

WHATCOM COMMUNITY FOOD NETWORK FORUM

MAY 11, 2011 - SESSION I

SUMMARY REPORT

BACKGROUND

In April 2010, a number of people from Whatcom County participated in a statewide “Food System Strategies Summit” held in Seattle by the Access to Healthy Foods Coalition. Inspired by the initiatives emerging across the nation, they began meeting with a small group of local stakeholders who shared the goal of increasing coordination among organizations working on various dimensions of the Whatcom County Food System. This group, which expanded and became the [Whatcom Food Network Planning Committee](#), defined their common purpose:

Working to build common understanding and facilitate collaborative efforts toward a healthy and equitable food system for all.

The Committee began planning for a kickoff event to initiate formation of a Whatcom Food Network in the spring of 2011. The event was timed to coincide with the publication of WSU’s [Whatcom County Community Food Assessment](#), which was made possible by funding support from the Whatcom Community Foundation and the Mary Redmond Foundation. The Whatcom Food Network Forum Session One was held on May 11, 2011



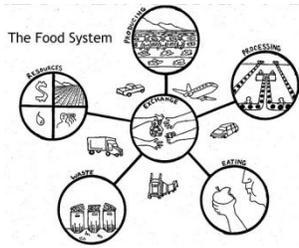
(The Whatcom Food Network Planning Committee)

PURPOSE OF THE WHATCOM COMMUNITY FOOD NETWORK FORUM

The purpose of the Food Network Forum was to bring together a diverse group of community partners to learn about the findings of the Whatcom Community Food Assessment, learn of model collaboration projects in other communities, and participate in small group discussions to further the implementation of the food network. Activities were designed to allow participants to get to know others working on similar goals in and across the food system, and create connections for future partnerships.



Sixty-two participants representing 35 organizations attended the day-long Food Network Forum (see Appendix A for list of organizations represented).



Working to build common understanding and facilitate collaborative efforts toward a healthy and equitable food system for all.

-Purpose Statement of the Whatcom Food Network Planning Committee

Whatcom Food System Forum, May 11, 2011 Session 1 Agenda

Agenda Item	Description	Time
Welcome and Overview	<i>Laurie Brockman: Facilitator, Professional Solutions</i>	9:00-9:10
Introduction	<i>Whatcom Food Network Planning Committee Members</i>	9:10-9:40
The Big Picture	<i>The Food System and Why it Matters in our Community: Samya Lutz, Whatcom County Planning Department</i>	9:40-10:00
Small Group Activity	<i>What's Your Interest in the Food System?</i>	10:00-10:35
Whatcom County Food Assessment	<i>Findings of the Whatcom County Food Assessment: Colleen Burrows, WSU Whatcom County Extension</i>	10:50-11:10
Equity and Food System	<i>Current Gaps in our Food System—Equity for Farm Workers: Rosalinda Guillen, Community to Community Development</i>	11:10-11:35
Participant Activity	<i>Gaining a Better Understanding of our Roles in the Food System</i>	11:35-12:15
Film Shorts	<i>Two Perspectives on Food Systems</i>	12:45-1:00
Weaving the Food System	<i>Holly O'Neil and Mardi Solomon, Crossroads Consulting, Whatcom Farm to School; Nicole Willis, Whatcom County Health Department; Laura Ridenour, Sustainable Connections:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Momentum for local food system coordination</i> • <i>Examples from local catalyst projects and model communities</i> • <i>Whatcom Food System Network process & structure</i> 	1:00-1:40
Participatory Activity	<i>Asset mapping across the food system</i>	1:40-2:15
Participatory Activity	<i>Assessing our food system coordination needs</i>	2:25-3:05
Network Next Steps, Events and Evaluation	<i>Holly O'Neil: Whatcom Farm to School, Crossroads Consulting</i>	3:05-3:15
Closing Remarks	<i>Drew Betz: WSU Whatcom County Extension</i>	3:15-3:30

1. THE BIG PICTURE- *The Food System and Why it Matters in Our Community*



Whatcom County Planner, Samya Lutz, beautifully summed up why we need a more coordinated food system in Whatcom County in her opening presentation to Food Forum participants.

