



2019 Spring Forum Summary Report

Background & History

The Whatcom Food Network (WFN) is a group of organizations that have been working together since 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 2019 Spring Forum was the 17th 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 connect the richly diverse organizations involved in the food system over the discussion of important topics.



Forum at a Glance

When: May 16th, 2019 from 2–5pm

Hosted by: Whatcom Food Network

Where: The Squalicum Boathouse, Bellingham Wa

Attended by: Approximately 55 individuals and representatives from different organizations and food businesses from around Whatcom County.

Forum Outline

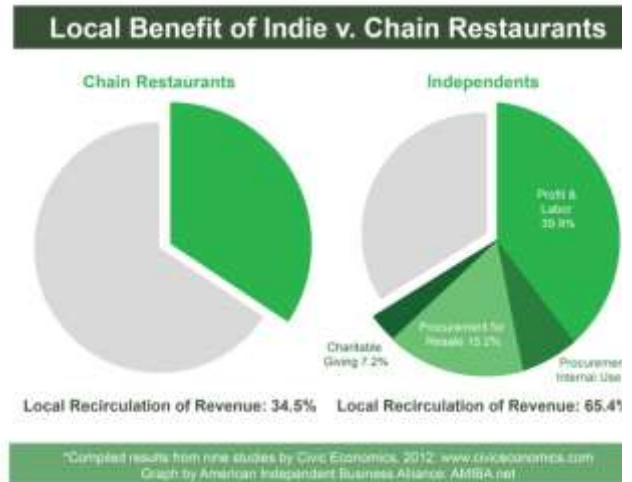
1. Overview of the Network’s mission and goals and an update on current work given by Chris Elder, Whatcom Food Network Chair
 2. Facilitated Networking
 3. Introduction to the Consumption Sector given by Karlee Deatherage of RE Sources for Sustainable Communities
 4. Presentation 1: *The Landscape of Local*, Sara Southerland of Sustainable Connections
 5. Presentation 2: *Barriers to Equity*, Ali Jensen and Holly O’Neil of Whatcom County Health Department
 6. Presentation 3: *The Good Food Promise*, Jessica Sankey and Patrick Durgan of the Bellingham School District
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Presentation #1

The Landscape of Local ([slides](#))

Sara Southerland – Food & Farming Director,
Sustainable Connections

1. What local food is, why it's important, impact it has here, who are the eaters here, and how you can get involved in growing our local food system.
2. About SC F&F program.
 - a. Definition of Local Food: How far does your food travel to get to you?
 - b. SC defines local food as food grown, produced, harvested, made in 4 county region: Whatcom, Skagit, Island, & Sand Juan Counties.
 - c. What is not local – Big corporations sourcing a handful of local products.
3. Why is local important: People, profit, planet
 - a. Economic Multiplier – benefit of independent vs. chain restaurants.
 - b. Many more dollars spent stay local.
 - c. Even greater economic benefit in shopping at local grower.
4. Who are eaters in our community and how are we choosing the food we eat? – 2017 Market research conducted 3 focus groups.
 - a. Price, convenience, health, and quality were main factors influencing “swing shoppers.”
 - b. Barriers and things that make it easier to purchase local at farmers market, CSA, grocers, restaurants.
 - c. Need to use careful language in trying to bring swing shoppers into buying local. They liked more soft and nourishing messages rather than directive and admonishing. E.g., “Eat Local, Nourish the people you love.” “The best flavors are from home.”



Recirculation of revenue for independent restaurants vs.

Things that are working:

- ELF Campaign
- Local food consumption is on the rise (2% in 2010 to 4-5% in 2018)
- Farm fresh workplaces
- Growing new farmers

Challenges:

- Economy of scale – most farms are small to mid-scale. Hard to compete on basis of price
- Expensive land prices & entry into farm & food businesses
- Price of food
- “local washing” – standing out as authentically local takes intentional effort

What can we do?

