

FOOD POLICY FORUM

MEETING NOTES

December 7, 2021: 1:00pm-4:00pm

Webinar

Food Policy Forum Meeting Attendees

Members

First	Last	Affiliation
Aaron	Czyzewski	Food Lifeline
Addie	Candib	American Farmland Trust
Ali	Jensen	Whatcom County Health Department (Alternate for Chris Elder)
Alyssa	Auvinen	Washington State Department of Health
Babette	Roberts	Washington State Department of Social and Health Services
Brian	Estes	LINC Foods
Chad	Kruger	Washington State University - CSANR
Chris	Voigt	Washington State Potato Commission
Chris	Elder	Whatcom County Public Works
Christina	Wong	Northwest Harvest
Claire	Lane	Washington State Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition
Colleen	Donavan	Washington State Farmers Market Association
Diane	Dempster	Clark County Food Systems Council
Judy	Warnick	Washington State Legislature
Kate	Delavan	Washington State Conservation Commission
Kirk	Robinson	Washington State Conservation Commission
Laura	Lewis	Washington State University
Laura	Raymond	Washington State Department of Agriculture
Leanne	Eko	Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Mary	Embleton	King Conservation District
Melissa	Spear	Tilth Alliance

Mia	Gregerson	Washington State Legislature
Morgan	Rockey	Washington State Legislature (for Rep. Andy Billig)
Nancy	Warner	Initiative for Rural Innovation and Stewardship
PJ	Cawley	Charlie's Produce
Ron	Shultz	Washington State Conservation Commission
Tim	Crosby	Cascadia Foodshed Financing Project
Tom	Davis	Washington State Farm Bureau
Trish	Twomey	Washington Food Coalition

Non-Members

First	Last	Affiliation
Alicia	McClendon	Washington State Conservation Commission
Chris	Curtis	Seattle Farmers Markets
Cristina	Rodriguez	Labor and Industries
Eric	Williams	Second Harvest
Maggie	Reilly	IRIS
My Linh	Thai	Washington State Legislature

Facilitation and meeting support provided by Ross Strategic.

ROLL, WELCOME AND AGENDA OVERVIEW

- Three meeting objectives were identified:
 - 1) Review the Forum's charter and next steps
 - 2) Identify and discuss equity considerations for food system infrastructure grants
 - 3) Identify activities for the Forum in early 2022
- The meeting facilitator provided context that this meeting marked the beginning of a new chapter for the Forum, now that the October report has been submitted and the group is operating under statute. This meeting would focus on the work that lies ahead for the Forum.

STATUS OF THE FORUM'S CHARTER

- Forum co-conveners provided meeting participants with an update on the drafting of the Forum’s charter, that had been provided via email earlier in the week and was shared again via zoom chat. Forum members were invited to provide feedback on the draft document and co-conveners stated they would consider that feedback as they continue to finalize the document and elevate it with the Directors of the convening agencies, WSDA, OFP, and WSCC.
- The co-conveners asked members to flag anything of concern or missing from the draft charter. The charter was written drawing from the language and content of the statute and the Forum’s agreements and practices to date. Language taken directly from the statute would require legislative action to change. However, presenters noted that the ‘Managing Principles’ section is not directly from the statute and therefore is more flexible should members have feedback on the content.

Forum Discussion

- As Forum members were invited to share thoughts on the draft charter, a discussion emerged regarding the preclusion of compensating Forum members for their time. It was noted that the language from the statute indicating members serve without compensation is a barrier to participation for many people with lived experience that the Forum would benefit from hearing from. Members raised that there is currently dialogue happening across state government around this issue as it is not unique to the Forum.

EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS FOR FOOD SYSTEM INFRASTRUCTURE GRANTS

- During the process that created the most recent Forum report, food system infrastructure was voted to be of high priority in terms of timeliness of the issue. That said, given recent wins, thanks to legislative provisos in the state budget, regarding food system infrastructure, a recommendation on infrastructure was not included in the recent October report to the Legislature. Instead, the report noted that WSDA would be engaging the Forum in 2021 as part of its effort to design equity considerations into its implementation of these newly funded grant programs.
- In November of 2021, a group of Forum members, including Laura Raymond from WSDA met to apply the Forum’s [equity filter](#) to the recently funded WSDA infrastructure grant programs. Forum member Alyssa Auvinen presented the considerations that emerged from the November conversation, at this meeting.

