

# Whatcom Food Network Steering Committee Meeting

*Purpose/function: Working to build common understanding and facilitate collaborative efforts toward an equitable, sustainable and healthy food system for all.*

## Agenda

Date: 4/1/2020

Time: 1:30-3:00pm

Location: Zoom virtual meeting

## Present

Facilitator: Various

Note taker: Kerry

Mardi Solomon Gavin Willis Kerry Eastwood Naomi Siegel Kether Scharff-Gray	Amber Noskoff Becky Snijder van Wissenkerke Elma Burnham Laura Ridenour Seam Hopps
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Red = DECISIONS

Yellow = ACTION ITEMS

Blue = Opportunities for Collaboration

MEETING SUMMARY:	
Item	Summary
Agenda	Agreed to include discussion of what we can do to help food system during COVID into our sector updates. Approved.
Cross-sector activity	We will do another round of the cross-sector activity.
Fall Forum Date	November 18 <sup>th</sup> worked for all present for the Fall Forum date.
Spring Forum Planning	We will either host a shortened program more relevant to local food businesses during the COVID pandemic, or we will postpone Spring content to the Fall Forum.
Outreach Update / Overview	Steering Committee members are encouraged to help promote WFN activity of Facebook, and post their sector events and news on the WFN listserv. Outreach Committee will explore function/purpose of listserv.
Sector updates	C2C asks WFN supporters to call governor's office and ask them to halt H2A guest workers program.

FOLLOW-UP ITEMS:		
By when	Action Item	Person(s) responsible:
4/5/20	Ask Shelley Balanko if she would be interested in providing a presentation that was relevant	Kerry

	to how food businesses can adapt during COVID pandemic.	
4/5/20	Talk with Sara about the need/feasibility of hosting Spring Forum virtually as a platform for crisis venting and idea sharing amongst local food businesses.	Kerry
4/10/20	Share current resource sites to WFN listserv and what efforts are happening in our community.	Naomi
4/15/20	Create another cross-sector meet-up schedule.	Kerry
4/15/20	Invite any SC members to discuss listserv function/purpose with outreach subcommittee.	Kerry
4/30/20	Outreach Subcommittee will discuss purpose of listserv further with help from Laura.	Kerry, Rhys, Laura
5/15/20	Be in touch about whether next SC meeting is virtual or in-person.	Kerry

## PROPOSED NEXT STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING:

**Date: June 3; Location: TBD**

### NOTES

#### 1) Introductions, update us on your current situation during COVID pandemic:

- a) Kerry – Welcome to new Steering Committee members – Kether, Elma, and Laura... and Sean too! Let's introduce and update on what's happening with you during this time.
- b) Amber – EBT SNAP program working to get approval at Federal level to support people during COVID.
- c) Naomi – Opp Council working to continue providing resources to those in need and coordinating efforts with Whatcom Unified Command.
- d) Becky – working remotely and still very busy.
- e) Gavin – working from home and very busy.
- f) Mardi – not much she can work on remotely, so trying to find ways to support current food system efforts.
- g) Laura Ridenour – coaching around managing change and helping small businesses with next big idea, focuses on consulting biz, Facebook page for women in agriculture, recently rejoined Farm Fund, and is diving into network weaving in terms of group processes for diversity inclusion practices.
- h) Sean Hopps – C2C, labor, general food systems interest. Currently, C2C is focused on addressing policy implications at the state and regional level, and working on the ground to connect to farm workers and hear what their needs are as well as help them navigate staying safe in their work environment and getting needed benefits during COVID;
- i) Elma – commercial fisherman in Bristol Bay in summer, promo manager for SeaFeast, works with seafood supply chain locally and across PNW corridor up to AK. Also works on 'Strength of the Tides' which works to support women who earn their living on the water to ensure they

have a voice at the table and remain safe in their work. Trying to figure out how to keep supply chain safe during COVID – close quarters without much infrastructure. Many workers normally traveling to AK would be coming from areas with major COVID outbreaks – trying to create a medical plan for how to manage work in Bristol Bay.

