



Press Release

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For Immediate Release

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Okanogan County and Methow Conservancy Partner to Preserve Farmland

Winthrop, WA -- The first farmland conservation project to come from a cooperative partnership between Okanogan County and the Methow Conservancy has been completed, preserving 110 acres of highly productive agricultural land owned and farmed by Charles and Youngme Lehman within the Winthrop to Twisp farmland corridor.

This project was made possible by a new State Farmland Preservation fund as part of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP). Okanogan County was the first County in Eastern Washington to successfully secure funding through this fund, and this project is the first completed farmland preservation project in Washington under this new state program. As part of the partnership between Okanogan County and the Methow Conservancy, the Methow Conservancy worked to obtain matching funding through the federal Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program and a grant from the Peach Foundation.

“This project is a good example of how we can work together to preserve productive farmland and in doing so retain the rural character and agricultural economy of Okanogan County” stated Okanogan County Commissioner Bud Hover, who has supported the partnership since its inception.

The farm was protected with a permanent conservation easement that is jointly held by Okanogan County and the Methow Conservancy. A conservation easement is a written legal agreement between a willing landowner and a public entity or land trust that permanently protects specific conservation values such as wildlife habitat, working farms and ranches, scenic views and open space, riverfront and more. Conservation easements typically reduce or eliminate future development in order to protect these conservation values. With all conservation easements, the landowners retain ownership of their land.

The Methow Conservancy has partnered with landowners to conserve over 2,200 acres of farm and ranch land in the Methow Valley since 1996 and currently works with landowners to steward over 5,375 acres contained within 64 conservation easements.

Okanogan County and the Methow Conservancy are currently working to identify future farmland protection projects in the Methow Valley. Both entities hope to encourage local farmers to continue farming and selling products locally and regionally, to protect farmable soils, wildlife corridors and riparian zones, and to maintain the rural character of the Methow Valley while providing landowners an alternative to subdivision and development.

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