



Tall Chief Update from Farmer Erick

Hi everyone,

This is an “update” unlike any I have written in our 20 years of doing CSA. I hope later to write in the vein I usually do, offering some thoughts and reflections on the past season and various topics concerning organic farming and stewardship.

But in this update I want to report on a single subject of concern to me, other local farmers, and a growing number of people both within our community and beyond: the disposition of the Tall Chief Golf course. I will have only two sections in this update:

1. Tall Chief: the short story—where we are and what needs to be done (for those of you already aware of the situation and ready to help);
2. Tall Chief: the longer version—providing some of the background and reasons for what is outlined in “the short story.”

Tall Chief: the short story—where we are and what needs to be done.

The County wants to sell for \$710,000 the Tall Chief Golf course that it bought for \$4.5 million dollars to the largest land-owner in the Snoqualmie Valley, to be used agriculturally as a site to both spread manure from a confinement dairy and a site to grow more GMO corn.

A large number of citizens, Wendy and me included, are outraged by this, and are organizing in opposition. The decision to sell the Tall Chief property to the Keller Dairy is proposed as an ordinance that comes from the Executive. It must be passed by King County Council to be finalized. If we can convince the King County Council NOT to pass it, the deal is dead.

Wendy and I are asking each of you to join us in opposing this ordinance. You can register your desire to stop this travesty by signing a petition to the Council at:

<https://www.change.org/p/save-snoqualmie-valley-wa-farmland-from-gmos-roundup-and-synthetic-fertilizers>

If you are willing to help in other ways (i.e. by posting information on Facebook or other social media), or if you know of groups that would likely support our cause and could help us get information to their memberships, please send me a note to jubileefarm@hotmail.com, and put my name (Erick) in the subject line.

Tall Chief: the longer version—providing some background and reasons for what is outlined in “the short story.”

As many of you know, the final disposition of the Tall Chief property is a matter of great importance to me. How important? It is important enough that I have decided to spend every penny of political capital I may have accrued over the years on this issue.

I’ve been told by many people that by taking a stand against the County on the Tall Chief disposition, I am abandoning any good I might be able to do in the future. That may be the case. But it doesn’t change my resolve. No one knows what the future holds. Beyond that, I’m certainly not the only person committed to the growth of local agriculture in our County, and it may be time for me to get out of the way of the others who will undoubtedly fill any void I leave. And finally, I’ve come to see that in most cases, failing to do what you believe to be right now because you imagine you can do something “more important” later is both a logical and an existential fallacy. I’m reminded of Leo Tolstoy’s powerful autobiography in which he makes the point that the “rules” of this endeavor called life are such that failure to do today and at the present moment what you know in your heart you should do is a dead-ended road that doesn’t lead to future opportunities, but blocks the path to both personal growth and future opportunities.

I’ve written before on the Tall Chief, but here’s a short review: The effort of the former owners of the golf course to develop the property into 18 luxury homes was thwarted when the County stepped in a couple of years ago and purchased the property for 4.5 million dollars. We were thrilled, of course, and even more pleased when the County conducted a thorough canvassing of the Valley to find out what they should do with the now “former” golf course.

The voice of the community was clear, and the County later released a RFP (Request for Proposals) that called for the former golf course to be used for sustainable agricultural production, along with a variety of public benefits that would serve the local agriculture community and citizens throughout the County. I have attached the RFP and would encourage you to read it, noting especially the stated “goals” for the future of the Tall Chief property.

It turned out there were only two substantial proposals submitted to the County. There certainly would have been more proposals—I know of two parties that would have submitted proposals—had it not been

for the fact that Seattle Tilth submitted a proposal that was widely publicized and their proposal, to most observers, was so strong that Tilth was seen without question to be the presumptive choice for the property (how do you compete with the best?). I have attached the Seattle Tilth Proposal and encourage you to see the amazing scope of public benefits that proposal entails.

The second proposal was submitted by our neighbors, the Keller dairy. Their proposal (which I have also attached to this note) proposes to incorporate the Tall Chief property into their dairy. The bottom land would be used to grow GMO corn and as a site to distribute animal manure from their dairy. The uplands were to be offered to organic farmers.

The Keller proposal mentions five specific organic farmers who had expressed interest in farming the uplands of the Tall Chief. You can imagine how surprised Wendy and I were when we finally obtained a copy of the Keller's proposal (via public disclosure laws) and saw the names of the organic folks that were claimed to have "expressed interest": Jubilee Farm, Sol-to-Seed farm, Changing Season farm, and the Valley Co-op.

