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January 13, 2021

To Seattle City Council

Via email: Teresa.Mosqueda@seattle.gov, Kshama.Sawant@seattle.gov

CC: Governor Jay Inslee, Laura Watson, Director, Department of Ecology, Satpal Sidhu, Whatcom County Executive, Representative Mike Chapman, Senator Kevin Van De Wege

Dear Council Members Mosqueda, Sawant and all Seattle City Council Members:

On behalf of the Indian community in Whatcom County, the nearly 100 family farmers who now call this beautiful and productive valley home, as well as the entire Whatcom farming community as a whole, I wish to offer my sincere thank you for your resolution in support of Indian farmers. Many people in Whatcom County have roots in farming, with family farming operations continuing for generations. As such, our community is deeply concerned by the devastating actions the Indian government has taken.

It was very encouraging to hear the words of your resolution expressing support for farmers in India. As a farming community, we support the farmers of India in their fight against harmful and unjust regulations.

It is with your resolution and support in mind that I wish to call your attention to a challenging and potentially devastating action in Whatcom County, affecting Indian and non-Indian farmers alike.

The State Department of Ecology is moving forward with plans to adjudicate water rights in Whatcom County at the request of our local tribes. We as farmers are very supportive of tribal treaty rights and have been leaders in working with tribes and others on habitat and salmon restoration projects. We remain willing, as always, to work together for a better solution that would be fair to all. We also understand the state's desire to end the decades of uncertainty about water rights through adjudication.

But sadly, this adjudication will have damaging unintended consequences for the farming community, possibly including the end of my family farm and most everyone of my fellow farmers. Some family farms are among the last to enter farming in this community and, as directed, we applied for water rights for our farms and were given the promise that someday the process of full legalization of our water rights would be completed. That promise, however, may not be kept and adjudication may mean the end of our farms. As the most junior users, we will

no longer have legal access to water.

This doesn't just affect my community alone, but every family farmer in our community. This is a unified issue that includes all our farmers. The simple reason is that the Nooksack River, set for adjudication, does not have a water storage, like similar river systems. Storage in other basins allows the flood waters of our region's very wet winters to be stored and then released in the summer to maintain the flow in the river. But without that kind of storage, the Nooksack River falls below the state's acceptable limits for flows. Given the effects of climate change and increasing population, this issue becomes more challenging every year. Under adjudication, only those with the most senior water rights will be allocated water. This means only tribes, and perhaps some cities, will have access to legal water while others will be cut off. Since groundwater is going to be included in this adjudication, every farm will be affected. A farm without water cannot survive.

Whatcom County farmers, both Indian and non-Indian, are unified against harmful actions by the Indian government. We believe this local issue also deserves attention. That's why your resolution was so encouraging and why we are asking for your help in addressing the very challenging and devastating issue we are facing here at home.

More than our farms are at stake. We face constant pressure from urbanization that has caused the loss of well over 60% of farmland in the Puget Sound region. This action will accelerate the process of farmland conversion, as development will be the only possibility for those who own the land once water for crops is cut off.

Again, we are very thankful for the steps you have taken and the support you have shown for the rights of farmers in India. Given your strong and positive action toward farmers in India, we ask similarly for help with Washington farmers.

One of the last remaining viable farming areas in Western Washington is in danger. Members of Whatcom County farming community are unified and always willing to do our part to insure everyone is treated fairly. We would be most pleased for the opportunity to meet with you. We eagerly await your assistance in this crucial matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Sangha". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul Sangha

**For Whatcom County Indian-Sikh Farming Community and all Family Farmers.
Whatcom Family Farmers - Board Member**

M.V.B. / S.D.