The following excerpt gives the essence of her message:

Excerpt from “The Big Picture” by Samya Lutz

Why do we need to coordinate and connect our efforts?

Most of our organizations are already a part of some consortium that helps us leverage our efforts – the farmers have for example the Farm Bureau, the market grower associations, the Dairy Federation, Whatcom Farm Friends, the Cattlemen, the Seed Potato Commission, Raspberry and other Commissions.

What is unique about the idea of a food system network is that it is at the same time more focused and more broad in its scope than any of these examples of farm networks. A regional food system network asks us to think beyond the specific issues and targeted goals of our particular interest group.

As we work to further the position of our organization & the interests our constituents, is there room to incorporate the broader interests of others? And how can we possibly answer that question unless we actually know what the interests are of others in our region who are also involved in food issues?

A food system network is focused, in that it is regional -- not in a protectionist or isolated way, but in a way that builds our resilience and our capacity as a region to grow our economy, to meet our community needs, and to respond to disasters that may come our way.

Our region will be stronger if we have a diversified food economy.

Our region will be stronger if our children do not have nutritional deficiencies that hinder their learning.

Our region will be stronger if all of us have opportunities to incorporate healthy living into our daily lives.

Our region will be stronger if farm and food service workers are treated with dignity and respect and are able to earn a living wage.

Our region will be stronger if we are able to meet our basic food needs in the aftermath of a major earthquake.

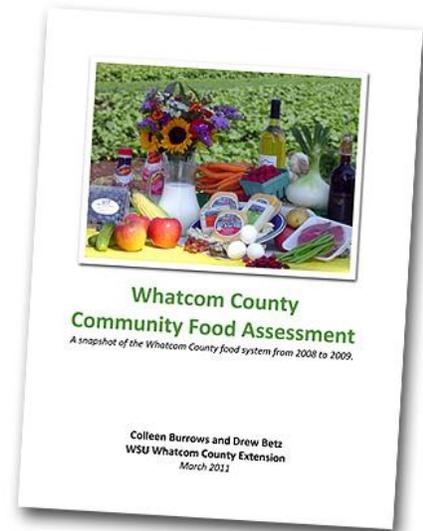
Our region will be stronger if our farmers have the land and water they need to produce food here.

We have huge capacity here in Whatcom County. We have creativity, skills, experience; we have infrastructure, facilities, transportation; and we have organizations old and new. All of this can be leveraged to do what we already do more effectively, and to adapt to new realities that continue to shape the food system in our community.

2. FINDINGS OF THE WHATCOM COUNTY COMMUNITY FOOD ASSESSMENT

Colleen Burrows of WSU Whatcom County Extension, and an author of the [Whatcom County Community Food Assessment](#) (CFA), presented a summary of its content. The CFA process started in 2007, with meetings of a diverse steering committee to select indicators of the food system to study. This group worked to advise the data collection process and hosted a public input meeting in February 2008. Published in March 2011, the report covers the following aspects of the food system:

- Demographics
- Health and food consumption
- Food Access
- Agriculture
- Fisheries
- Food Processing
- Food Waste



The CFA offers a central document rich with baseline data for future comparisons, as well as useful indications of where current gaps exist in the Whatcom County food system.

3. EQUITY AND THE FOOD SYSTEM

Among the significant gaps in our current food system are those faced by people living in poverty and farm workers.



Rosalinda Guillen, Executive Director of Community to Community Development, put the plight of farm workers into the larger context of equity issues within our food system.

The following excerpts from Rosalinda's presentation highlight her main points.

Excerpts from “Equity and the Food System” by Rosalinda Guillen

It's only been recently that I've begun to think of myself as a farm worker.... Most of the time it is not something you can be proud of in our local communities. For many years, and for many of us, we don't think of ourselves as an important component of a system. It's only been in the last ten years that I've begun to look at a food system and our role within it... and the fact that we have an equal place in that system.