I'm sure that listing these farms made a good impression on the Selection Committee, implying that local organic farms were supporting the Keller proposal. But of course it wasn't true. I don't know how something not only absolutely untrue, but improbable to the point of being preposterous, could have been written. Maybe it was assumed we'd never get a look at their proposal. Maybe it was assumed that the transaction would be a "done deal" by the time it was found out. In any event, none of us has a clue as to how we had in any way indicated we would want to lease this property. This claim, which could have made a big impact on the Selection Committee, is just untrue.

The Keller proposal states that GMO corn will be grown on all the bottom land (bounded by the river on one side, and a wetland on the other) using their "traditional farming practices." We know these to be the use of synthetic, water soluble fertilizer for nutrients, glyphosate for weed control, and no winter cover cropping. The Keller proposal says corn grown on this property will amount to 5% of their feed, and thus lower their feed costs by 5%.

The Keller proposal also indicates a vision for a milk processing plant on the hillside. No details are offered.

As you might guess, I have a few issues with the Keller proposal and the findings of the Selection Committee. It's because I can't even feign impartiality that I've supplied you with the RFP document and the proposals of both Tilth and the Keller dairy. You can judge for yourselves.

I'm not ashamed of being biased. Reasonable people can be biased, but reasonable people are not biased without reason. I have reasons for my bias, and I'd like to share a few of them:

1. As most of you know, I was asked by the King County Executive to serve as the co-chair of his Local Food Initiative's guiding committee: the Kitchen Cabinet. Over a period of 8 months we met regularly, and

came up with some aggressive, agricultural goals: among those being the establishment of 25 new farms in King County each year for 10 years, and having 4,000 new acres of land in new agricultural production within ten years.

In light of these goals, it is very disheartening to recognize that the County spent 4.5 million dollars for the Tall Chief to become farmland, and if the Keller's proposal is adopted by the King County Council, it will not provide either a single acre of new agricultural production, or a single new farmer.

As a farmer I recognize the value of cutting a feed bill by 5% (as the Keller proposal calls for); but I also recognize that cutting costs is not the same as increasing production. There is no mention in the Keller proposal of increasing milk production, only of cutting costs.

To be honest and frank, I feel betrayed by what seems to be a complete denial of the goals of the Local Food Initiative, especially because five of the six people on the Selection Committee served with me on the Kitchen Cabinet! They too supported the very ambitious goals I mentioned above.

Betrayal is a strong word, and I don't use it casually. What make me feel betrayed is that the proposal of Seattle Tilth would have put 80 acres of land into increased, agricultural production, producing organically grown fruits and vegetables for both the local and the greater Seattle community. To put that into perspective, our farm grows enough food for our CSA on about 12 acres of land. The Tilth proposal would have had (or, if we prevail, "will have") 7 times as much production as our farm, and would likely have become the largest food producer in our Valley.

A more dramatic divergence between two proposed uses of the Tall Chief property I cannot imagine; that my fellow Kitchen Cabinet participants chose GMO and manure disposal over organic food production and service to the community becomes somewhat more understandable (though no more acceptable) by the next point I want to make.

2. The RFP states very clearly that the Selection Committee was to have been comprised of County representatives, and also representatives of the community. But in the end, and in complete disregard for the RFP guidelines, there were no representatives of the valley on the Selection Committee.

I know each of the members on the Committee, and they are good people one and all. But they are not from the Valley. Collectively have almost no farming experience, and little if any "local knowledge."

If there had been local representation on the Committee, surely someone would have asked if the local organic Co-op and three organic farmers had really told the Keller's they wanted to farm on land adjacent to an industrial farm. And if a local farmer had been on the committee, surely he or she would have questioned the suggestion that a group of organic farmers would really even consider farming on glacier till soil on the hillside (full of rocks with thin top soil) when there is a lot of the rich, bottom land that can be easily leased on the Valley floor. The Keller proposal makes no suggestion that they want to farm the rocky glacial till! They know better.

Had local knowledge been sought, had the RFP been followed, there would likely have been a lot more critical analysis of the Keller proposal. (BTW, the Tilth proposal called for keeping animals—sheep or cattle—on the rocky hillside; a very appropriate use!).

