

Compiled Responses from Mural

1) What are the chronic gaps or roadblocks in the local food system that have become apparent for you during the pandemic?

Systemic Challenges

Inequities in the food system and food insecurity have become more apparent

Need to decentralize food system

Institutional will, concerns of risk and liability, limiting ability to pivot

Gaps in urban and rural understanding about farmer issues and food access limitations, distribution gaps

Funding needed, especially for small businesses

"Essential" label and what that means for support (or not)

Coordination

Identifying who needs support

Need to create a picture of the supply and demand of food in this county (so the public can access, and understand changes)

Need to redirect existing chains to meet emerging needs

Connecting local food systems with food access supports (staples)

Information lagging behind realities on the ground

Communication

Technology gap -- hard to let people know about resources if they don't have access to online tech

Lack of access to food stamp eligibility for individuals that have technology limits

Inequities in communications (language barriers)

Information on where to volunteer

Distribution

Food distribution networks have been disrupted



Online Whatcom Food System Meet-Up 5.13.2020

Reaching hungry people with surplus food

Finding food donations for agencies who can distribute/food servers

Streamlining ways for farmers to get food to people

Packing and aggregation capacity problem (food bank)

Supporting distributors that now have gap in market with no restaurants

Food Production, Processing

Lack of affordable commercial kitchen space

Cool and cold storage for small businesses

Help with accessing capital for processing/cold storage

Seed supply -- hard for gardeners/small farmers to get seeds. Need more local seed production.

Seed production

Meat production - CAFO not sustainable

USDA meat processing

Labor

Farm labor shortages

Lack of farm laborer safety

Lack of safe housing

Protecting workers & processors

Farming Challenges

Access to land, especially for beginning farmers

Need to dedicate more land to filling food demand gaps/reallocation of land for local food consumption

Hard for farms to get certifications

Lack of understanding of the complexity that farmers face, and unhelpful communication

Grower reliance on restaurant & hospitality



Online Whatcom Food System Meet-Up 5.13.2020

access to markets

Growing your own Food

Lack of community gardens in some neighborhoods

Limited food education after grade 8 to teach kids how to grow food

Consumption – Food Access

Challenge to get produce and bread to people receiving emergency food boxes

Can't meet dietary restriction needs in food boxes

Addressing the needs for folks not used to asking for help

Difficulty going to the store

Shopping in large quantities not possible for all

Schools - creating meals - and long term

Kids/youth - lower food access to fresh food

Lack of ability for food insecure people to gather for meals

Food desert in eastern WA County

Need for food vouchers modeled off Seattle's democracy vouchers

Waste

preventing food waste

Other

isolation

transportation

Reliance on volunteer groups

crisis management plans

less fishery representation on natl level (relief)

Food shortage in fall?

Lack of food for animals

2) What patterns did you discover that made these opportunities possible?

Flexibility, resiliency, responsiveness, innovation, adaptability

Ability to make quick shifts

New behaviors are being forced on us, new ways of doing things seem possible

Willingness to adapt and change

Creative ways to connect

Collaboration and looking at problems differently

Mutual aid – decentralization

Creative ways to connect

Communications - Effective use of digital tools

Increased communication -- Using more communication tools (barrier is lack of internet access)

Events are more accessible and in new platforms, creative ways to share information

Online sales platforms have helped farms (with webinars, technical support available)

Platforms already in existence are working well for connecting to producers - Facebook, Local Harvest.org, CropMobster

Leveraging technology - to set up a call center and routing software for food distribution (OC, Food Bank, WUC)

Proactively reaching out to communities of color, ESL, homeless, not digitally connected

Not making assumptions about resources/information that is available to everyone

Support for Local Food

Eating fresh produce is healthy and people always want more

Dedication to supporting growers, reducing food waste, getting food to people who need it

People want to do good- not waste, eat healthy, help each other

Support for local businesses and good communication

Support for localized food system

Connect with farmers more

Local food buying clubs popping up, producers are wanted

People's Good Will – Pulling Together to Help Each Other

People seeking opportunities to support

Because people have time, there are more unlikely heroes (volunteers)

Willingness to all pull together

Attitude of kindness, helpfulness and support

Adopting and supporting projects

Trust built through working together

Generosity from producers who don't want to see their food wasted

Lean into Existing Systems

Investment in systems developed previously

We have a good local system set up that we can rely on

Existing vision for new ways to access food and growing food

Networks are critical, and that they are built before the crisis

Existing Systemic Issues Persist and Are Exacerbated by Current Conditions

Communicating & centralized system (still gaps)

Understanding of what was needed because gaps have existed

Supply chain critics were ready to react to change (prepared to make big efforts)

Strong local food system needs to include more diverse organizations at the table (ex. Tribal groups)

Navigating the Rules and Making Your Own

Look at basic rules of COVID - work within limits

Socially appropriate structuring

Not having to navigate as much red tape

Fine art of not taking no for answer

Not waiting for an outside organization to tell you what to do

Early action, going for it!

Bottom up decision making

Empowering people on the front line who are close to needs

Other

Local seed resilience

Capacity to still support staff (PPP)

Tapping resources

Food remains to be a tool for safety & security

Shift in collective conscious has been underway

3) What can we do to invest in these patterns that are likely to foster more opportunities?

Increase Access to Technology

More support for online - reach people who are not able to attend online

Invest in permanent wifi hotspots to increase access

Increase access to tech tools for people in need (computers, laptops, tablets, etc.)

Make sure people know about existing networks and platforms - no recreating the wheel

Redirect financial resources

Language resources- communication to underserved populations

Show how it is working

Understand there are ways to join a group that is safe

Elders who have skills and time. 'leverage this'

Affirm and acknowledge other ways of doing things

Pattern remains of giving food rather than empowerment to access so need to direct support appropriately

Reality check, work left to do (opportunity for change)

Less reliant on grocery stores, for ex.