



2018 Spring 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 2018 Spring Forum was the 15th 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 May 10th, 2018 the Whatcom Food Network hosted its biannual forum in Bellingham at the Squalicum Boathouse. Approximately 55 individuals and representatives from different organizations and food businesses from around Whatcom County attended.

The forum began with an overview of the Network’s mission and goals and an update on current work, including news about the ongoing food system planning effort. In early March the WFN Food System Planning Subcommittee received unanimous approval from the Whatcom County Health Board to work with the Public Health Advisory Board to create a task force and develop recommendations for effective food system planning in Whatcom County.

The remainder of the forum included two presentations, a group activity, and time for facilitated networking, all summarized below.

Session #1

Whatcom's Fishing Sector

Presenters:

Pete Granger – Fisherman, President of the Whatcom Working Waterfront, formerly from UW SeaGrant Program

[Pete's Slides](#)

Cliff Cultee – Fisherman, and former Chair of the Lummi Nation Indian Business Council

[Cliff's Slides](#)

Pete gave attendees a general overview of the fishing sector, first through a global lens, and then narrowing focus to the impact of fishing in Whatcom County. Pete presented data about fish consumption including:

- U.S. consumers typically eat approximately 15 lbs. of seafood per year, a much lower number than other types of protein.
- Most of the seafood U.S. consumers eat is prepared in restaurants, not the home.
- 84% of the seafood we consume is imported.

Pete outlined the different kinds of boats one is likely to see in local marinas, how they harvest, what they catch, and the economic importance of this sector to our region. Some of the most notable information shared included:

- 6,033 direct and indirect jobs are created throughout Whatcom County by the maritime sector (on par with our other big industries).
- \$320 million in revenue is generated by purchases from the fishing fleet at the Port's marinas (does not include landed value of the fish catch).

He closed by reviewing some of the current challenges and opportunities we now see in the fishing sector including:

Challenges

- Climate change and unpredictable salmon runs (warming stream temperatures)
- Net pens
- Orca population feeding on salmon

Opportunities

- Increasing local consumption of local catch
- Annual [Bellingham SeaFeast](#) event
- Waterfront redevelopment projects

Cliff Cultee from the Lummi Nation then gave an overview of tribal fisheries, highlighting the importance of fishing and maritime activities to Lummi culture: “we are the Lhaq'temish, The Lummi People. We are the original inhabitants of Washington's northernmost coast and southern British Columbia. For thousands of years, we worked, struggled, and celebrated life on the shores and waters of Puget Sound.”

Cliff covered the importance of salmon to the Lummi People, saying that they are “as important at the air we breathe. [Salmon] sustains our Schelangen (way of life).” Cliff emphasized that fishing and maritime heritage bind Lummi families together, and the importance of passing on practices and knowledge down through each



Pete Granger



Cliff Cultee

generation. He also gave a brief history of the 1885 Point Elliot Treaty which ceded vast areas of land to the U.S. government and established the Lummi reservation.

Currently the Lummi have the largest Northwestern tribal fishing fleet, harvesting 5.3 million pounds annually for commercial, ceremonial, and subsistence needs. Their fishing methods include SxWole (reef netting), skiff fishing on the river and bay, stake net or set net (using poles), gillnet, and purse seine. Some of the main types of seafood harvested are salmon, halibut, shellfish, geoduck, and sea urchin.

Session #2

Labor and Innovation in the Fishing Sector

Kevin Riley, Trident Seafoods

Riley Starks, Lummi Island Wild

Kevin and Riley painted a broad picture of labor and innovation in our local fishing industry. Kevin addressed labor in the fishing sector from the perspective of [Trident Seafoods](#), the largest vertically-integrated seafood company in North America, with a large seafood processing facility located in Bellingham. Trident employs 140 full time workers on its value added lines and an additional 100 employees during “fresh” salmon season.

From his perspective staffing is one of the most challenging parts of the industry as work hours can vary widely depending on the season, size of the catch, and the job itself can be physically daunting. Each year it is a struggle to find a balance between the amount of work that needs to be done and an available workforce to meet those needs.

Riley shared his personal journey as a commercial fisherman, from buying his own boat in the 1970s to becoming one of the founding members of [Lummi Island Wild](#), which is touted as one of the most sustainable fishing companies in the world. Quoting Milo Moore, former WA State Fish & Game Director, Riley sees the industry as needing to “move away from non-selective fisheries and return to a more common-sense approach – selective fisheries – so we can better manage our resources.” Riley highlighted current work to create a specific brand for Salish Sea seafood, and the new nonprofit he is involved in developing to help educate the next generation of sustainable fisherman (as well as the public) called the [Salish Center for Sustainable Fishing Methods](#).