After the decision had been made, three of us—me, David Casey (Changing Seasons Farm and then-president of Snoqualmie Valley Preservation Alliance), and Luke Woodward (Oxbow Farm and President of Sno-Valley Tilth)--had a chance to talk to three of the people on the Selection Committee (we didn't even know who they were until it was all over). After expressing our shock, dismay, and disbelief about the decision, one of the members of the committee said, "I should have called one of you." Yes, she should have. But more than that, there should have been the two local representatives on the committee that the RFP stipulates!

3. A certain amount of my frustration with this decision is based on the conviction that a 4.5 million dollar expenditure of public funds should provide public good. It also seems to me that what it shouldn't do is feather the nest of the largest land-owner in the valley, the most established farmer, and in all likelihood the largest user of toxic chemicals in the valley.

The Tilth proposal is overflowing with public benefits—a farm education center to train new farmers, a core, "production farm" of 35 acres, processing facilities that would be available to local farms and local residents, establishing a food hub to market local organic produce, and an "open door" policy for local and county-wide citizens wanting to witness local, organic farming in action.

On property owned by the County, how can this much public benefit be denied in favor of the private benefit of one farm?

4. People and groups can propose anything. Wise and critical analysis of proposals looks both to what is said, and to the history of what the proponents have done.

The record of Seattle Tilth is one of being a constant community leader in practicing stewardship; it is a record that includes an impeccable history of managing over 50 properties owned by the County; it is a record that demonstrates a consistent outreach to individuals who live beyond the borders of the privilege that comes with wealth; it is a record that includes transforming a challenging, rocky, ten-acre site into a well-managed, profitable farm; it is a record that includes creating a vibrant "food hub" through which farmers throughout King County market their products; it is a record of teaching both in word but also by example, as Tilth instantiates truly sustainable caretaking of the public lands it manages.

The Kellers are hardworking people. Their hard work has paid off, and in addition to the 700+ acres they own in our Valley, they lease up to a thousand more acres. But their history is not one of the kind of public involvement or even the kind of business that the RFP calls for.

The RFP stipulates that the "the County would like to receive proposals from persons or organizations that have experience "farming and marketing their crops successfully; developing processing or value

added operations; integrating educational or vocational programs into farm operations; and from farmers who wish to buy or lease land.”

The Keller proposal points to no experience whatsoever in “processing or value added operations,” or, within their five generations of farming experience, did their proposal point to any experience in “integrating educational or vocation programs into farm operations.” While it is certainly possible they could expand into these fields, Tilth’s proposal has a resume of successful programs in each one of these areas—processing, value added, educational programs, and vocational programs—and in integrating each into farm operations.

Based on the record of what has actually been done regarding the public benefit requirements in the RFP, the Keller Proposal points to what they might do or to what they would like to do; the Tilth proposal points to what they do, what they have done, and based on that, we may justifiably infer that they can and will do that in the future as well.

I should also mention that the Keller proposal states that the existence of their dairy farm in the Valley is, in itself, a public good. I agree with that claim whole-heartedly. But it is a public benefit that is already enjoyed by the community; adding the Tall Chief to their long list of properties will provide no additional public benefit, and will deprive the community of all the public benefits that would be a part of Seattle Tilth’s management of this property.

5. I need to bring this to a close. I’ll do so with just a few quotations from the RFP, and leave you with this question: which proposal best achieves each of these stated goals or outcome best? (You may certainly examine the two proposals to find the answers.)

a. A stated goal: “to protect and restore the soil, water, and forest resources on the site through stewardship.”

b. Another goal in the RFP: “To increase opportunities for new and beginning farmers.”

c. A selection criterion: “Demonstration of a commitment to sustainable and environmentally appropriate farming practices.”

d. Another selection criterion: “Making affordable farmland available to small scale and low income farmers or other farmers who otherwise would not have land.”

e. Another selection criterion: “Helping beginning farmers obtain the technical and marketing skills necessary to produce and sell their agricultural products successfully.”

Conclusion and Call to Action:

To turn this decision around, we need to convince the King County Council that this decision does not reflect the will of the citizens of King County. We already have allies on the Council, by taking action we can confirm the support of our allies, and those who are inclined to side with the large land-holders will be forced to question their position. You can make a difference.

