

WHATCOM FOOD NETWORK LAUNCH JUNE 13, 2012 – SESSION 3 SUMMARY REPORT

I. ABOUT THE WHATCOM FOOD NETWORK

The Whatcom Food Network is a body of organizations, agencies, and institutions that are involved in strengthening the local and regional food system. The primary goals of the Whatcom Food Network are to:

- Increase coordination, communication, and collaboration among food-system related organizations, agencies, and institutions.
- Gain a collective understanding of the barriers and gaps in Whatcom County's food system and develop common goals for addressing them.
- Build community capacity through education, leveraging resources, and mutual support.
- Work inclusively with the diverse communities of our region to ensure lasting success.

[Additional Information about the Whatcom Food Network](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)



II. WHATCOM FOOD NETWORK EVENTS

NETWORK LAUNCH

Following two Whatcom Food Network planning forums held in 2011 ([Forum 1 Summary](#) & [Forum 2 Summary](#)), the purpose of this session was to formally launch the Network and facilitate action groups in which participants could discuss new initiatives and key projects.

[Whatcom Food Network Launch Agenda](#)

Six action groups were proposed. Attendees participated in a facilitated discussion with one or more groups to determine how to collaboratively take action on the topic. What follows are descriptions of each action group and a proposed timeline for next steps.

A part of the launch involved a request to sign a Declaration of Support. Individuals and organizations are invited to join WFN as members by signing the Declaration in support of the goals of the Whatcom Food Network, available on the WFN [website](#).

III. ACTION GROUPS: PRESENTATION & DISCUSSION

FOOD SYSTEM EQUITY
Facilitator: Rosalinda Guillen, Community to Community Development, rosalindag@qwestoffice.net
Description of Project
Rosalinda suggests looking at local food systems through the lens of food sovereignty and educating people with an "equal voice" to create a link between underrepresented and marginalized communities and food system work in Whatcom County. While educating, it is important to make sure not to tell people that we come to help or that we have the solutions, but to have culturally appropriate conversations that build solutions from the grassroots up. This in turn will create an equitable process which will raise the overall participation in finding ways to improve our food system.
Which Whatcom Food Network Goal does this align with?
Advance community understanding of food sovereignty
Tasks of Potential Collaborators
After discussion the action group concluded that the next steps would be to look at links within agriculture cultures and the stakeholders in agriculture in regards to having a voice in policy development. There was also discussion to review the language in the nine states that have passed food sovereignty legislation if the action group chooses to take the direction of change in policy.
Timeline
The timeline could vary depending on the commitment and direction the action group chooses to go. Policy change would require much commitment and would take a long time where as education has the potential to not take as long depending on the circumstances or the short term actions chosen.

PLANNING THE 2ND ANNUAL “REEL FOOD FILM FEST”

Facilitator: Sara Southerland, Sustainable Connections, sara@sconnect.org

Description of Project

Four local food organizations helped launch this film series in winter/spring 2012 with 14 showings at libraries around Whatcom County. *The goals* of the “Reel Food Film Fest” are to 1) reach a broad Whatcom County audience with the real stories behind our food; 2) show how people are changing the way they eat for the better; 3) inform them about how the farm-to-school (F2S) program is working to increase local, fresh, seasonal and healthy foods in school meals; and 4) encourage them to become involved in the local food movement.

In addition to increasing the number of attendees for next year, we would like to have a well thought out, coordinated, educational and resource effort to take with us to each event throughout the county that includes next steps such as: a take home activity, organizations to get involved with right away, simple solutions to eating healthy on a budget within your immediate community.

Which Whatcom Food Network Goal does this align with?

This project meets all of the WFN’s goals. The primary goals for the project at this time are:

- Provide resources and education to diverse communities around Whatcom County with diverse needs and gaps
- Increase coordination and leverage resources between organizations through Reel Food Film Fest events.

Tasks of Potential Collaborators

Participants in this action group discussed reaching a larger audience by showing films at different locations such as schools and resource centers. There was also discussion around the topic of giving toolkits to the attendees allowing them to have something to take away from the film that shows what they learned.