Equity Considerations Shared

- Consider defining equity goals for the program which can inform design decisions. Equity comes into play in three ways with these grants and must be considered in a balance with one another.
 - Who receives the funding
 - Consider how program design choices will reach different types of businesses, those that are poised to grow (e.g., have existing business plan and relationships) versus individuals that are earlier in business development or don’t have access to businesses supports. For example, reimbursement grants will serve individuals who can access bridge capital or an entity that can be a fiscal sponsor, or easily have the cash on hand.
 - Technical assistance and outreach to support successful participation in the program
 - Without intervention, people who have been connected with WSDA or USDA in the past and know how to navigate the grant system are likely to benefit. Technical assistance related to the grant application process as well as targeted, multilingual and multi-platform outreach would help remedy this.

- *Grant recipients who are women, minority, and small business owners may require greater technical assistance and others supports (due to historic underinvestment).*
 - Who/what will be impacted by the successful implementation of the funded projects
 - **Type of Grant:** An investment in shovel-ready projects will increase access to Washington products and improve resiliency of the food system on a more immediate timeline. While a capacity building grant could be important for reaching businesses that historically have not been served well.
 - **Geographic distribution of projects:** Geographic distribution of funds should be considered, with a lens for where the projects will be carried out and how that will affect the local community (e.g., increasing access to Washington grown food through farm to school programs in communities of color).
 - Consider whether it makes sense to invest heavily in an area that already has investment.
- Information Needed: Where are there more women and minority businesses? Where are the infrastructure gaps in local systems?
- Perspectives to include: When prioritizing women, minority and small business owners it will be important to engage them, as well as trusted organizational partners, in the program design process.

Forum Discussion

- Multiple Forum members noted that they resonated with the notion certain relationships are necessary to be able to access grant programs such as these and that those relationships are harder to access for small businesses as well as minority and women-owned businesses that a portion of the grant funding is aimed to target. The benefit of information sharing, particularly from those who have participated in a program before, was highlighted.
- Laura Raymond, the WSDA representative who participated in the equity filter conversation, shared that she participated virtually at the Tilth Conference that took place a few weeks ago and administered a survey to stakeholders to inform the development of these grant programs. She noted that the equity filter conversation directly informed the survey questions she asked of stakeholders.

FORUM ACTIVITIES IN EARLY 2022

- The meeting facilitator conducted a multi-part activity aimed to generate topics the Forum can coalesce around because they are of interest and are appropriate for Forum action. These topics would serve to be the focus of Forum work in 2022. The activity took place in the following parts.
- **Part 1: Generating topics for Forum attention**
 - Using the 5 topics from the Forum's 2019 food system diagram (processing, distribution and aggregation; market access and development; productive farmland; food insecurity; and climate change), members were asked to add topics to a shared online workspace in response to the question: "What topics warrant the Forum's attention this biennium?" The lens for 'attention' was framed to be broad, potentially including convening, coordination, communication, collaboration, policy development, research, information sharing and other activities of that nature. In the shared online workspace, ideas from past reports that were voted as timely this summer by Forum members were pre-populated to seed the brainstorm.
- **Part 2: Reviewing and grouping topics**

- Many topics warranting the Forum’s attention were generated for each of the 5 food system categories. The Forum ran through an exercise where they reviewed each topic put forth and began grouping them into themes. The topics and themes generated by category are outlined below, alongside the recommendations pulled from past reports that were used to seed the brainstorm.

Processing, Distribution and Aggregation:

- Themes:
 - **Transportation issues:** lack of drivers, limited market access, increasing costs, processing and packaging barriers, regional food hubs and labor shortages.
 - Possible Forum action: convene a conversation
 - **Local, small-scale meat processing and market access issues.**
 - Possible Forum action: convene a conversation
- Other topics:
 - Enumerate the overlap between our topic grid and what is addressed in the Farm Bill as well as Build Back Better.
 - Food Policy Forum should be weighing in on how federal infrastructure money can be used to support our goals/recommendations.
- Previous recommendations:
 - Make relevant, timely public health and safety information, technical assistance and funds available to farms, ranches and food businesses so they can operate and transport essential food and agricultural products in accordance with CDC guidelines.
 - Develop business-to-business needs and assets linkage opportunities to support matchmaking between producers and products, markets, and available processing and logistics infrastructure.
 - Stabilize lines of credit, extend collateral positions and create a guarantee fund to allow lines of credit from banks or credit unions.
 - December 7th 2021 addition: Can WA State follow CA’s lead with their iBank loan guarantee program to help in state producers and infrastructure? <https://ibank.ca.gov/small-business/loan-guarantees/>

Market Access and Development:

