towards an intentional solution. We drafted a letter, supported by the Washington State Department of Health, that our mobile temperature monitoring system and camera system are sufficient to protect public health yet the county has still told us we must get the retail permit before the end of the year or we will be issued a cease and desist of business. We are trying to work with the county, we love our county employees and most departments do an amazing job of working with the community and are not opposed to being permitted - we just want that permit to fit farm stands, we have even stopped reselling items that help support our fellow farmers. By forcing us into the retail permit it could have greater implications; every egg stand may need a retail food permit, every CSA would have to get a permit and explain their packaging for every product, honor system stands may need to provide septic plans, and on and on and on. In a time when food supply chains are being interrupted and it is becoming obvious how important local access to goods is, we want the county to support farms by creating and committing to an intentional process - and in the meantime -allow farmers to continue to feed our community. You can help by emailing the commissioners at: district1@islandcountywa.gov , district3@islandcountywa.gov , district2@islandcountywa.gov or by attending the Commissioners meeting on November 9th and speak asking for an intentional process and the support of Bell's Farm and all farm stands. Make it known to our county commissioners that they need to follow through with the comprehensive plan to support the viability of AG on Whidbey Island, and at the very least it should not be MORE onerous to operate as a farm stand than it is as a grocery store. A public call to action like this is an option of last resort for us. We value and cherish our customers and community and do not take this call for support lightly and only after we have exhausted good faith efforts to work with the county. Please help us so that we can continue to farm in this community as our family has over the last 75 years.