- j) Kether – volunteering at Foodbank where they are packing 1000 food boxes a day to send to families in need. Mainstem Malt currently in a tight position – craft breweries are suffering because 70% of sales are in-house. Still plugging away and hoping to weather this storm – interested in supply chains (farmers, grain cleaners, truckers, breweries, malters, etc. – many imperiled but it remains to be seen what becomes of it. Hopeful that supply chain is resilient because grain is so important in our daily diet regardless of beer consumption).

## 2) Agree on agenda for meeting

- a) Sector updates will focus on calls to action/ideas on what WFN can do to help address food systems issues during COVID. Agenda finalized and agreed upon.

## 3) Cross-sector activity:

- a) Naomi was paired with Cheryl – was great to show her Opportunity Council and get to see CMFC.
- b) Sean and Mardi – it was really good to learn history of WFN and realize how far back it goes.
- c) Mardi – talked about history of WFN and learned more about what each other does – gathered info through observations during school lunch, then went and had tea. Mardi got to learn and connect with Sean’s work. Rhys and Mardi went to the cat café and she got to hear about their work, and answer questions about the farm-to-school program. It was a good activity to bring us together and learn more about each other’s work
- d) Amber met with Amy at Co-op was really valuable
- e) Becky met with Ali – had lots of similarities and was interesting to learn about a diff sector and would be interested in doing again.

f) Kerry will create another schedule of who should meet with who.

## 4) Fall Forum date: Nov. 18 – works for all.

## 5) Spring forum planning:

- a) How/when to decide whether to move forward, postpone, or cancel
  - i) Feasibility of virtual forum –
    - (1) Naomi – we probably couldn’t do networking portion of the program.
    - (2) Rhys – Concerned about the bandwidth / capacity to switch format to virtual.
    - (3) Laura – if we put on event, content would need to be relevant to current food systems issues (i.e., COVID)
    - (4) Mardi – new content more relevant to current issues would be hard to do by May; do we want to ask people to be on zoom for several hours in a row; do we want to do something totally different?
    - (5) Rhys – interested topic (Shelley Balanko), but people might be more likely to show up for support for food safety plans or innovative responses to adapting to market needs and limitations of;
    - (6) Elma – could Shelley present on something related to adapting to consumer needs during COVID? Kerry will ask Shelley if she can pivot her topic to address.

- (7) Naomi – thinking around food trends – we could bring in food delivery programs that are adapting to meet community needs: food bank, school districts, Unified Command, Dandelion Organics – to see what ideas we can glean from what they are doing.
- (8) Elma – a lot of need for ideas and creativity sharing, solidarity; connecting with others doing the work right now, it was comforting to talk to others going through this and brainstorm ideas.
- (9) Laura – went to trade meeting – that content is interesting as a broader topic. But I love what Elma was saying in terms of keeping our connection strong, if we refocused a purpose and got really clear about what the needs are. State-wide there are a lot of webinars being offered, by more regional organizations. There is a lot of that content already going around about food safety, how to take advantage of new distribution systems. There might be some need around re-tooling the back-end of businesses. Getting clear on the purpose would be really helpful.
- (10) Sean would agree that the zoom meeting format would need to be shortened vs. our normal forum program. In terms of food culture trends, we're going to be in a really different place even in a month. The topic would need to revolve around how people are doing in COVID and share resources, what support tools have been helpful. For small farmers that depend on direct markets, are we going to have farmer's markets this year? How are they filling that gap if not?
- (11) Rhys – echoes Elma's idea for coming together in solidarity – holding space for sharing what they are going through and learning about support resources.
- (12) Mardi – wondering if the response to food access needs has been very well coordinated or does it feel at all fragmented (asking Naomi).
- (13) Naomi – it's been fragmented but coming together. Unified command providing funding to food delivery system at Food Bank. Opportunity Council making sure resources are up to date to continue serving community.
- (14) Ali was feeling like there was a gap between food access being addresses in city but not in county. Maybe there's a role WFN can play in helping with that coordination?
- (15) Gavin – The Whatcom Food Security Task Force is already addressing that - making sure that we coordinate the different efforts in the city and the county.
- (16) Mardi – does it feel like WFN needs to have a conversation with Unified Command or would that be duplicative?
- (17) Gavin feels it would be duplicative.
- (18) Laura – it feels like there's a gov't response as well as a community response and could the forum serve a role that isn't happening at a gov't level in terms of connecting with the community? (Making them aware of what's happening?)
- (19) Gavin – if there's interest in bringing people together and talking about how we can support quality local healthy food, rather than addressing food security and distribution concerns, which is what the task force is already doing.
- (20) Naomi – connecting farmers and restaurant owners to resources and seeing how they're doing. And then in the fall, brainstorming what could be done better next time.
- (21) Elma likes the idea of reflecting on the immediate circumstances.
- (22) Mardi – good question for Sara and Maressa – small food biz, not farmers.

