



2017 Fall Forum Summary Report

Background & History

The Whatcom Food Network (WFN) is a group of organizations that came together in 2010 to create a more collaborative and coordinated food system in Whatcom County, from farm to fork to food disposal. The WFN mission is:

“Working to build common understanding and facilitate collaborative efforts toward an equitable, sustainable and healthy food system for all.”

The 2017 Fall Forum was the 14th biannual forum the WFN has held since 2011. The goals for forums are two-fold: to increase participants’ awareness of work being done across the food system, and to create a connecting point for the richly diverse organizations involved in the food system to come together and discuss important topics.



Forum Overview

On November 9th, 2017 the Whatcom Food Network hosted its biannual Fall Forum in Ferndale at the Ferndale Public Library. Approximately 60 individuals and representatives from different organizations and food businesses from around Whatcom County attended.

Whatcom Food Network Chair, Adrienne Renz, started the forum with an overview of the Network’s mission and goals and an update on current work, including the new [Whatcom Food Network website](#) which is now live! The remainder of the forum included two presentations, detailed below, and time for facilitated networking.

Session #1

The State of Whatcom Farmland

Presenters: Hannah Clark, Executive Dir. of the WA Association of Land Trusts, Chris Elder & Matt Aamot from Whatcom County Planning & Development Services, and Sara Southerland from Sustainable Connections

Panel: Harold Carbee, Dusty Williams of Broadleaf Farm, and Sean D'Agnolo of Monkey Puzzle Farm

Moderated by Chris Elder

[Hannah Clark Slides](#)

[Farmland Preservation Slides](#)



Hannah Clark, the Executive Director of the Washington Association of Land Trusts gave a broad overview of the state of farmland in the U.S. and in the Pacific Northwest Region, and the work that land trusts have been doing to protect farmland locally. Attendees learned that 60% of farmland has been lost in the Puget Sound Region since 1950, primarily due to development pressures, and the fact that the Puget Sound region has one of the highest growth rates in the nation makes it imperative that we work to protect our farmland from disappearing.

Fortunately, progress has been made. There are 28 land trusts across the state, and close to 900 acres has been protected in Whatcom County alone. However, there are looming challenges at this time. The State Capital Budget was not passed in the last legislative session, holding up millions that could be to put towards easements. Additionally, the upcoming Farm Bill reauthorization could threaten an important funding source for ag land conservation if the Regional Conservation Partnership Program is not included in the bill. Hannah closed by sharing the recipe for farmland protection which the other presenters and panelists then explored together:

- **Land use regulation and zoning**

Matt Aamot reviewed the history of zoning in Whatcom County and what current zoning now looks like. In 1976 the County first included zoning for agricultural land conservation, with 40 acre lots being the minimum size within an Ag Zone. The 1997 County Comprehensive Plan further evolved to incorporate the State Growth Management Act. Currently zoning works to balance the needs of existing agricultural businesses while also easing development pressures in order to keep rural areas rich in farmland.

- **Purchase of development rights (easements)**

The goal of Whatcom County is to maintain at least 100,000 acres of agricultural land (the minimum amount identified as being necessary to maintain a viable local agricultural industry). Purchasing development rights is a key tool in agricultural land conservation programs. This strategy allows farmers to sell development rights associated with their land at a significant financial gain, while continuing to use the land's other rights, such as the right to farm. Whatcom County's goal is to maintain 100,000 acres, with the agricultural zone

currently containing 87,412 acres. To date, Whatcom County has purchased 18 agricultural conservation easements on a cumulative 899 acres, extinguishing 125 development rights.

- **Current Use Tax Assessment**

The current use tax assessment allows property owners that are farming their land to be taxed at the current use (agriculture) of the land rather than the highest and best use of the land (residential or other developed uses). This provides farmland owners with a lower tax burden and more incentive to keep the land in active agricultural production.