This is what we believe when we talk about the food system, when we talk about equity, when we talk about working together, when we talk about alliances and friendship:

- *We believe that food sovereignty really is about the people's democratic control of the food system.*
- *It is the right of all people to healthy, culturally appropriate food, produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods.*
- *It is the people's right to define their own food and agricultural systems.*

We seek sovereignty from the monopolies that dominate our food systems with the complicity of our governments. We believe that in order to create a better food system we must break up the corporate control of our seeds, our land, our water and natural resources.

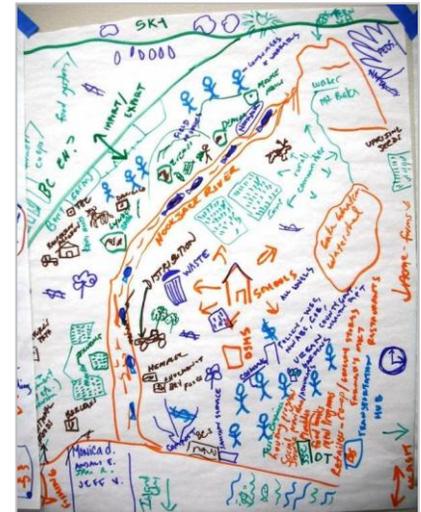
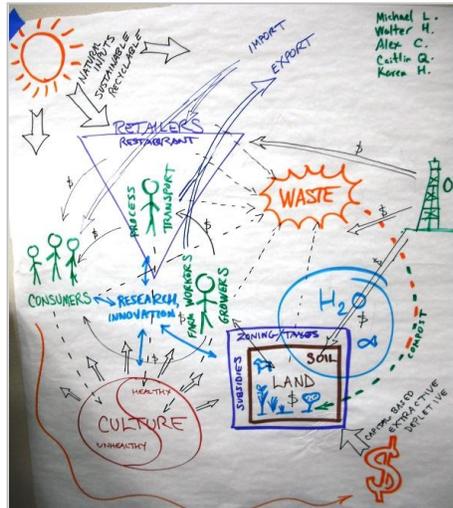
We are finding that this work we are doing is inextricably linked to the struggle for workers' rights, immigrant rights, women's rights, the fight to dismantle racism in our communities, and the struggle for sovereignty in indigenous communities.

The food system has workers all across it that have the ability and the capacity to help define a better food system. We must develop, as a community, full partnerships with workers and their organizations. It's the people who are working the land, working in the processing plants, and in anything else that has to do with food, that will come up with a solution if we open up the room and listen. And listening is going to be hard, because we as workers speak in a different way.

If we are going to bring equity into the food system, there are some sacrifices and tough decisions that are going to have to be made... in order to save our land, continue to have healthy food, but most of all have total respect and dignity for everybody that is involved in the food system.

4. GROUP ACTIVITY: *What Does the Food System Look Like?*

Participants were asked to work in small groups to draw a picture representing the major components of the food system, how they are connected, and to place their own organizations in the picture. This activity engaged participants in thinking about the complexity of food systems and the intricate coordination needed to make them work.



5. FILM SHORTS: *Two Perspectives on the Food System*

Participants viewed two brief film clips which illustrated different perspectives on the food system and how our collective consciousness is shifting as our society gains understanding about the importance of the food system's health and integrity.

→ A brief clip from "How to Talk Food Systems", a video from the WK Kellogg Foundation, gave context for what people think about when asked about the food system, when given certain cues. <http://www.wkcf.org/knowledge-center/resources/2007/01/How-To-Talk-Food-Systems.aspx>

→ The second video was of an 11-year old boy who articulately summarizes what is wrong with our food system:

http://www.ted.com/talks/birke_baehr_what_s_wrong_with_our_food_system.html

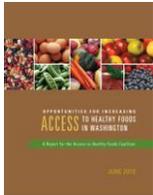
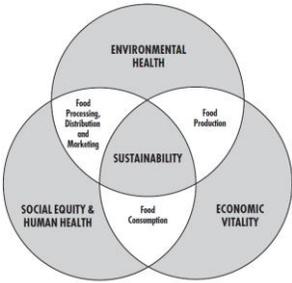
TALKS | TEDx
Birke Baehr: What's wrong with our food system



6. WEAVING THE FOOD NETWORK: Model Communities, Charting the Food System, Local Momentum & Network Development

MODEL COMMUNITIES

Nicole Willis, Community Health Specialist at the Whatcom County Health Department, described three model community projects that Whatcom County can learn from in forming a Food Network.

