

From: Yakima County Farm Bureau

To: RCO- Farmland Preservation Evaluation Committee

Date: 05-14-20

RE: Thornton Ranch (20-1546) Farmland Preservation Program Application

This correspondence is from the Yakima County Farm Bureau (YCFB). YCFB is a grass roots organization with 3,100 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 (Thornton Ranch, 20-1546) is most deserving of serious consideration for approval. The ranch is nestled in a beautiful valley with other agricultural properties but the housing build out is not far away and this will place the future of this property in question as to development.

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 our community 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 that Ag activity and its supporting businesses contribute.

The Thornton property is situated along the Cowiche Creek and is "bottom land". Soils found in these situations are typically of the most productive types. They are blessed with much higher organic matter and higher water tables, just what a productive farm needs. Unfortunately, access to the property is also good and that increases its chances for development. Properties found on the upland areas with less developed soils and somewhat more difficulty in gaining access are the proper lands to build upon. This is a prime reason for the Thornton property being qualified for consideration for preservation.

There has been a lot of money expended towards watershed enhancements and the entire valley which the Thornton Ranch is situated in is a good example. If housing is allowed to build out on the area, those enhancements will be jeopardized or lost. With respect to the day to day operation, one matter in particular, that of a "wheeling exchange" stands out. This exchange allows the waters of Cowiche Creek designated for irrigating the Thornton property to remain in the creek and the property is instead irrigated from the pressurized Tieton Irrigation system. The farm is thus irrigated from pressurized water from a reliable source (a reservoir) and requires no pumps. The other half of the wheeling exchange requires that the water previously withdrawn from the creek instead remains in the creek, helping fish and other aquatic life and maintaining higher water tables beneath the Thornton property as well as the other properties downstream from the ranch.

When one drives out Summitview Road and crests the hill just before entering the valley in question, you are reminded of topping the Manastash Ridge and viewing the Ellensburg Valley. The valley is certainly smaller than the Ellensburg Valley but the beauty is still there, even the mountainous back drop. The maintenance of the view shed is definitely a factor and also increases the desire of some to build there if allowed.

The YCFB believes that the Thornton Ranch 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.

Thank you

Mark Herke

President, Yakima County Farm Bureau