



WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY  
**EXTENSION**

## The AG Sounder Newsletter

### February 2026

Do you have an event or story you would like featured in  
The Ag Sounder? Let us know!

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#### **In This Issue:**

- Register Now! - SWWA Grazing School - April 16th-19th
- Job opportunity: Grazing Association Coordinator

- WSU Thurston County Grassland Resilience Project opportunity - accepting applications now and throughout 2026
- Community Garden Support and Networking Meeting - February 19th
- SW Washington Grasslands & Grazing Photography Competition
- Celebrate local prairies and grazing lands with the UN International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists. Exhibit visiting Timberland Regional Libraries through 2026
- Ag Youth Career Fair at Avanti High School - February 26th
- Western Cover Crops Council meeting - February 26th
- On-Farm Composting Short Course - March 27th & April 3rd

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**Help support the Cougs with a donation to WSU College of Agriculture, Human and Natural Resource Sciences**

**Make a Gift Today!**



**SOUTHWEST  
WASHINGTON  
GRAZING SCHOOL**  
MULTI-DAY INTENSIVE

April 16 - April 19 - Skookumchuck Grange - Tenino, WA - 8:00am-8:00pm

**Southwest Washington Grazing School 2026**  
**Online registration is now open!**

The Southwest Washington Grazing School will be held at the Skookumchuck Grange in Tenino, Washington on April 16th-19th, 2026. Visit the [Grazing School web page](#) for more information.

**Contact [Stephen Bramwell](#) if you have questions!**

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**Job opening:** Southwest Washington Grazing Association Coordinator

**Employer:** Washington State University Extension

**Official Station:** 3054 Carpenter Rd SE, Lacey, WA 98503

Washington State University Extension is hiring a coordinator for the Southwest Washington Grazing Association. This is a 12-month, part-time position (0.5 to 0.75 FTE based on funding). The position is grant-funded, and annual position renewal dependent on job performance.

**Compensation:** \$21 to \$28 per hour depending on experience. The position is benefits eligible.

**To Apply:** Interested candidates can send a cover letter and resume to Stephen Bramwell at [bramwell@wsu.edu](mailto:bramwell@wsu.edu). The position is open until filled.

**See the attached [job announcement](#) for the full position description and qualifications.**

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**WSU's Thurston County Agriculture Team set to implement over \$1 Million in grassland resilience projects on local farms**

If you are managing grasslands on your farm and you are interested in improving soil health, converting to rotational grazing, or installing trees and shrubs to build habitat and

support your livestock, read on.

Over the next 3 years WSU has funding to improve the mineral balance and biological functionality on 500 acres of local agricultural grasslands. Additionally, this project will help local farmers convert 300 acres of continuously grazed grasslands to rotational grazing through fencing and livestock water projects. And excitingly, we aim to install 100 acres of silvopasture and other agroforestry techniques to begin to understand how these important climate mitigation and habitat tools can be applied locally.

The project is funded by the Department of Defense and Joint Base Lewis McChord's ongoing commitment to protecting prairie habitat in the region. Technical partners include the non-profits Agroforestry Northwest and Ecostudies Institute, as well as technical service providers from the Thurston Conservation District. Applications are being accepted now and throughout 2026.

You can read more and get application materials on our website:

<https://extension.wsu.edu/thurston/rep-i-grant/>

Projects will be selected on a quarterly basis with the first batch of projects identified by April 30, 2026.

**Reach out directly to agriculture specialist Sierra Smith to discuss potential projects ideas: [sierra.smith1@wsu.edu](mailto:sierra.smith1@wsu.edu).**

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## Community Garden Support and Networking Meeting

The second Community Garden Support and Network meeting will be held on Thursday, 19 February, from 7-9pm at the Capital Vision Christian Church (1775 Yew Ave NE, Olympia).

Learn about Cover Crops for soil health, including summer options like Buckwheat, from WSU Thurston County Extension Agent Stephen Bramwell. Hear from members of the NorthEast Neighborhood Association about their Joy Food Forest Project. Connect with

fellow community gardeners and share tips, tricks, and lessons learned in a fun, welcoming environment!

Please RSVP to Tina Wagner ([twagner@thurstoncd.com](mailto:twagner@thurstoncd.com))

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ANNOUNCING: SOUTHWEST WASHINGTON GRASSLANDS & GRAZING

# Photography Contest!



Agricultural photography can convey stories about farming, natural resources, and the day-to-day lives of farmers.

No matter your skills, consider participating in this photography contest to showcase your work and tell the story of local, grass-based agriculture.

Farmers have the inside story, so producers themselves are encouraged to join in!



For more information:  
<https://extension.wsu.edu/thurston/iyrp-photography-contest/>

## Southwest Washington Grasslands and Grazing Photography Contest

This contest focuses on grazing lands and prairies in Grays Harbor, Lewis, Mason, Pacific, and Thurston Counties, and is timed to generate artistic content for the 2026 United Nations “International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists”. All submissions are eligible for public arts exhibits.

