Food Policy Forum

# Meeting notes

**April 10, 2020: 1:00pm-3:00pm**

Webinar

**Next In-Person Meeting:** June 4, 2020

**Food Policy Forum Attendees**

**Members**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name | Organization |
| Addie | Candib | American Farmland Trust |
| Richard | Conlin | Puget Sound Regional Council |
| Tim | Crosby | Thread Fund |
| Aaron | Czyzewski | Food Lifeline |
| Tom | Davis | WA State Farm Bureau |
| Diane | Dempster | Clark County Food System Council |
| Colleen | Donovan | WA State Farmers Market Association |
| Mary | Dye | Representative |
| Leanne | Eko | Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction |
| Chris | Elder | Whatcom County Public Works |
| Amy | Ellings | WA State Department of Health |
| Brian | Estes | LINC Foods |
| Mia | Gregerson | Representative |
| Alison | Halpern | WSCC |
| Chad | Kruger | Washington State University - CSANR |
| Claire | Lane | WA State Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition |
| Laura | Lewis | WSU - Food Systems Program |
| Aslan | Meade | Thurston Economic Development Council |
| Nick | Norton | Washington Association of Land Trusts |
| Laura | Raymond | WSDA |
| Babette | Roberts | WA State Department of Social and Health Services |
| Trish | Twomey | WA Food Coalition |
| Chris | Voigt | WA State Potato Commission |
| Nancy | Warner | Initiative for Rural Innovation and Stewardship |
| Judy | Warnick | Senator |
| Christina | Wong | Northwest Harvest |

**Additional Attendees**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name | Organization |
| Leslie | Connelly | OFM |
| Alicia | McClendon | WSCC |
| Katie | Rains | WSDA |
| Saundra | Richartz | Senate Republican Caucus  |
| Derek | Sandison | WSDA |
| Evan | Sheffels | WSDA |
| Carol | Smith | WSCC |

*Facilitation and meeting support provided by Petra Vallila-Buchman and Mary Byrne, Ross Strategic*

# Welcome and Overview

Overview

Carol Smith, SCC, welcomed the Forum. Carol noted that the Forum has brought together diverse interests in an inclusive and collaborative way. The Forum was established in 2016, with leads from the State Conservation Commission (SCC), Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), and Office of Farmland Preservation (OFP). Recent legislation during the 2020 session put the Forum in statute. The Forum’s work complements Washington State’s goals, such as addressing hunger and preserving farmland. In 2019, the Forum [submitted consensus recommendations](https://scc.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2019-Forum-Final-Report.pdf) for the Governor’s Office and Legislature’s consideration. The Forum has been a productive venue for increasing mutual support for diverse perspectives that allows us to find the important common ground and acts as a spring board for action. Carol thanked the Forum for its hard work.

Derek Sandison, WSDA, provided an overview of Washington’s emergency response to manage food security in light of COVID-19. JT Austin, Governor’s Office, has been helping to organize and lead this emergency response effort.

* The state is working with three NGOs who are on the frontline of helping to acquire food and manage distribution of food out to the public. The current model of how the state approaches hunger prevention/food security changed drastically in a matter of days due to the social distancing mandate that now means more food needs to be brought to people (some foodbanks have closed due to the fact that they are unable to comply with social distancing guidelines). Food banks are increasingly relying on shelf stable items and are pivoting to curbside delivery.
* The Governor’s Office has approved a $10 million supplemental appropriation for food security work. Federal assistance should be shared with states soon as well.
* A coordinating group of Washington NGO food assistance programs, FEMA, WA Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), and others have been meeting on a regular basis to provide a coordinated response to the crisis.

JT and Derek would like to engage the Forum on the specific question of how to transition out of the current crisis. The Forum can provide input as the state moves from emergency response mode to recovery planning.

Derek thanked Representative Gregerson and Senator Warnick for getting legislation passed to enable the Food Policy Forum to have an ongoing role and function to build Washington’s food system.