(23) Could be done more like a networking event, serving as a platform for food businesses to vent about their COVID-circumstances and share resources. See if food biz's and farms want to participate. Maybe Gavin, Sara, and Maressa could provide a little outreach on support tools for businesses; Kerry explore whether this is needed and report back to SC.

(24) Laura has some ideas about how to facilitate helping those in need.

- b) SC outreach and day-of roles, skipping until we know how we're moving forward.
  - c) New forum payment structure:
    - i) Probably wouldn't apply to the virtual spring forum we are currently discussing.
    - ii) For in-person forums in the future we are providing a sliding scale from which registrants can self-select: Free (if to pay would be too cumbersome for any reason), \$10 general admission, and \$20 for WFN supporters.
    - iii) We've discussed this at Steering Committee meetings and decided it was worth a try for both helping obtain better attendance rates for registrants of the Forums, and for creating additional funding sources to continue and strengthen the work of the WFN.
- 6) Outreach update/overview
- a) Website – stays relatively consistent over time with updates when needed.
  - b) Facebook – building a calendar for the year to help make informed decisions about what is most engaging to our audience (this will help us plan next year's content), trying to post enough to get algorithms on board and then see how people are engaging; framework of content calendar is currently built around events so we need to rethink that due to COVID;
  - c) Newsletter – mainly used for forum and event outreach, but we plan to expand its use to general food systems content/updates when we have capacity to plan and implement.
  - d) Listserv – is for news, events, and announcements to be posted to, not to house conversations between listserv members. Please reply directly to sender when responding to their post. If people reply to all, people on the listserv get too many emails that aren't relevant to them and they may get burnt out. We want SC members to post as often as they can to help get the word out about local food systems opportunities.
    - i) Laura – feels the tool was meant to be for conversations rather than just for events for posting.
    - ii) Outreach subcommittee will explore the Listserv function/purpose with help from Laura.
- 7) Sector updates:
- a) Sean – ask governors office to halt the H2A guestworker program (makes no sense in terms of unemployment rates and in terms of COVID and social distancing and how we slow the spread of the virus to bring in guestworkers and have them return to Mexico). Farm work labor is particularly vulnerable to abuse mistreatment. We're in the midst of financial insecurity. We're seeing employees speak out about health and safety standards related to COVID and being fired.
  - b) Naomi will send current resource sites to WFN listserv and what efforts are happening in our community.
  - c) Mardi – ask Gavin if there are any ways besides the list Naomi had that word is getting out about task force efforts or Unified Command efforts that we can track.
- 8) Gavin not sure if there's any public outreach. Secondary priority to getting the resources out.

- 9) Elma – there is seafood available in Whatcom County – plenty of sellers without a market. Elma’s happy to connect with anyone interested.
- 10) Next meeting: Host June meeting at Lost Cider later in the day? Kerry will be in touch to reassess where we’re at in terms of the possibility of meeting in-person in June.