

Office of Governor Chris Gregoire

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - December 13, 2006

Contact: Governor's Office, 360-902-4111

Making Changes Families Can Count On: Governor Gregoire Invests to Keep Washington Farms and Forests Working

Farming and forestry are vital to our economy and to the well-being of many communities

RICHLAND – Governor Chris Gregoire today at Barnard Griffin Winery in Richland announced that she will invest in a Working Lands Initiative so that farms and forests continue to be a thriving part of the Washington economy.

"Farms and forests are the backbone of our state's history and heritage and they are known around the world for the high-quality of their "Grown in Washington" products," said Governor Gregoire. "We must look to the future of these industries by creating a market for biofuels, making sure water is available for irrigation and improving the long term viability of family forests."

Profitable farms and forests are more likely to stay in business, keep their lands intact and contribute to better environmental and economic solutions for our future. Washington has the highest per acre forest yields in the nation, providing family-wage jobs to over 50,000 people. The combined agriculture and food industry employs more people than any other business or industrial sector. Today, the total economic impact of the food and agriculture industry in Washington is estimated at more than \$29 billion annually, about 13 percent of the state economy.

Governor Gregoire will keep farms and forests working by:

- Creating an office of Working Farms and Forests to provide more options for landowners who want to continue farming, ranching and forestry in the face of pressure to develop their lands;
- Promoting increased security for family forest land owners by supporting 15-year permits for family forest landowners;
- Developing a long-term strategy for the future of agriculture in Washington to make sure that our state competes with the safest and highest quality products;
- Promoting energy independence with the Energy Freedom Loans and a bioenergy initiative that will create a new market for farmers and support alternative fuel sources;
- Increasing promotion of Washington products to include awareness of the pivotal role played by farmers, ranchers and the food industry in our state to increase purchases of products from the "Heart of Washington"; and

- Finding better ways to meet the water needs of farmers, fish, people and the natural environment so that one is not supported at the expense of the other.

“I have traveled around the world, knocking on doors and drumming up business for Washington,” said Governor Gregoire. “With these investments, we can continue to expand our international reach while supporting our foresters and farmers.”

Since taking office, Governor Gregoire has invested to secure water for agriculture, cities and fish on the Columbia River and supported common-sense improvements to growth management laws. She has traveled around the world on trade missions and has met with world leaders to promote Washington products.