	WASHINGTON STATE	CITY OF VANCOUVER, BC	MULTNOMAH COUNTY, OREGON
GROUP TYPE	<p>Access to Healthy Foods Coalition State-level coalition provides advocacy and technical assistance for state and local food access efforts.</p>	<p>Vancouver Food Policy Advisory and policy development body for the City of Vancouver.</p>	<p>Multnomah Food Initiative is supported by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multnomah Food Initiative Steering Committee Portland/Multnomah Food Policy Council
FOCUS AREAS	<p>To improve access and availability of healthier foods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Where we live. → Where we learn. → Where we work. → Where we play. 	<p>Five principles of a just and sustainable food supply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Community economic development → Ecological health → Social justice → Collaboration and participation → Celebration 	<p>Action Areas of the Multnomah Food Initiative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Local Food → Healthy Eating → Social Equity → Economic Vitality
ACHIEVEMENTS	<p>Co-sponsored WA State Study & Report: Opportunities for Increasing Access to Healthy Foods in Washington.</p> 	<p>Implementation projects of the Vancouver Food Charter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanded street food options • Backyard Hens • Community & School Gardens • Urban Bee Keeping • Grow a Row, Share a Row 	<p>Multnomah Food Initiative's comprehensive and strategic</p>  <p>Multnomah Food Action Plan- 2025</p>
FOOD SYSTEM MODEL		 <p>Figure 1. Goals of a Community Food System</p>	

CHARTING THE FOOD SYSTEM

Holly O’Neil of Crossroads Consulting and the Whatcom Farm-to-School Support Team shared a draft chart that lists and categorizes the organizations working in Whatcom County on various aspects of the food system. The chart follows a “farm to fork” model, connecting the dots between land and water resources, all the way to the consumption of food. The chart also shows what type of services the organization provides: Technical Support, Education and Advocacy, or Policy and Funding. There are dozens of organizations that are involved in bringing healthy food to our community. The purpose of the chart is to help us understand “who’s who” so that we can collaborate more effectively towards common goals. NW Farms and Food helped design the chart, and it is intended to become an interactive website, so that one would be able to click on different organizations and be able to go directly to their websites. Holly invited feedback on the chart, and noted that the chart would continue to change as organizations changed. The development of the chart (Appendix B) was made possible by funding from the Sustainable Whatcom Fund Committee of the Whatcom Community Foundation.

LOCAL MOMENTUM: *WHATCOM FARM-TO-SCHOOL*



Mardi Solomon, also part of Crossroads Consulting and the Whatcom Farm-to-School Support Team, described how the farm-to-school movement is a perfect example of how essential coordination among all aspects of the food system is for increasing access to local food in the school setting. Locally, the Whatcom Farm-to-School (F2S) Support Team is funded by the Sustainable Whatcom Fund Committee of the Whatcom Community Foundation to work with all school districts in the county. As the F2S Support Team works to increase demand for local food, they are in close communication with community partners who are striving to increase local capacity for food production, processing, and distribution. Everyone must be well-coordinated and keep pace with one another for the system to maintain a balance of supply and demand.

Given that the F2S Support Team’s focus ranges from the home to the classroom to the school cafeteria to entire school districts, they wind up interacting with a wide variety of community partners. A major task of the F2S Support Team is to facilitate connections between people and organizations by looking for places of overlap among them, and then encouraging prospective partners to consider ways in which they can support one another. That is the same spirit in which this Food Forum was planned, and that we hope will propel it forward.

