



RE: Davenport Conservation Easement Application

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. We believe the Davenport Conservation Easement application for funding from the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program Farmland Preservation (WWRP-FP) grant to purchase an easement on ≈5,600 acres of their property in the central area of Klickitat County is most deserving of serious consideration for approval.

The YCFB also commends the Davenports for their willingness to step forward to preserve working lands that support the regional economy as well as the agricultural and ranching heritage of this community. We understand that the Davenports have a long history of working with conservation entities to implement conservation projects to support wildlife habitat, water quality and agriculture and appreciate their work with Central Klickitat Conservation District and the Washington State Conservation Commission to conserve farmland in the region.

Several years ago another family with property holdings of several hundred acres willed their property to the Davenports even though they were not related, but did so because they knew the Davenports would properly care for their land upon passing. That speaks volumes!

The number one economic activity in Klickitat County is farming and ranching. Preserving lands in Klickitat County is essential to maintaining the economic well-being of our residents which rely on agriculture.

Recent national and international developments have underscored just how *critical and precious* our agricultural resources have become.

The Davenport property is situated within the heart of Klickitat County. As such, besides providing livestock grazing and farm products it also serves as an important resource as wildlife habitat.

The YCFB is concerned that without approval, this working land could be lost through development for houses, as the build out in the unincorporated areas has been occurring at a rapid pace. Alternatively, the State Wildlife Department could acquire it and its livestock and farm production status would surely be lost. The YCFB believes it serves a better balanced role as a working ranch property while still enhancing habitat.

Even more serious, both the working status of the Davenport land and its habitat values would be lost if it were to be converted to a Solar Industrial Complex such as is currently being contemplated on very large swathes of land in the immediate area.

Inflation pressures and supply chain issues are pressing hard on farmers and ranchers nationwide and the challenge from volatile farm commodity prices due to market issues there are ever increasing the economic drivers forcing family farm operations to sell off portions of their lands in order to continue to operate. RCO's farmland conservation easement will ensure this large farm and ranch operation stays viable into the future.

The YCFB also believes that the Davenport agricultural operation constitutes a Legacy operation. The family, beginning in the 1880s began farming and ranching this property. Furthermore, the sixth generation now is poised to provide for its continued success.

The YCFB believes that the Davenport property 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. The YCFB requests that WWRP funds this valuable conservation opportunity.

Thank you,

Mark Herke, President, Yakima County Farm Bureau