- Themes:
 - **Marketing and visibility:** formal Grow and Buy Local program, funding for Eat Local First, market cultivation.
 - Possible Forum action: support creation of a WA grown program
 - **Technical Assistance to support Agriculture enterprises:** support TA providers to tackle a variety of issues related to pivoting from one market to another and being successful in existing markets, TA and funding to sell to institutions, e-tools and TA about selling online, add both financial and educational resources for small growers to achieve food safety certification.
 - Possible Forum action: provide, convene, organize or promote this technical assistance
- Other topics:

- Assess which post-covid markets have stabilized and how different they are compared to pre-covid; and which markets have not stabilized, or have potentially stranded producers.
- Previous recommendations:
 - Permit farmers markets as essential food and agriculture enterprises not temporary events. Farmers markets need secure and affordable sites; as well as support offered to other marketplaces.

Productive Farmland

- Themes:
 - **Conflicts in and use planning and policy:** Growth Management Act and land use, conflicts between renewable energy development and farmland/farm communities.
 - Possible Forum action: convening, research, representing food/ag in the conversation
 - **Land transition:** Farmland changing hands: how to connect farmland owners with farmland seekers and to support land remaining in production as it transitions to a new owner/tenant. Avg. age of Washington farmers is 58 years old. Need services/resources to support connection across generations.
 - Possible Forum action: research and information gathering on how other states are tackling land transition
- Other topics:
 - Realistic, workable riparian buffer programs that protect both riparian ecological conditions and the economic viability of the farm.
- Past recommendations:
 - Provide \$100 million in funding to existing WSCC programs for the purchase of conservation easements or development rights to secure multi-benefit agricultural lands owned by producers most impacted by COVID-19.
 - Explore partnering with Workforce Development Councils to seek funding for labor and staff for key agricultural supply chain positions to help build out the needed regional-scale production, processing, and distribution systems needed to make our food system more resilient to the pressures of a crisis such as COVID-19.
 - Share successful changes agriculture and food enterprises have made to new markets during COVID and share insights so that other businesses can learn from their experience. Technical assistance providers, researchers, and community-based organizations can contribute to this with funded capacity.

Food Insecurity:

- Themes:
 - **School meals (summer and pandemic):** address school food needs during pandemic and other disasters that result in remote learning, expand programs feeding kids in the summer, ensure school meals continue at no cost, promote awareness USDA is creating in their nutrition programing.
 - Possible Forum action: cross collab learning, implementing investment from Build Back Better
 - **SNAP:** fruit and vegetable incentives, expand programming, Farm Bill topics.
 - Possible Forum action: to be identified

- **Plans and recommendations:** 2021 Food System Assessments commissioned by WSDA, Use Food Well Washington.
 - Possible Forum action: identify overlap in plans, research and analysis
- Other topics:
 - Ensure Farmers Market Nutrition Programs for WIC & Seniors has the technology needed to continue - in a 21st century way.
 - Make sure local food producers/small and ag in the middle are receiving their fair share of funding/subsidies (to help make local food as affordable as subsidized commodities).
 - Understand how soil health connects to human/gut health in WA State (peer-reviewed research has shown solid connections).

Climate Change:

- Themes:
 - **Water:** access to legal water, “Drought Bill”, funding for Western water storage and delivery.
 - Possible Forum action: promote efficient water use, preventing water rights speculation, supporting community water banking and trusts
- Other topics:
 - Support more research into climate change impacts and potential responses e.g. smoke impacts, changing pest and disease patterns, heat impacts.
 - Clustering grants/approaches to conservation within watersheds, e.g., Myer’s Creek restoration in Okanogan County. Develop scaled models of how neighbors can team up to produce larger impact using conservation practices.
 - Support funding for the Sustainable Farms and Fields program (SB 5947) that provides grants to implement carbon-reducing and sequestration practices.
- Past recommendations:
 - 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.
 - 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 the Impacts of Climate Change Team in the June 2019 report to the Legislature.

Other:

- Themes:
 - **Resilience of the food system:** best practices related to food production, natural resources, wealth distribution, crop diversity etc.
 - Possible Forum action: support programs that increase resiliency of Washington Ag
- Other Topics:

- Coordinate statewide Forum with regional food coalitions.
- Labor costs (minimum wage/ag overtime) for agriculture have skyrocketed, especially for smaller farms.
- Food Policy Forum should be weighing in on how federal infrastructure money can be used to support our goals/recommendations.

NEXT STEPS

- Members are invited to provide feedback on the draft charter before 12/17.
- Ross Strategic and the co-conveners will communicate next steps before the end of December regarding further narrowing of these topics and action definition for the Forum.