As I said in the "short version," Wendy and I are asking each of you to join us in opposing this ordinance by simply registering your desire to stop this travesty. You can do this by signing a petition to the King County Council at:

<https://www.change.org/p/save-snoqualmie-valley-wa-farmland-from-gmos-roundup-and-synthetic-fertilizers>

It requires a simple registration on their site, and a search on their search function for "save Tall Chief Jewel of Snoqualmie Valley." And your email address will not be sold or compromised.

Please also post to your other social media sites as well such as Facebook.

If you know of groups that would likely support our cause and you could help us set that up, or if you could help us in other ways, please let us know by emailing the farm jubileefarm@hotmail.com
Please put my name, Erick, in the subject line.

Be sure to scroll down to view and open references.

Erick

Below are links to the RFP, the two proposals.

1. RFP (Request for Proposals):

<http://your.kingcounty.gov/dnrp/library/water-and-land/agriculture/tall-chief-farm/tall-chief-rfp-document.pdf>

2. Seattle Tilth proposal

<https://snt153.mail.live.com/mail/ViewOfficePreview.aspx?messageid=mg1SS51R5t5RG0rQAeC8yl2g2&-folderid=flqwHYBNXPhEG3twvyqKBLTw2&attindex=4&cp=-1&attdepth=4&n=28331290>

3. Proposal from the Keller Dairy:

<https://snt153.mail.live.com/mail/ViewOfficePreview.aspx?messageid=mg1SS51R5t5RG0rQAeC8yl2g2&-folderid=flqwHYBNXPhEG3twvyqKBLTw2&attindex=2&cp=-1&attdepth=2&n=75523725>

4. Criteria and Scoring for Tall Chief

<https://snt153.mail.live.com/mail/ViewOfficePreview.aspx?messageid=mg1SS51R5t5RG0rQAeC8yl2g2&-folderid=flqwHYBNXPhEG3twvyqKBLTw2&attindex=1&cp=-1&attdepth=1&n=66398956>

Recently Released Scientific Studies on Glyphosate:

1. March 2015, the World Health Organization published a study that concludes glyphosate “causes cancer in laboratory animals, and ‘probably’ in human beings.”

<http://foodtank.com/news/2015/03/world-health-organization-gm-crop-herbicide-a-probable-carcinogen>

2. August 25th, 2015, A collaborative study from several European Universities and Guy’s Hospital in London found that extremely low doses of glyphosate in water given to laboratory animals “can result in liver and kidney damage with potential significant health implications for animal and human populations.”

<http://www.ehjournal.net/content/14/1/70>

3. September 14th 2015, (today) The California Department of Ecology listed glyphosate with other chemicals “known by the State to cause Cancer.” <http://www.redorbit.com/news/1113408605/california-epa-labels-roundup-herbicide-carcinogenic-090815/>

4. On August 2nd 2015 in the journal Science, Technology, and Human Values a peer-reviewed article entitled “An Illusory Consensus Behind GMO Health Assessment” was printed. https://snt153.mail.live.com/mail/ViewOfficePreview.aspx?messageid=mgODOTEDU95RG6wAAhWtm-UA2&folderid=fl_P4B2H9mbU-W7Q_fmjOMLSA2&attindex=0&cp=-1&attdepth=0&n=60099498

This article final article (4) has drawn a great deal of attention, as it takes on the assumption that the scientific community supports GMOs as being safe. I quote here a section from the conclusion of this article:

I began this article with the testimonials from respected scientists that there is literally no scientific controversy over the health effects of GMOs. My investigation into the scientific literature tells another story. I found twenty-six animal feeding studies that have shown adverse effects or animal health uncertainties (Table 2). The eight review articles were mixed in their assessment of the health effects of GMOs (Table 1). The analysis of how two respected scientists were treated so poorly by the scientific community over their peer-reviewed work raises questions about likely political and ideological influences in the science. I could find no comparable case in the history of science where someone’s published and peer-reviewed work was retracted because it was not definitive . . .

These three studies along with the decision of the California EPA to classify glyphosate as “known by the State to cause cancer” have all become available either after the decision about the Tall Chief was made, or while it was being made. So it is obviously not a criticism of the selection committee for not knowing about them.

But the deal has not been finalized, and now we do know about them. The narrow time frame in which they have occurred is remarkable. And taken together, they raise serious, documented evidence that the use of glyphosate is, in fact, an issue of public health and safety.

Thanks for hearing me out on this. I wish I didn’t have to be involved in politics like this, but the decision about Tall Chief will have an impact for good or for ill for at least decades, probably much longer. It is worth working together to make that impact be for the good of all.