*Discussion*:

* Tim Crosby: Thanked the state for stepping up so quickly to address COVID-19 related needs. Tim noted that it is good to hear that additional funding is on its way and that money is being funneled to foodbanks. Tim asked what is being done to support other types of food businesses and to reactivate supply chains, especially given that many restaurants are closed.
	+ Derek Sandison: Responded that this issue is being examined state-wide. There are numerous Washington products that typically move through the restaurant supply chain. One challenge is that the nature of packaging does not easily translate from one supply chain to another. The state has been having conversations on the feasibility of repacking, but this cannot take place at the food bank level. The state is engaging Food Northwest to determine what is needed to get food properly packaged.

# Team Breakout

Overview

The five Forum Implementation Teams (listed below) were divided into Zoom breakout rooms and were asked to consider refinements to their draft early actions related to COVID-19. Teams were given 15 minutes to coordinate before being brought back to the main Zoom meeting to share their early actions with the full Forum.

Forum Implementation Teams

* Recommendation Team 1: Food insecurity
* Recommendation Team 2: Agricultural land protection and availability and next generation farming
* Recommendation Team 3: Alleviating barriers to small and medium scale f armers accessing markets, including institutional purchasing
* Recommendation Team 4: Infrastructure and rural economic development
* Recommendation Team 5: Impacts of climate change

# Team REport Out

Overview

The five Forum Implementation Teams were asked to share their draft early actions related to COVID-19. Team leads were asked for their report outs to focus on high-level key issues and solutions. The suite of proposed draft early actions is available [here](https://scc.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/FPF-Draft-COVID-19-Actions_Full-Forum_040920-1.docx).

**Implementation Team: Food Insecurity**

**Team Roster**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Aaron | Czyzewski | Food Lifeline |
| Amy | Ellings | WA State Department of Health |
| Babette | Roberts | WA State Department of Social and Health Services |
| Christina | Wong | Northwest Harvest |
| Leanne | Eko | Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction |
| Trish | Twomey | WA Food Coalition |

**Proposed Early Actions**:

The Food Insecurity Implementation Team did not offer any refinements to their draft early actions during the meeting. The Team’s early actions can be reviewed [here](https://scc.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/FPF-Draft-COVID-19-Actions_Full-Forum_040920-1.docx).

**Discussion**:

* Claire Lane: Commended the work of DSHS, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), and WSDA during this crisis. Claire shared that she has never been more grateful to be a food security advocate in WA than she has been in the last month or so.
* Tom Davis: Shared that he is grateful for how the Food Insecurity Team has expressed their implementation narrative, including the compassion expressed for people experiencing food insecurity and also for the farmers providing food.
* Chris Voigt: Noted that for the potato industry, nearly 90% of sales happen in restaurants. Currently, the potato industry has a tremendous volume of finished product that is not being utilized and cannot rapidly switch to a grocery store/retail market. All packaging locations in the state are running at full capacity and don’t have additional capacity. There are 3 billion pounds of potatoes in Washington that must be moved before the middle of July when the new crop is growing. Producers who have already planted potatoes for this year are considering disking the soil to cut losses. Many growers are on the verge of bankruptcy and there is a surplus of food we cannot get into the system.
* Aaron Czyzewski: Noted that food pantries have had a dramatic drop off in volunteers and that food safety concerns have altered models of how food pantry food is distributed. There is a surplus of food to be distributed, but without the infrastructure/volunteer support to handle the amount of food to be distributed to those in need.

