

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Ann Katzenbach with local news and commentary for today, September 16, 2022.

This weekend there is a tour of farms in Jefferson County. If you shop at either of the local farmer's markets, you know that fruits, vegetables, flowers, and beef are plentiful, organic, and grown with love and pride here in the county. A visit to the farms lets you see behind the fences and barn walls. At this time of year, it's always a magical experience, but as with many things, COVID-19 and inflation have made life harder for local farmers.

Congressman Derek Kilmer talked with 35 farmers and members of the Olympic Peninsula agricultural community on August 24 at Finnriver Farm. The Organic Seed Alliance reported on the meeting, as did the *Leader*. Kilmer acknowledged that the last few years have been challenging due to COVID -19, workforce and supply chain issues. He indicated that the Inflation Reduction Act, recently signed into law, may help because the Olympic Peninsula, with its limited economic resources, qualifies for significant economic programs. He asked the farmers to prioritize their concerns and needs.

Many of the issues, such as hiring and housing workers, water resources, education, and the soaring cost of land were familiar to everyone. Issues and possible solutions central to farming were worthy of note. The cost of organic poultry feed and fuel have driven up operating costs. Most farms are not very energy efficient and electric vehicles would help enormously. Young farmers cannot afford land, thus there should be federal loan programs for farmers so they are not at the mercy of private lenders. And children should understand and participate in where their food comes from. Representative Kilmer affirmed each farmer's needs and pointed again to the Inflation Reduction Act provisions for electric vehicles and land conservation.

Agricultural needs are simmering all across Washington. The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) has just awarded more than \$16 million in grants to help small farms and businesses recover from on-going economic impacts. These grants received applications in record-breaking numbers with requests totaling over \$148 million dollars. Laura Raymond, manager of the WSDA Regional Markets Program said of the grant program, "We really wish we could fund many more of these worthwhile activities." Several local agricultural businesses applied but at this time, there is no news as to whether any received grants.

Banned Books Week starts on Monday. This annual event celebrates our freedom to read. It highlights the value of free and open access to information. Banned Books Week brings together the entire book community – librarians, booksellers, publishers, journalists, teachers, and readers of all types – in shared support of the freedom to seek and to express ideas, even those some consider unorthodox or unpopular. The theme this year is "Books Unite Us, Censorship Divides Us."

Book banning has been much in the news of late. The *New York Times* reported, "As highly visible and politicized book bans have exploded across the country, librarians – accustomed to being seen as dedicated public servants in their communities – have found themselves on the front lines of an acrimonious culture war, with their careers and their personal reputations at risk. They have been labeled pedophiles, called out by local politicians, and reported to law enforcement officials. Some librarians have quit after being harassed online. Others have been fired for refusing to remove books from circulation."

Here in Port Townsend, Melody Eisner, Port Townsend's head librarian will have a display of the current most censured books to help raise awareness. She has already cleared this with Mayor Faber, so there is no danger that she will be fired. And let us hope she gets no threats.

There is a severe blood shortage locally and nationally. Right now you can easily donate to the blood bank on Monday from 9am to 4pm and Tuesday from 8am to 2pm at the Elks Hall on Otto Street.

And that's it for today's news. KPTZ, 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5pm, Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturday. I'm Ann Katzenbach, Thanks for listening and support our local farmers.