8. GROUP ACTIVITY: *Assessing Our Food System Coordination Needs*

In another small group activity, participants addressed three questions:

1. How would a coordinated food system support the needs of your organization?
2. What is exciting/interesting to you/your organization about a Whatcom Food System Network?
3. In what ways can my organization support the needs of the broader food system?



Participants Identified Ways that a Network Could Help:

- Creation of partnerships – mutual support
- Integration of work – cross-pollination
- Identifying and addressing gaps and barriers
- Identifying measurable benchmarks, gathering data
- Access to capital/funding
- Access to volunteers
- Raising awareness of the food system and sustainable agriculture

Major Topics of Interest:

- Creation of an organized advocacy body – Food Policy Council / Office of Sustainability
- Securing the agricultural land base
- Increasing access to local food for low-income families and the market
- Recognition of the importance of farm workers and improving the situation for farm worker communities and families
- Development of better food distribution networks
- Creation of a local food hub (job skills training, kitchen to prepare local food)

Expertise/Resources that Organizations Can Offer:

- Providing education – the community, elected officials, service learning opportunities
- Assisting with communications – website, newsletter, events
- Organizing grassroots action and networking –encouraging public involvement
- Sharing and developing leadership skills
- Encouraging regulation changes
- Accessing funding, generating capital
- Providing able-bodied workers
- Assisting with business and cooperative development, job development
- Facilitating access to land for farming
- Serving as an informational resources on farm worker issues
- Helping to build a movement

9. NEXT STEPS & CLOSING REMARKS

A second Food Network Forum will be held Monday, October 17th, 2011, where participants will be involved in establishing the priorities for the Food Network, beginning with the above list of “Major topics of interest,” and continue collaborating and integrating efforts to create a more equitable, sustainable and healthy food system.



The interest in the local food system is clear in this room today. It matters how we spend our time and money when we think about the importance of local food. We are connected to farms and to the farmers and farm workers. We are connected to the soil and how we care for it does make a difference for today and tomorrow's food supply. We are connected to each other by the choices we make and as eaters in this glorious life. Grow, buy, prepare, and dispose of your food with an eye to how it impacts us and all of the people around us. Do it in good health.

- Drew Betz, Director, WSU Whatcom County Extension

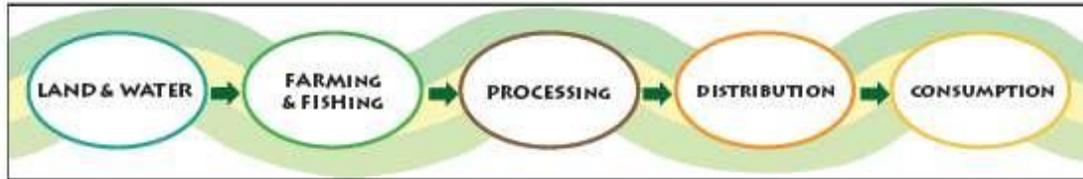
APPENDIX A: *Organizations Represented at the Food Network Forum, May 2011*

- Bellewood Acres
- Bellingham Farmers Market
- Bellingham Food Bank
- Center for Local Self Reliance
- City of Bellingham
- Cloud Mountain Farm Center
- Common Threads Farm
- Community Food Coop
- Community to Community Development
- Crossroads Consulting
- EarthCare Garden Designs
- Futurewise Whatcom
- Kulshan Community Land Trust
- Local Food Works
- Mount Baker School District
- Northwest Agriculture and Business Council
- Northwest Indian College
- Five Loaves Farm-Northwest Washington A Rocha USA
- Opportunity Council
- Puget Sound Food Network
- Resilience Institute of Huxley College
- Skagit County Democrats
- Slow Food Fourth Corner
- Sustainable Connections
- Washington Department of Ecology
- Washington State Department of Agriculture
- Whatcom Community Foundation
- Whatcom Community Television and Communications
- Whatcom County
- Whatcom County Council on Aging
- Whatcom County Planning and Development Services
- Whatcom County Public Works
- Whatcom Farm-to-School Support Team
- WSU Food \$ense
- WSU Whatcom County Extension