The contest will run from May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025 through September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2026.

Visit the **IYRP Photography Contest** webpage to learn more.

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## WHY ARE GLOBAL RANGELANDS THREATENED?

Rangelands and grasslands today are under growing pressure from many directions. Pastoralists, such as herders, shepherds, and ranchers, are finding it harder to sustain their livelihoods, and in many places rural communities are being reshaped by urban migration. Biodiversity is declining, with grassland bird populations rapidly decreasing. Climate change, including prolonged drought, is accelerating large-scale impacts across these landscapes. Invasive and encroaching species are displacing native plants and wildlife. At the same time, perennial grazing lands are being converted to annual row-crop agriculture or fragmented by energy and mining development.

These lands, and the people, livestock, wildlife, and cultures that depend on them, are at a critical moment. But this is not a story of loss alone. It is also a call to care, learn, and act.

### 1 Rangelands Overview

Grasslands and rangelands are rich with wildflowers, wildlife, butterflies, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and more. Yet they are often defined by what they are not—places without trees or wetlands. Visit a grassland near you and you'll see why that framing misses the point: Rangelands are ecosystems in their own right. In fact, they cover roughly half of the planet's ice-free land area. Sadly, they are disappearing rapidly, with up to 80 percent already lost in some countries.

### 2 Land, Mobility, and Water Scarcity

For people who depend on rangelands, access to land, water, and movement is essential. Across North America and around the world, common or collectively used grazing lands sustain livelihoods. Traditional herders, shepherds, and ranchers rely on seasonal movement of herds and flocks, through practices such as transhumance and nomadism. A central goal of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists is to secure the rights of these communities for grazing lands and water. Keeping migration routes free of barriers also benefits wildlife. Yet many pastoral communities face land grabbing for mining, large-scale agriculture, and other competing land uses. These practices undermine both livelihoods and long-term ecological health.

### 3 Economics and Livelihood

Grasslands and rangelands provide meat, milk, hides, fiber, and manure. Globally, one in eight people earns a livelihood from rangelands, and in some countries, as many as one in three. In the United States alone, grazing lands support approximately two million jobs. For food security, one in four people worldwide depends on rangelands for their primary protein sources.

Beyond food production, grasslands offer enormous ecological value. In regions too rocky, cold, dry, or high-elevation for crops, pastoralism provides resilient livelihoods. During times of crisis, pastoralists and ranchers draw on deep knowledge of landscapes, seasonal movement, and cooperation with neighbors. In the U.S., ecosystem services such as wildlife habitat and recreation contribute roughly \$2 billion annually, about one-third of total rangeland economic value. Although often undervalued next to industrial agriculture, pastoral systems are ecologically resilient, locally adapted, and remarkably resilient.



## International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists

"Rangelands" or "pastoralists" may not be the first words that come to mind when you think of SW Washington prairies and grazing lands. But these landscapes of ours (and the people who live in, take care of, and work in them) are very much part of the earth's incredible, and threatened, grasslands. The precarious state of these wildlife-rich biomes has been recognized in 2026 with the United Nations International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists. To take advantage of this global 'limelight', a coalition of local partners will be circulating an educational grasslands exhibit through all/most of the Timberland Regional Libraries.

We'll feature local educational resources, some events with local ranchers/livestock producers, emphasize the long legacy of indigenous grassland stewardship, and host farm walks through the SW WA Grazing Association. Big thanks to partners at TRL including the special events team, City of Olympia for opening their doors to a hosted event this summer (July-ish), and the SW WA Ag Park (and Stone City Event Center) in Tenino where we'll host a prairie and grazing lands party this fall with art, food, speakers and more. Reach out with questions and interests in collaborating ([bramwell@wsu.edu](mailto:bramwell@wsu.edu)).

**Ag Youth Career Fair - Thursday, February 26th**

## 3:00-5:00pm at Avanti High School

CTE Teachers in the Sound South are invited to bring youth (ages 14-20) to a Career Fair on February 26 from 3:00-5:00 hosted by the SouthSound Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources CTE Advisory Committee. Local employers in agriculture and natural resources are invited to table at this career fair – come with your job opportunities (seasonal, one-time jobs, etc.)

**Employers:** Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resources Employers who will hire youth. Examples: Local Farms, Landscapers, Christmas Tree Farms, City of Olympia Parks Dept., TCD and more

**Students:** Students interested in a job in the AFNR field should attend. Ages 14-20 invited. Should be reliable and have good people skills.

**Teachers:** CTE Teachers will promote the career fair to students. We encourage making this a field trip and providing transportation or taking the City Bus to get students there.

**Employers and Teachers can RSVP on this [google spreadsheet](#).**

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### Western Cover Crops Council (WCCC)

The **Western Cover Crops Council** (WCCC) works to facilitate and enhance communication and collaboration that promotes the successful adoption and integration of cover cropping into Western U.S. agricultural systems. The council covers the states and territories within the **Western SARE** region.

