



**RE: Emerick Rangeland Preservation Program Application (RCO # 22-1545)**

**Date: April 26, 2022**

**To: RCO- Farmland Preservation Evaluation Committee**

**Dear Committee members,**

**This letter is from the Yakima County Farm Bureau (YCFB). YCFB is a grass roots organization with 2700 members consisting of farmers and ranchers with operations both large and small as well as other folks with interest in agriculture affairs in Yakima and Klickitat Counties.**

**The YCFB as a matter of principle supports Conservation Easements and we believe this application (Emerick Rangeland Preservation, 22-1545) is most deserving of serious consideration for approval.**

**The number one economic activity in Yakima County is farming and ranching and number two is supplying agricultural inputs and processing farm and ranch products. Preserving lands in Yakima County is essential to maintaining the economic well-being of our residents which rely on agriculture for employment and their sustenance. There are few other industries in our County that serve as major employers and none of them come close to the positive financial status that Ag activity and its supporting businesses contribute.**

**The Emerick property is situated along the Cowiche ridge encompassing 2576 acres. The property is Sagebrush Steppe and thus besides providing livestock grazing it also serves as an important resource as wildlife habitat. It borders both the Cowiche Canyon Conservancy and WDFW lands. The area serves as a winter range for a large number of elk and is also near a winter feeding station.**

**It is also important to protect the Emerick property because it matches the Yakima County Voluntary Stewardship goals as Sagebrush Steppe has been receiving greater emphasis recently.**

**The YCFB is concerned that without approval, this working land could be lost through development for houses, as the build out has been occurring in the general area and this will place the future of this property in question.**

**Alternatively, the State Wildlife Department could acquire it and its livestock production status would likely be lost. It serves a better balanced role as a working ranch property while still enhancing habitat.**

**The YCFB believes that the Emerick livestock operation constitutes a Legacy operation. The family, beginning with Shockley, began farming and ranching in the Ahtanum Valley many years ago. The family is now entering into its fifth generation ranching there as a son and grandson are interested in carrying the operation into the future.**

**As the property is situated, its loss as a grazing property through development would cause the loss of the remaining grazing areas since the Emerick range serves as the access to the other areas.**

**The YCFB believes that the Emerick Range is fully deserving of consideration for preservation of agricultural land status. It has the physical and environmental attributes necessary to remain in agriculture but needs the protection from development that we believe it deserves. Furthermore, it has a dedicated family eager to provide the sweat equity to ensure its success.**

**The YCFB requests that WWRP funds this valuable conservation opportunity.**

**Thank you,**

**Mark Herke**

**President, Yakima County Farm Bureau**

**(509) 930-5933**