**Implementation Team: Agricultural land protection and availability and next generation farming**

**Team Roster**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Addie | Candib | American Farmland Trust |
| Alison | Halpern | WSCC |
| Chris  | Elder | Whatcom County |
| Elizabeth | Bragg | WA State Young Farmers Coalition |
| Nick | Norton | Washington Association of Land Trusts |
| Ron | Shultz | WSCC |
| Tom | Salzer | WA Association of Conservation Districts |

**Proposed Early Actions**:

*The Implementation Team offered refinement to its draft early actions (shared with the Forum prior to the April 10 meeting) based on discussion during the breakout session. The information below reflects the Team’s revised early actions.*

1. Problem*:* This time is extremely pivotal for agricultural land protection and farmer economic viability. If existing famers retire/get out of farming due to limited or changing markets, then significant agricultural land can be lost. Funding for farmland preservation could be pushed aside for needs that feel more urgent right now. However, this time presents the critical opportunity to provide direct funding to farmers. Most of the funds currently being offered to farmers is in the form of loans. Many farms are already extremely leveraged or are not interested in further leveraging themselves in a time of limited market certainty. Purchase of agricultural conservation easements provide funds directly to farms and simultaneously ensures long term food security for Washington State and supports ecosystem resilience that farmland and farmers supports. Furthermore, increasing the ability to couple farmland preservation with farmland access will ensure there is an opportunity for transfer of farmland to new and beginning farmers as this pandemic will certainly force some farms to close operations.

*The team proposed a three-tiered approach, with option A being the ideal opportunity to preserve agricultural land and support new and beginning farmers, followed by option B, and then option C.*

1. Provide 100 million dollars in funds annually to Washington State Conservation Commission Agricultural Conservation Easement Account to provide immediate funds to purchase agricultural conservation easements.  These funds will provide much needed support to agricultural producers across the state impacted by COVID-19 and protect agricultural land needed to provide long term food security for Washington State residents and communities.  Under this tool, a landowner voluntarily sells agricultural conservation easement to a qualified easement holder, eliminating most or all future residential development potential; the land is kept in agricultural production, the landowner receives compensation in a time of great need, and the land can be more accessible to a new farm buyer because the development rights have already been sold.
	* SCC has a framework in place for this, but it has not yet been funded. Josh Giuntoli had made sure the admin needed is in place for this program before switching rolls at the SCC.
	* This is an opportunity for Commission’s unfunded bucket to compensate for existing tools (WWRP) for emerging needs. An opportunity could be to tailor funding to play ball with federal money better. Identify opportunity areas that are not protected by existing funding. Could think of Commission’s buckets as targeting specific areas where people are struggling to maintain viability due to loss of direct market access. Could set up program to prioritize these types of projects.
2. Create a system to match agricultural properties at risk of being commercially sold with a producer. This can help link new or beginning farmers with opportunity based on producer turnover and keeps agricultural land in use.
3. Invest in Farm PAI, which would be housed under the Washington State Housing Finance Commission. This would involve solidifying the coalition and reinvesting in relationship building with the Commission to bring idea to the forefront.

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**Discussion**

* Addie Candib: Noted that there is a high threat of land turnover during this crisis; however, we have a one-time opportunity to have an impact in perpetuity. Farmland lost during this time will have impacts for generations to come.
* Derek Sandison: Thanked the team and agreed that we need to think about how to make long-term progress in agricultural land protection and availability.
* Claire Lane: Asked what are options that do not rely on big state investments in agricultural preservation funding, especially considering the coming environment of drastically reduced state revenue and budget cuts.
	+ Nick Norton: Noted that aspects of the team’s early actions that link farmers to land availability cost less than a onetime large investment in agricultural investment (e.g., funding the Washington State Conservation Commission Agricultural Conservation Easement Account), but would still provide a large return on investment.
* Chris Elder: Shared that many farmers will feel the impact of this crisis head-on. Government agencies are providing loan opportunities, but these loans are money that farmers must pay back in an uncertain future. This team is proposing policies that allow farmers to benefit from direct cash now and help achieve long-term agricultural land preservation.
* Carol Smith: The SCC Office of Farmland Preservation coordinator position is open, and SCC is actively recruiting and emphasizing a skill set on the ability to market and manage conservation easements / working land easement. This is an important goal for a number of reasons. SCC should be in a great position to work on conservation easements in a couple of months.
* Claire Lane: If there are recommendations on how some of these emergency investments for farmers could be sustainable (e.g., not necessarily loans that require repayment) in the next round of federal COVID-19 response funding, please make sure WSDA and advocates hear your ideas ASAP.