If you would like to be involved in the mission and work of the WCCC, a great way to do so is through our subregional committees. The Pacific Northwest Committee covers Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Alaska.

The committee meets virtually about 4 times per year. Two of those meetings highlight a specific topic, usually with a guest speaker.

The next meeting is: **February 26, 2026, 1pm: Micronutrients and legumes** with Doug Collins & Stephen Bramwell, WSU Extension. Collins and Bramwell will share results of a recent trial examining micronutrient additions based on soil test results to promote legume growth.

To join the WCCC-PNW committee and listserv (and the above-mentioned webinars), please visit this link: <https://lists.wsu.edu/join.php> and enter wccc-pnw in the List Name (along with your Name and Email)

Visit the **Western Cover Crops website** for more information

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A promotional graphic for an "On-Farm Composting Short Course". The left side features a dark blue background with white text: "On-Farm Composting Short Course" and "REGISTRATION REQUIRED" with the URL "https://tinyurl.com/5ara9v4f". A QR code is positioned in the center, with a white arrow pointing from it to the right. The right side of the graphic is a photograph of four people (three men and one woman) standing outdoors in a field. They are dressed in casual work clothes, and there is a large pile of straw or hay in the foreground. The background shows a clear blue sky and some trees.

## Two-day composting short course held on: March 27 & April 3, 2026

Find out how to make great compost on your farm and use it effectively in your production!

This two-day short course for farmers and landowners with livestock will focus on increasing your knowledge and skills around on-farm composting. The course will include hands-on exercises in compost recipe formulation, feedstock assessment, and construction of aerobic and properly wetted compost piles, including offal composting. End use of compost products to improve production and soil health on-farm, best practices to protect water quality, and regulations and certification considerations will also be covered. Refreshments and a tasty lunch will be provided on both days! Register today!

**Dates:** March 27 & April 3, 2026

9:00 AM - 4:30 PM both days

**Location:** **WSU Puyallup Research and Extension Center**

**Register here:** <https://tinyurl.com/5ara9v4f>

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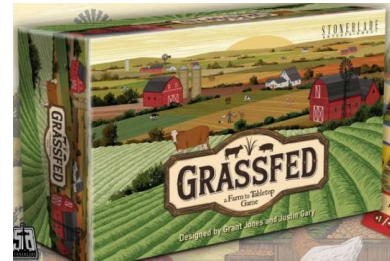
## More local opportunities!

*WSU Extension supports local farms and farmers and is happy to help announce opportunities to the community. If you have an announcement for the Ag Sounder please submit to ([sierra.smith1@wsu.edu](mailto:sierra.smith1@wsu.edu)). The following announcements have been submitted by local farmers this month. These opportunities have not been vetted nor endorsed by WSU.*

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Local regenerative farmer, Grant Jones, is preparing to launch a new board game about sustainable/diversified farming called *Grassfed*.

You can learn more about this game and follow the launch progress at the [Game Found website](#)



Sundance Farm is offering a season-long position for a Farm Helper. This is a work trade position in exchange for room and board in Independence Valley along the Chehalis River. Looking for someone able bodied, interested in farming, experience preferred but not required. Text Willow 360-528-9923 for more information. Available now- October minimum.

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The Center for Natural Lands Management is hiring multiple seasonal technicians for the Violet Prairie Seed Farm in Tenino, Washington. This is a temporary position starting on March 2 through September 30, 2026. Become a seed technician and grow plants that directly benefit the recovery of endangered species on South Sound Prairies! The full position description and how to apply can be found [here](#).

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### **Grow Your Own Produce: The Workshop Series**

**February 4th - November 4th 2026: 1st Wednesday of the month**

**\$250 for all 10 classes, \$130 for a 5 class series, or \$30 per class**

Grow Your Own Produce is a 10 class monthly series taught by permaculture expert Marisha Auerbach designed to help you grow a climate resilient garden that provides food

from your landscape all year. Each two hour class features seasonally-relevant information about planning, growing, maintaining, and harvesting food from your own vegetable garden. Our class will help you develop adaptable low-input systems in your garden based on local resources that thrive, even with extreme weather. 2026 will be the 13th year of the workshop series!

Each month's class is designed to help you maximize your efforts, and subsequent yields in the garden by providing an overview of key activities to engage in at the right time each month. We meet from February through November, on the first Wednesday of each month, on Zoom. Before the class meeting, participants will receive a collection of handouts supporting the key topics for the month, including a garden checklist for the month ahead. We will discuss different subjects pertinent to the garden that month, using slides and the month's handouts as reference. There will be ample time during the class for questions. A few days after each session, participants will receive the recording of the class and PDF of the slides. Students are invited to submit photographs and questions from their gardens, to be addressed at the next class.

Marisha Auerbach has spent many years observing and interacting with her gardens, and in the gardens of the greater Pacific Northwest bioregion. She has been growing most of her own produce year 'round for over the past decade. To learn more about Marisha, please visit [her bio page](#).



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