Group Networking Activity

At the end of the event, attendees organized by food system sector and reflected on the day’s presentations. Discussion focused on the following two questions:

1. How does my sector affect (or potentially affect) the fishing sector? Or for those working in the fishing sector: What is the one sector we should work on partnering with so that by doing so our challenges become less challenging or are totally solved?
2. What strategies would increase those connections and relationships?

Below are the notes from each sector group [Note: There were not groups for land and waste sectors.]:



Water:

- Clean water is essential for healthy fisheries and aquaculture.
- Work to remove fish passage barriers, replace culverts, conduct riparian habitat restoration (ongoing)
- Promote citizen stewardship of our water resources
- We could do more work to test for and prevent pesticides, pharmaceuticals, human waste (from failing septic systems, etc.), and polluted stormwater runoff from entering our streams and waterfront.
- Include this sector on non-profit boards for orgs working in this sector
- Don't leave out the human factor when promoting clean water policies or doing outreach (for example: helping a farmer see that they have a lot in common with a fisherman who is also dependent on the natural resource for his livelihood is more likely to affect behavior change vs. just telling them the water is polluted).
- Involve private businesses to fund education & restoration.
- Help/support fishermen/women in starting co-ops or converting to direct retail.
- Support partnerships like the Portage Bay Partnership.
- Work around the fishing industry schedule and lifestyle if you want their participation and input. Go to them, don't just ask them to come to you.
- Build upon recent successful collaborations (ex: sports fishermen, commercial tribal and non-tribal fishermen, conservation groups, and others all agreed that open water fish farms were a threat and they worked together to pass legislation ending the practice. These groups have not historically always worked well together).

Farming:

- Keeping an open mind is the most important part of understanding each other and what we can do to help each other
- Urban vs. rural perspectives need to be addressed to help each sector understand one another better.
- Work with aquaculture land-based systems
- Increase shellfish and algae production
- All natural resources share similar issues – Increase outreach to natural resources conservation groups such as NSEA (fish habitat restoration) & Puget Sound Partnership.
- Increase community education and outreach about fishing sector and what people can do to support local fisheries.

Fishing:

- Explore ways to get kids to eat more seafood (e.g., Right after NSEA has a stream enhancement project they could serve salmon to the kids before they go home. Have the kids taste the salmon they are trying to save!)
- Increase students' exposure to fish by having aquariums at school raising juvenile salmon students could release in the spring
- Should have Home Ec (cooking classes) in school curriculum.

Labor:

- Will be added to this document and updated the week of 5/21

Processing & Distribution:

- Trident distributes seafood all over the world. Would also love to work with local markets, large and small.
- Traceability: Where a product comes from is KEY for consumers. There is opportunity to add-value through expanding the market.
- Puget Sound Food Hub Cooperative is now selling fish and seafood to wholesale outlets like restaurants and institutions yet there aren't many systems currently for local seafood sales/distribution on a local level. Seafood Producers Cooperative was mentioned as a group that works both locally and nationally (one customer is Acme Farms + Kitchen).
- How do we support and help both farming & fishing – both have different needs (especially in terms of handling, refrigeration/freezing etc)? Do we need a food hub for farms and a food hub for seafood?

- How to increase local seafood use by restaurants/grocers without having a full-time staff person for that job?
- i.e. Whole Foods has a dedicated local food forager.
- How do we get people more educated about seafood so they are eating/buying more/increasing demand?
 - Community Supported Fisheries are a growing model
 - Could cultivate large drop sites like student housing sites (Gather, Bucanen Towers...)
- Community Education:
 - Opportunity for collaboration with Common Threads Farm?
 - Opportunity for a cooperative model in community education or demos among partners already doing food/nutrition education?
 - Host cooking demos at housing sites

Consumption:

- Encourage people to select local fresh fish in season and eat canned/frozen fish all year round. Shifting perspective to have fish more often than just for special events.
- Educate people about eating fresh frozen fish never exposed to air.
 - Alaska Seafood Marketing has instructions for cooking frozen fish.
<https://www.wildalaskaseafood.com/cook-it-frozen-recipes/>
- Explore ways to address food safety regulations that make it hard to sell fish at the farmers' market.
- Increase access to local fish for emergency meal programs (e.g., Maple Alley Inn).
- Main question is how to grow local fish consumption without a local outlet that is convenient, affordable, and appealing?
- The waterfront redevelopment offers an opportunity.
- Eat Local First needs to include more fish/seafood.
- Figure out how to help schools source more low-cost fish products that can be made into recipes like "Yummy Chummy Fish Cakes."

Wrap Up & Next Steps

Keep a look out for information about our next forum, which will be held in the fall of 2018. Between forums please continue to use the WFN Listserv, subscribe to the WFN Facebook page, and explore our new website: whatcomfoodnetwork.org. Please contact the WFN assistant if you would like more information, whatcomcommunityfoodnetwork@gmail.com.