**Implementation Team: Alleviating barriers to small and medium scale farmers accessing markets, including institutional purchasing**

**Team Roster**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Claire | Lane | WA State Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition |
| Colleen | Donovan | WA State Farmers Market Association |
| Diane | Dempster | Clark County Food System Council |
| Jon | DeVaney | WA Tree Fruit Association |
| Laura | Lewis | WSU - Food Systems Program |
| Laura | Raymond | WSDA |
| Mary | Embleton | King Conservation District |

**Proposed Early Actions**:

Laura Raymond, WSDA, noted that there are new areas of alignment between this Implementation Team (Alleviating barriers to small and medium scale farmers accessing markets, including institutional purchasing) and the Food Insecurity Implementation Team due to new food system landscape in light of COVID-19. This new reality presents the opportunity to make better connections between growers of all scales and people who need food, both for the emergency food system and also for long-term/sustainable food security and community food security.

The Team’s early actions can be reviewed [here](https://scc.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/FPF-Draft-COVID-19-Actions_Full-Forum_040920-1.docx).

**Discussion**:

* Aslan Meade: Noted there is strong alignment between this Implementation Team and the Infrastructure and Rural Economic Development Implementation Team. Aslan agreed that there is a critical need for online sales platforms. A potential solution is for tech service providers to help farmers implement an online-point-of-sale platform. Aslan also shared that Thurston County has a procurement help center; when a state declares a state of emergency, FEMA then puts contracts in place that prioritizes the purchase of local products.
* Babs Roberts: Suggested that this Team's goals/strategies may be a place to discuss expansion of EBT use, especially regarding online sales platforms. Currently, EBT cards cannot be used online other than with Amazon/Wal-Mart who are part of a pilot project under USDA.
	+ Saundra Richartz: Noted that this sounds similar to existing co-ops, just on a bigger scale. If the online food co-ops and CSA's could accept EBT, it would make a big difference.
	+ Linda Neunzig: Shared that the Northwest Ag Business Center is helping Snohomish County to work with USDA to acquire a SNAP reader to be used on boxes in low income areas. USDA was very open to the concept and are ready to move it forward.
* Claire Lane: Asked that since Washington is one of the world’s tech centers, can we figure out how to harness our tech community’s generosity to help producers move more sales options online? We should build a more scaled-up online market for local products, rather than requiring each individual farm business to go online. How do we preserve the small and local identity and capacity and scale up in a big way, rather than asking people who many not have this expertise to do more?

**Implementation Team: Infrastructure and rural economic development**

**Team Roster**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Aslan | Meade | Thurston Economic Development Council |
| Brian | Estes | LINC Foods |
| Jamie | Wiggins | Food Northwest |
| Linda | Neunzig | Snohomish County |
| Mary | Dye | Representative |
| Melissa | Spear | Tilth Alliance |
| Nancy | Warner | Initiative for Rural Innovation and Stewardship |
| Patrick "PJ" | Cawley | Charlie’s Produce |
| Tim | Crosby | Cascadia Foodshed Financing Project |

**Proposed Early Actions**:

Brian Estes, LINC Foods, shared that this Team has been focused on long-term and systems level transformation, and that translating this Team’s work to a crisis is challenging. However, what is critical is recognizing that for small-/mid-scale producers and enterprises, the level of investment that they have already put into regional infrastructure and economic development is at risk during this crisis. This team is thinking about core strategies to sustain infrastructure for those types of producers.

The Team’s early actions can be reviewed [here](https://scc.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/FPF-Draft-COVID-19-Actions_Full-Forum_040920-1.docx).