- Prioritize food in your budget
 - Eat with the seasons
 - Plan ahead when shopping & meal planning
 - Support orgs who are doing this work
 - Buy from local farmers, grocers, and restaurants
 - CSA's are one of the most affordable ways to eat local
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Presentation #2

Barriers to Equity (slides)

Ali Jensen & Holly O'Neil - Whatcom County Health Department



Map depicting “food deserts” in East Whatcom County, as well as Birchwood, Puget, Lakeway, and Whatcom Falls neighborhoods due to physical and economic barriers to access.

1. Est. 30,000 W.C. residents are considered food insecure – don't have reliable access to healthy food (access defined as economic, physical, & cultural access).
 - Physical access: Distance from a grocery store (1/2 mile or further in urban area, 10 miles or more in rural).
 - Live 25-40 minutes from full-service grocery for people with vehicle. Limited public transportation.
2. Food insecurity in childhood is linked to:
 - poor ability to learn;
 - 32% more likely to be obese.
3. Here in Whatcom County:
 - Economic – 12,000 SNAP households in Whatcom County. Lummi Nation & East Whatcom County have highest levels Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP).
 - 40% of Whatcom school children are on Free/Reduced lunch.
 - Two urban food deserts in Whatcom County and one in East County. (Food desert = census tract with poverty rate of 20%+ and far from grocery store.)
 - Half of children in East County are eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch (East County includes: Nugents Corner, Deming, Acme, and Kendall).
4. Food landscape assessment: Nutrition Environment Measures Survey (NEMS), community survey of ~300 people, and community focus groups.
 - Compared cost of the 7 convenience stores that East County residents could access to prices at Winco. Prices at East County stores were more than twice Winco prices for some items.
 - ¾ of 300 people surveyed felt food was not accessible in East Whatcom. 84% travel to Bellingham to access food.
5. Food sovereignty – the right of peoples to eat culturally appropriate and healthy food, to define their own food & agricultural systems, and to control the mechanisms and policies of food. A challenge is to look at equitable food access through the lens of food sovereignty. What would equitable access look like in Whatcom County?
6. We'll be updating the Foothills Food Access Plan this year. Food pantry and Twin Sisters Farmers Market came out of the current plan. Nooksack Native Foods Project is another related project.

Comments/Questions:

- Strategy to address food deserts in Whatcom County: work with community to decide what is important to them.
 - Does access to culturally appropriate food lead to more importing of food? Solutions should be tied to land access so food can be produced locally.
 - Making sure everyone has opportunity to grow, harvest, and prepare food is another important way to address access. About 10% of the 30,000 food insecure people in our community are homeless and don't have anywhere to cook. Most don't have SNAP.
 - Transportation is a huge issue for seniors. Many can't access specialized transportation. Money isn't always the issue. Transportation and isolation are.
 - With climate change, intermittent food access challenges will be more frequent because of extreme weather.
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Presentation #3

The Good Food Promise (slides)

Jessica Sankey and Patrick Durgan – Bellingham School District

<http://bellingshamschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/GoodFoodPromise.pdf>

Bellingham Good Food Promise aims to create positive food memories.

Good Food Promise guides the work. Including nutritional goals that we want to be inclusive.

We don't want to shame anyone's food preferences. We want to come up with a values lens that guides what food we are serving in schools.

Can't assume kids share the value of eating school meals together. There are social determinants of health. Nutrition and physical activity choices impact our choice, and so does the bigger health environment. We want to build an environment that makes the healthy choice the easy choice for all.



Community action items from *The Good Food Promise* presentation.

Food equity is another piece – how we allocate our resources so all kids have access to opportunities. Removing barriers to healthy food for kids. E.g., Breakfast In the Classroom (BIC). Seeing more consumption and less waste because of BIC.

Participation in school meals by income eligibility:

- 61% of students eligible for free meals are taking school meals.
- 55% of students eligible for reduced price take meal.
- 18% of full pay eat school food.
- Across district 32.4% of students participate.
- Approx. 35% of students are eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch.

Going forward:

- If all kids eat school food, there is no stigma.
- Trying to create more choices, more vegetarian items, more global menu items.
- Got over 10% response to recent survey.

Comment: What about reaching out to senior population to eat lunch at schools?

Wrap Up & Next Steps

Keep a look out for information about our next forum, which will be held in the fall of 2019. 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.