Timeline

- **Network Launch June 13** - Planning for the 2013 Reel Food Film Fest begins
- **October-November 2013** – Apply for funding, as needed
- **February-May 2013** – Host film events around the county



CREATING HEALTHY FOOD ENVIRONMENTS: RESPONDING TO THE OBESITY AND HEALTH CRISIS

Facilitator: Laura Ridenour, Sustainable Connections, laura@sconnect.org

Description of Project

Creating healthy food environments is an idea of a collaborative project to address chronic disease and community health improvement goals by increasing healthy eating habits and food environments. This project would provide people within Whatcom County increased access to nutrition education, access to healthy foods, and engage businesses in creating healthy food environments so that everyone can make more healthy food decisions.

Physical, environmental and social environments have impacts on behavior and health outcomes. Developing healthy food environments where people work, live and get health care is the first necessary step toward setting strategic goals that inform community-wide initiatives for healthy children and families, as well as the populations most impacted by health and social issues.

Working with local businesses to shift their internal communications, advertising and messaging would persuade employees and residents to adopt healthy food habits. Key participant groups for healthy food environments are schools, hospitals and health care provider workplaces, as they educate their clients and customers as well as professionals in the field of health, and have shared chronic disease and community health goals. Health care providers and businesses of all sizes and kinds can empower everyone as role models in establishing healthier food norms in their workplaces.

Of note, the Community Health Assessment found that those disproportionately impacted by health and social disparities have “a desire and willingness to identify and participate in solutions that build on their respective community strengths.” This project could create a community voice and engagement process that affects the overall community, too.

Which Whatcom Food Network Goal does this align with?

Establishing Healthy Food Environments fits with all of the core WFN values, and with the following goal areas: Encourage institutional procurement of healthy local food, facilitate community dialogue in policy and decision making, increase equitable access to and consumption of fresh, healthy and local food, advance community understanding of food sovereignty.

Tasks of Potential Collaborators

Through positive messages, in collaboration with the Health Department, Sustainable Connections business members, and other partners working toward the Community Health Improvement Plan and ACHEVE goals, the citizens of Whatcom will have better access and knowledge around healthy foods, and will adopt behavior changes.

Initial tasks could include setting common messaging and goals for healthy behaviors, establishing workplace healthy norms for actions of all employees, creating a mentorship for healthy food cooking classes, exercise and nutrition, and advocacy and messaging for healthy food environments, including advertising in and around schools and workplaces. Collaborators will also coordinate increased healthy food access points, connecting workplaces, schools and corner stores with recipes, guides to local food, and local and direct-market farmers and nutritious local food options.

Timeline

This group was a topic discussion group focused on sharing information and increasing collaborative understanding. No further action is scheduled at this time.

AGRICULTURAL STRATEGIC PLAN: COUNTYWIDE AGRICULTURE POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

**Facilitator: Samya Lutz, Whatcom County Planning,
SLKLutz@co.whatcom.us**

Description of Project

The Whatcom County Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC) created the Agricultural Strategic Plan which was then endorsed by the County Executive and Council last year. The AAC is largely made up of farmers representing various commodity groups in Whatcom County: dairy, berries, nursery crops, seed potatoes; as well as market growers and those from agriculture support businesses. We're interested in a wide diversity of perspectives on planning for agriculture, including perspectives on the laws, policies, and regulations, how water can be used, and so much more.

Which Whatcom Food Network Goal does this align with?

Facilitate community dialogue in policy development and decision-making; secure an abundance of healthy and available land; and leverage regional strength to access resources and raise awareness.

Tasks of Potential Collaborators

Collaborators with the agricultural strategic plan are encouraged to become involved in the official planning processes that make policy and regulatory change in the county (through public workshops and open houses, and through regular meetings of the Planning Commission and County Council). What is missing? What is important to you or your organization? Involvement does not have to mean "advocacy" – it can simply mean expressing your perspective wherever you happen to focus within the food system in order to remind others of the breadth this work has and to keep individual initiatives in perspective. Diversity among collaborators is needed in order for all voices within Whatcom County to be heard.

Timeline

Implementation of the Agriculture Strategic Plan has begun and will continue over the next several years. The County Planning Commission will discuss the plan in general on July 12, and begin consideration of specific items (the first is the Parcel Reconfiguration Tool) in September 2012. Those interested in staying abreast of these initiatives can be added to a regular email list.