APPENDIX B: Organizations working to improve the food system

DRAFT 4/27/11

ORGANIZATIONS WORKING TO IMPROVE THE FOOD SYSTEM



	TECHNICAL SUPPORT*	EDUCATION & ADVOCACY*	POLICY & FUNDING*
ORGANIZATIONS ADDRESSING LAND & WATER	City of Bellingham - Planning, Public Works & Parks		
	Futurewise		
	Kulshan Community Land Trust		
	Marine Resources Committee		
	Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Assoc.		
	Puget Sound Partnership		
	RE Sources		
	Shellfish Districts		
	Washington Department of Ecology		
			Whatcom Community Foundation - Sustainable Whatcom
	Whatcom Conservation District		
			Whatcom County Health Dept.
			Whatcom County Planning & Dev.
	Whatcom Farm Friends		
	Whatcom Land Trust		
WSU Whatcom County Extension			
USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture)			

ORGANIZATIONS ADDRESSING FARMING & FISHING	Community Food Co-op		
	Growing Washington		
	NABC (NW Agriculture Business Center)		
	Sustainable Connections		
	WA Sustainable Food & Farming Network		
			Whatcom Community Foundation - Sustainable Whatcom
	Whatcom Conservation District		
			Whatcom County Health Dept.
	Whatcom Farm Friends		
	WSDA (Washington State Department of Agriculture)		
	WSDA Small Farm Direct Marketing		
	WSU Whatcom County Extension		
▪ Farm Workers	Community to Community Development		

***TECHNICAL SUPPORT** - providing expertise, training, tools and assistance.

EDUCATION & ADVOCACY - providing information and promoting awareness to target audiences or the community at large.

POLICY & FUNDING - providing financial resources and/or developing or influencing legislation/regulation.

Chart Courtesy of the Sustainable Whatcom Fund Committee of the Whatcom Community Foundation

	TECHNICAL SUPPORT*	EDUCATION & ADVOCACY*	POLICY & FUNDING*	
ORGANIZATIONS ADDRESSING PROCESSING	Growing Washington			
	NABC (NW Agriculture Business Center)			
	Sustainable Connections			
	USDA - Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)			
			Whatcom Community Foundation - Sustainable Whatcom	
			Whatcom County Health Dept.	
	WSU Whatcom County Extension			
ORGANIZATIONS ADDRESSING DISTRIBUTION		Common Threads Farm		
	NABC - Puget Sound Food Network			
		National Farm-to-School Network		
	Sustainable Connections			
	United Food and Commercial Workers - UFCW Local 21			
	USDA (FNS & AMS Collaboration) Farm-to-School Tactical Team			
			Whatcom Community Foundation - Sustainable Whatcom	
			Whatcom County Health Dept.	
	Whatcom Co. School Garden Collective			
	Whatcom Farm-to-School Support Team			
		WSDA Farm-to-School Program		
	▪ Hunger Relief		Anti-Hunger Coalition	
		Food Banks & Congregate Meal Providers		
		USDA - Food & Nutrition Service (FNS) Nutrition Assistance Programs		
ORGANIZATIONS ADDRESSING CONSUMPTION		Community Food Co-op		
		Community Food Security Coalition		
		Northwest Indian College Cooperative Extension		
		Slow Food - 4th Corner Bellingham		
	Sustainable Connections			
		Transition Whatcom		
			Whatcom County Health Dept.	
		WSU Whatcom County Extension		
	▪ Grow Your Own	BUGS - Bellingham Urban Garden Syndicate		
		Center for Local Self-Reliance		
Local Food Works				
WSU Whatcom County Extension				

*TECHNICAL SUPPORT - providing expertise, training, tools and assistance

EDUCATION & ADVOCACY - providing information and promoting awareness to target audiences or the community at large

POLICY & FUNDING - providing financial resources and/or developing or influencing legislation/regulation

Chart Courtesy of the Sustainable Whatcom Fund Committee of the Whatcom Community Foundation