**Discussion:**

* Tim Crosby: Shared a solution that Los Angeles has been implementing (Snohomish County will be implementing something similar as well). Restaurants provide information on the volume of sales needed to maintain operation (e.g., 300 meals a day at $15). The City then works with producers and distributers to distribute meals through the food network to get food to people in need (e.g., childcare centers; at-risk youth program; grab-and-go, etc.). The government covers the cost between what the restaurants need to sell meals for and the price point at which institutions can purchase. This is a strong and efficient method to providing relief quickly.
* Aaron Czyzewski: Shared that local food pantries are experiencing the following challenges with perishable products: volunteer labor shortages or cancellations, changes in demand (switch to shelf stable), and agency closures have all disrupted normal operations. Hopefully, workarounds can be brought on-line soon.

**Implementation Team: Impacts of Climate Change**

**Team Roster**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Chad | Kruger | Washington State University - CSANR |
| Chris | Voigt | WA State Potato Commission |
| Chris | Elder | Whatcom County Public Works |
| Dan | Wood | WA State Dairy Federation |
| Diana | Carlen | WA Association of Wheat Growers |
| Richard | Conlin | Puget Sound Regional Council |
| Tom | Davis | WA State Farm Bureau |

**Proposed Early Actions**:

*The Implementation Team offered refinement to its draft early actions (shared with the Forum prior to the April 10 meeting) based on discussion during the breakout session. The information below reflects the Team’s revised early actions.*

1. Problem: Bills related to long-term support to farmers that benefit climate have been sidelined to immediate response needs. The Impacts of Climate Change team is addressing long-term issues that need to continue. However, we can provide immediate financial assistance to farmers in support of climate change.
2. Support conservation programs and resources that provide direct financial assistance to farmers to implement best management practices that address impacts of climate change and also provide employment opportunities and economic development. Programs such as the Sustainable Farm and Fields and Soil Health Initiative have the potential to be examined for this purpose.
	* Example: Provide funds and technical assistance for farmers to implement cover crops, no till, organic amendments, etc. This allows farmers to have funding (not tied to loans) that directly supports farm viability and production and addresses conservation and climate change goals.
3. Washington agencies and organizations should continue preparations for near-term and long-term planning and implementation of programs related to the climate change recommendations outlined by this Team in the June 2019 report to the Legislature.
	* Example: Continue to promote PDR programs; develop a comprehensive state-wide water availability strategy; Create and deploy a voluntary carbon credit program; Develop strategies to enhance adaptation for food and ag productions that are most likely to be impacted by climate change.

**Discussion:**

* Aaron Czyzewski: Shared that the team’s early actions are well articulated.

# Full Forum Discussion and Wrap-Up

**Discussion**

* Alison Halpern: Thanked the Forum for their recommendations. Alison shared that it was quite inspirational to see how quickly this group could come together and create meaningful, COVID focused early actions.
* Carol Smith: Echoed Alison’s comments on how valuable and insightful this recent Forum work is. Carol suggested that she and Derek Sandison reach out to JT Austin of the Governor’s Office to present the Forum’s ideas and propose forward actions.
	+ Derek Sandison: Agreed with Carol’s proposal to share the Forum’s early actions with JT Austin.
* Derek Sandison: Noted that the COVID emergency is drastically changing how our food systems act. We have in a sense an opportunity to reshape the state’s approach to food insecurity and food programs and would like to work with the Forum to help provide input.
	+ Aslan Meade: I hope we utilize the opportunity in this crisis to reshape the food system, especially with a focus on regional production for regional markets.

**Next Steps**

* The next set of Implementation Team calls are scheduled for the first full week in May. These meetings will inform our next full Forum meeting on June 4.
* If you have any questions, please contact Petra at pvallila@rossstrategic.com.
* If you have any questions on membership, contact Laura Raymond (LRaymond@agr.wa.gov).