- **Economic development**

A focus on market development is key as there won't be any farms if farmers don't feel that farming is economically viable. In Whatcom County 42% of farmers are producing more than they can sell and need more marketing assistance. Counties and organizations can provide support by: addressing costs associated with permitting and regulations; increasing agritourism; building more direct distribution and sales channels to grocery stores, restaurants and institutions; and utilizing collective branding campaigns, like [Eat Local First](#), that educate and encourage consumers to eat local.

Session #2

2017 Whatcom Community Food Assessment Update

WFN CFA Subcommittee:

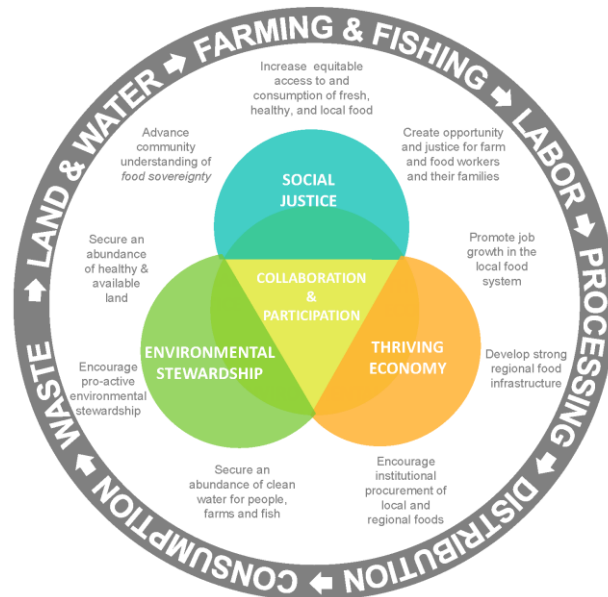
Diane Smith, WSU

Mardi Solomon, Whatcom Farm to School

Matia Jones, WWU

Diana Meeks, WFN

[CFA Presentation Slides](#)



After a year and a half of research and work the Whatcom Community Food Assessment (CFA) Sub-Committee debuted the 2017 CFA Update, [that is now available to explore on the new WFN website!](#) The team first gave a brief history of the CFA, and the overarching purpose of the CFA: to understand how our local food system is working from multiple viewpoints within each sector and across all sectors.

They explored each of the sections of the CFA, giving examples of some of the finding for each:

Methodology: This CFA Update was compiled using a robust iterative process involving individuals and groups from across the food system. Participants included 12 key informants, 13 ground-truthing groups and individuals, and 17 past and present WFN Steering Committee members.

Key Themes: Five key themes emerged that seemed to touch all of the food system sectors. Presenters briefly explored two of them including the impacts of climate change, and the challenges related to economic sustainability that many food and farming businesses are now feeling

Key Developments: Each sector lists changes that have occurred since the 2013 CFA update. The team reported on a number of changes in each sector.

Sector Overview: The CFA includes summaries for each sector of the food system, presenting specific challenges, opportunities, and collaborations. The team described some of the findings in the consumption sector.

Indicators: A number of indicators are tracked over time to measure progress toward the Network's food system goals. The chosen indicators must be relevant, collected by an outside organization on a regular basis, and be fairly easy to obtain. Indicators that illustrate decreasing food security over time were presented.

Organizations: The CFA team is still working on this section of the CFA and will be requesting that food system organizations complete current profiles.

Resources: A resource list with reports and other documents has been compiled for each sector for those who wish to dig deeper. All are encouraged to email the Network if they have resources to add, or find missing or inaccurate information.

Wrap Up & Next Steps

Keep a look out for information about our next forum, which will be held in the spring of 2018. Between forums please continue to use the WFN Listserv and subscribe to the WFN Facebook page, and explore our new website: whatcomfoodnetwork.org! Information about forums, food system planning, the CFA and more will be posted to all. Please contact the WFN assistant if you would like more information (Diana Meeks: dianam@sustainableconnections.org).