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SKAGIT VALLEY

Sweet Smell of Success

Turning ice cream into an olfactory attraction

LIKE OTHER FARM stands that line the twin forks of the Skagit River, Snow Goose Produce (360-445-6908) sells fresh vegetables—many of them locally grown and organic, of course—plus flowers, plants, vegetable starts, preserves, and fresh seafood. What sticks in people's minds, however, is the mouthwatering aroma that wafts from the back of this former granary between Conway and La Conner.

The sweet smell comes from waffle irons—seven of them, to be exact—steaming enough batter to make as many as 1,000 ice cream cones a day. "People tell us they can smell it on the road as they drive by," says Mike Rust, Snow Goose's co-owner.

Rust started Snow Goose in 1985, naming it for the large white birds with black-tipped wings that flock here from October through April. Two years after the stand's opening, Snow Goose started selling ice cream too. "My mom's ideas," Rust says. "She's the one in the family with the good business ideas. The ice cream was an afterthought that got out of hand."

How far out of hand is evident on a warm spring day during the Skagit Valley Tulip Festival (360-428-5959; www.tulipfestival.org), an event that attracts more than a million peo-

PHOTOGRAPH TOP BY EMILY KELTON, RIGHT BY ANNE MURPHY

THE SKAGIT VALLEY
TULIP FESTIVAL



Tulips, produce and 48 flavors of dreamy ice cream

ple to the area each year to ogle 300 acres of eye-popping blooms. The line for ice cream runs through Snow Goose's parking lot and meanders along like the nearby river. "Their patience and good humor always amaze me," Rust says of his customers.

But the payoff is worth it—48 flavors packed in heaping helpings on top of those cones. "We call them immodest ice cream cones," says Rust. "We serve the biggest scoop we can for the best price we can charge. Our only size criterion is being able to tell a single from a double."

Snow Goose Produce is open daily from 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. (hours vary depending on the season), from the first weekend of daffodil picking (typically in late February) through the first weekend of October. And while you're there, pay a visit to other Skagit Valley farms and farm stands, an updated list of which is available at www.visitskagitvalley.com/skagitvalleyfarms.cfm. —MIKE GREENSTEIN

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