FOOD SYSTEM PUBLIC EDUCATION

**Facilitator: Colleen Burrows, WSU Agriculture Special Projects
Coordinator, cburrows@wsu.edu**

Description of Project

The Whatcom County Community Food Assessment documented the complexity of the food system and how few people understand many of the intricacies of the system. This action group will work to educate the public about the issues within the Whatcom County food system and how we all fit together in this puzzle. Education may be accomplished through a variety of methods, including forums, films, and article series.

Which Whatcom Food Network Goal does this align with?

Facilitate community dialogue in policy development and decision making.

Tasks of Potential Collaborators

The food system is very complex so using a variety of education methods would be necessary. The action group discussed incorporating volunteers to offer education in the public schools as a way to incorporate a more diverse audience. Topics such as community gardens as well as school gardens would be an effective way to not only educate but get the community involved. However there were gaps identified that must be addressed. School-based education would not be effective for those adults without kids. Other gaps include those who may not be connected to educational organizations such as the Community Food Co-op, and the lack of knowledge in larger food system issues.

Timeline

Group meeting in July to determine educational opportunities through the year.



CREATING A “RECIPE REPOSITORY” AND COMPENDIUM OF NUTRITION EDUCATION RESOURCES

**Facilitator: Mardi Solomon, Whatcom Farm-to-School,
coordinator@whatcomfarmtoschool.org**

Description of Project

A big part of encouraging people to eat more fresh, healthy, and locally grown foods is helping them learn to prepare these foods in simple, quick, and delicious ways. For those who feel comfortable in the kitchen and those who are motivated to do more cooking, an easily accessible on-line “Recipe Repository” will be a helpful tool for getting inspiration and guidance. For those who are not skilled in cooking with fresh foods and making healthy meals, there are existing nutrition education resources available in Whatcom County (e.g., cooking classes, blogs), and we want to make it easy for people to find them on-line. This Action Group will compile a “Recipe Repository” and a compendium of nutrition education resources.

Which Whatcom Food Network Goal does this align with?

Increase consumption of and equitable access to local healthy food

Tasks of Potential Collaborators

Collaborators will:

- Contribute to the collections of recipes, on-line resources, and nutrition education tools.
- Spread the word to people who may have resources to contribute to the collections.
- Assist with design, organization, and promotion of the two on-line tools.
- Test recipes.

One idea is to host community pot lucks so people can share recipes and locally produced foods they enjoy.

Timeline

- **June-July 2012** – Collect materials with primary focus on Recipe Repository, but also collect nutrition education materials
- **August 2012** – Organize Recipe Repository, continue collecting nutrition education materials
- **September 2012** - Upload Recipe Repository website(s), continue collecting nutrition education materials
- **October 2012** – Organize Compendium of Nutrition Education resources
- **November 2012** – Upload nutrition education resources
- **January 2012** – Begin planning community potlucks to share recipes and local foods



IV. NEXT STEPS

Network leadership will transition from a Planning Committee to a Steering Committee. The Planning Committee will be working to ensure that organizations representing the diversity within the Whatcom County food system are part of the Whatcom Food Network. The Steering Committee will be composed of individuals who represent all sectors of the food system and will be supported administratively by WSU Extension and the Whatcom County Health Department. Members who are interested in serving on the Steering Committee should email: whatcomcommunityfoodnetwork@gmail.com

To join WFN as an individual supporter or on behalf of your agency you can sign a Declaration of Support. You can sign it online by going to the [WFN website](#).

Members can communicate about events, potential collaborative opportunities, current action group activities and more using the WFN [e-bulletin](#). The e-bulletin will be the main tool for WFN communication between biannual WFN meetings.

APPENDIX

List of Attending Agencies

Bellingham Farmers Market
Bellingham Food Bank
Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship
Catholic Housing Services
City of Bellingham
Common Threads Farm
Forest Garden Urban Ecology Center
Garden of Hope (Neighbors in Need food bank, Mt. Vernon)
Mercy Housing Northwest
Slow Food Fourth Corner
Sustainable Connections
Whatcom Community Foundation
Whatcom Community Television and Communications
Whatcom Council on Aging
Whatcom County Health Department
Whatcom Farm Friends
WSU Extension
WSU Extension--Carbon Masters
WSU Whatcom County Extension, Food \$ense