

Joint Rural Team

EPCA, FCUAC, FoSV, GMVUAC, GRC, GV/LHA, HHA, SCAR, and UBCUAC

Date: March 2, 2026

Subject: Proposed SB 5055--"Agritourism" and Revising the Growth Management Act

To: State Legislative District 5 Legislators: Senator Victoria Hunt; Representative Zach Hall; and Representative Lisa Callan

State Legislative District 41 Legislators: Senator Lisa Wellman; Representative Janice Zahn; and Representative My-Linh Thai

State Legislative District 45 Legislators: Senator Manka Dhingra; Representative Roger Goodman; and Representative Larry Springer

cc: King County: Executive Girmay Zahilay
King County Council District 9: Councilman Reagan Dunn
King County Council District 3: Councilwoman Sarah Perry
King County Dept. of Local Services: Director Leon Richardson

Who We Are

We are a team of King County Rural Area Organizations whose Mission is: *Ensure the State Growth Management Act (GMA) is implemented to:*

- (1) Foster sustainable urban areas and cities, including affordable housing, that address social, environmental, and economic impacts through proper planning to meet the needs of people;*
- (2) Prevent sprawl outside the Urban Growth Area, so that limited regional resources for infrastructure and services are not diverted from cost-effective urban areas to more costly fringe areas; and*
- (3) Protect and restore rural lands to continue to provide clean water for people and wildlife, trees for clean air and flood control, and local healthy food sources.*

As such we do not take any changes to the GMA lightly, especially those in proposed SB 5055.

Agritourism

In the rest of the world, the term "agritourism" refers to "any agriculturally based operation or activity that brings visitors to a farm or ranch." Here in Washington, speculators are intent on co-opting the word to refer to any business activity that takes place on agricultural or rural land. One of the most damaging and well-documented effects of allowing non-agricultural activities on agricultural land is to raise the price of the land far out of the reach of farmers. For example, according to the USDA, irrigated cropland in 2025 in Washington averaged \$9,800 per acre (see: https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Todays_Reports/reports/land0825.pdf, p. 13), but speculative asking prices in King County have been as high as \$1.5 million per acre, and actual land sale prices as high as \$345,000 per acre. (see: <https://blue.kingcounty.com/Assessor/eRealProperty/Detail.aspx?ParcelNbr=1026059030>). It is observational, not hypothetical, that allowing uses such as the proposed "entertainment" and alcohol

sales is not agritourism, but rather land speculation and commercial profiteering, leading to sprawl. Washington can choose to protect agriculture, or give way to uses that guarantee an end to agriculture; we cannot have both.

Infrastructure Costs

In terms of growth planning the cost of and impacts of infrastructure must be considered. Allowing urban activities outside urban areas inevitably involves costs to the public: roads and transit, stormwater management, utilities, loss of habitat, and loss of access to green spaces. The GMA originally focused on the non-monetary costs of sprawl, but the monetary costs are considerable and fall nearly 100% on taxpayers. Compact urban areas are economically more efficient, as well as environmentally more sustainable. SB 5055 undermines both the letter and spirit of the GMA. In fact, any agritourism business should have an obligation to preserve the agricultural environment on which its business depends, nor generate more impacts than historical agriculture land use in terms of traffic, parking, water consumption, electricity consumption, septic use, noise impacts, and aesthetic impacts on the character of rural and agricultural areas.

Commercial Venues

SB 5055 appears to be yet another in an unending series of attempts over the past 25 years or so by Eastern Washington wineries to open up rural areas / agricultural lands in King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties to commercial venues to sell wine and provide entertainment to urban customers flying in the face of existing provisions of GMA. Specifically, the subject proposed SB 5055 states:

“There shall be a beer and wine license to be issued to an agritourism venue for the sale of beer, strong beer, and wine for on-premises consumption.” ... “Agritourism venues may sell beer and wine for off-premises consumption if the beer and wine is manufactured by a microbrewery or craft winery located within the state.”

That *“within the state”* wording clearly indicates an attempt to open up Western Washington rural areas / agricultural lands to commercial outlets—currently and wisely outlawed by the GMA. This would allow the Eastern Washington wine industry to commercialize these lands for money-making business opportunities that have absolutely nothing to do with any onsite agricultural use of these lands—again, against well-thought-out and time-tested provisions in the GMA. Remember, too, that these wineries already can open businesses in Western Washington, if they simply abide by GMA and open their commercial businesses inside the Urban Growth Boundary.

Wide-Open Definition

SB 5055 seeks to expand Agritourism to include: *“Such activities may include direct sales, educational activities, entertainment, seasonal outdoor activities, and hospitality.”* Please be aware and understand the risks this presents. For example, the proposed legislation states: *“may allow accessory uses, including nonagricultural accessory uses and activities, that support, promote, or sustain agricultural operations and production, as provided in subsection (3) of this section;...”* What exactly does *“non-agricultural accessory uses”* mean? Does it mean anything that any owner wants to claim supports his or her business? In the case of Carnation Farms, that’s what it has been saying all along—that it needs massive concerts for ~8,000 people to support its *“agricultural”* business. The proposed legislation would give a green light to that kind of activity. Please note the word *“production”* can be stretched to include just about anything as well. For example, *“production”* for Eastern Washington wineries that want to locate in King County might include simply bottling the wine in King County that gets trucked over or, even simpler, sticking the labels on the bottles of wine in King County that they produced in Eastern Washington.

We've Been Here Before

King County's deeply flawed Adult Beverage Ordinance from a few years ago also sought to open up rural areas / agricultural lands to urban-use retail and commercial businesses in areas that were meant to be protected. Many groups of determined citizens, in your three districts, fought long and hard—all the way up to the State Supreme Court to defend the GMA—and won!

Conclusion

Proposed SB 5055 clearly is another attempt to open the doors to commercialization of rural areas / agricultural lands for money-making business opportunities, leaving it up to anyone's imagination to determine what "*non-agriculture accessory uses*" might include, among other massive holes in this legislation. We call for you to ensure the proposed legislation does not see the light of day.

Thank you.

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