

# 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: 6/3/2020

Time: 1:30-3:00pm

Location: Zoom virtual meeting

## Present

Facilitator: Laura and Mardi

Note taker: Kerry

Mardi Solomon Gavin Willis Kerry Eastwood Kether Scharff-Gray Becky Snijder van Wissenkerke	Elma Burnham Laura Ridenour Ander Russell Rhys Thorvald-Hansen
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Red = DECISIONS

Yellow = ACTION ITEMS

Blue = Opportunities for Collaboration

MEETING SUMMARY:	
Item	Summary
Agenda	Switched items 4 and 5 so that discussion of what WFN can be doing to address online meet-up feedback happens before event planning discussion.
Sector Updates	Shared.
Review Online Meet-Up	Main take-aways are that the event was well-received, particularly for creating sense of solidarity, and people want more of these events/meet-ups.
What else can WFN do?	We see our role as holding space for people to connect and share during this challenging time, and also to help facilitate opportunities for collaboration and innovation across the food system. We also want to keep record of opportunities to shift toward food equity and justice both now and for addressing in the future.
Event Planning 2020	We will plan at least one more online meet-up for mid-July.

FOLLOW-UP ITEMS:		
By when	Action Item	Person(s) responsible:
6/4	Send out a doodle to SC for weeks of July 6 and 13.	Kerry
6/8	Check in with Laura and Mardi about Dropbox access issues	Kerry

6/10	Contact event planners to begin planning subcommittee meetings.	Kerry
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## PROPOSED NEXT STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING:

**Date: Aug 5; Location: Zoom**

### NOTES

#### 1) Review and approve agenda

- a) Items 4 and 5 switched so that discussion of what WFN can be doing to address online meet-up feedback happens before event planning discussion.
- b) Approved.

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

- a) Mardi: not a lot going on in her work with schools since they are close. Food systems committee is also not able to meet because they are deemed non-essential. She is working on employer task force that should be providing useful guidance for each different sector of local business. Working with state guidance to make sure all sectors know what state guidance applies to them and what peer resources they can utilize to adhere to guidelines. End result will be a website and docs to help provide clarity.
- b) Laura: has been working at the state-wide level responding to RFPs in coordination with WSU Food Systems teams and NW Tribes to do some food systems support work for ecological food system staffing and fundraising needs. Seeking roles she can play in food system economy.
- c) Cheryl: in the throes of productive farming – all hands on deck for getting things in the ground and maintenance. Also knowing who's growing, who's needing what, constantly shifting, but moving forward with growing and hoping to find buyers. 80% of food budgets are being spent in grocery stores instead of restaurants so creates a huge shift in suppliers. Restaurants not buying as much. Very focused on production right now, but trying to help other growers. Innovating with different options to support CSAs, farmers markets, etc.
- d) Gavin: farmers are dealing with issues of access to markets. We haven't seen the extremes of that in WA State. Working on the Food Access Committee and getting workers to do harvest and keeping them safe.
- e) Becky: Whatcom County hasn't been able to hold advisory committee meetings and so her work has been somewhat held up. She anticipates those meetings being reinstated soon and so applications can move through once again. Trying to get word out about story map project.
- f) Rhys: Looking for tenant farmers - Agrarian commons launched nationwide campaign with several sites including 13 acres of ag commons to increase land access to farmers on Whidbey Island.
- g) Ander: public meetings suspended so not much movement but there is a lot of change on water policy at the federal level – Clean Water Act. Trying to get that sorted out. State Dept of Ecology is considering doing a full water rights adjudication of WRIA 1 – complicated issues for and against. RE Sources working on climate adaption planning to protect natural resources while

thriving and remaining resilient during climate change – working to engage COB and Whatcom County. Working with C2C and Familias Justice to support farmworkers at state level.

- h) Kether: breweries have to plan several years in advance so working with them. They took 70-80% decrease to revenue during COVID. Some protections in place for maltsters who have lost 50% of contracts/revenue. Craft malt and beer is in an interesting position and remains to be seen

**3) Review virtual event** – reviewed survey results and mural notes.

- a) Value of different elements: Participants overall reported high value of the event.
- b) Try to ensure that new people are rotated through networking sessions (some people reported being paired with same people as previous break-out rooms).
- c) Critical updates were not as effectively delivered as other objectives for the meeting – could be a matter of needing more time, additional meetings to deeper dive into this level.
- d) Creating solidarity was rated very highly – Elma's goal for that was a success. This was an important aspect of the event that we want to continue.
- e) Even though small groups were short and we couldn't get to much depth, we created solidarity and a desire to continue to connect.
- f) 100% responses indicated they wanted attend more online meet-ups.
- g) Alex suggested spreading it out across two days to create more time to share without the burnout of going past 1.5 hours.
- h) Additional feedback:
  - i) Directory of participants was requested.
  - ii) Will be sharing notes on the website so that people can find them in perpetuity.
- i) How do we continue the connection part, not sure if we should be so focused on specific issues or just general sharing.
- j) Sharing and connecting, but bringing up some of the highlighted feedback on gaps and opportunities as focal points of future events. Maybe the prompts should be more spacious in allowing more time for discussion and reflection afterwards
- k) To balance sector updates and also create more time for conversation, participants can be prompted ahead of the event to provide a written sector update which can be compiled in a doc and shared during the event to free up more time for deeper discussions.

**4) What else can WFN do?** How can the SC support emergent needs or silver linings? Any local policies emerging that need support? How do we as a group want to play a leadership role to leverage the network collective power of the network?

- a) Obvious topics/issues that WFN should be taking a role in?
  - i) Cheryl and Gavin both mentioned how food producers are having to gamble due to shift in buyers – seems like a conversation that might be interesting to have.
  - ii) Where are the holes in supply in demand – what are the needs.
  - iii) Working with growers to look at getting food to people in a different way? Growers are working through this.
  - iv) How can we help provide valuable ways to move forward?
  - v) We have found when we talk to other people, opportunities come up for collaboration or new ways to innovate.

- vi) For the buyers there's so much uncertainty they can't really sit down to pair with growers at this point. Growers are also very busy – it's their peak season.
- vii) Sounds like the focus should be on connecting food systems folks and providing space for them to share what their needs are: project management needs, stuff that's in process, helping community understand what is stuck in food system and why it's stuck.
- viii) Food assessment has a big role to play and wondering if there is something we can do as a group to help alleviate policy barriers etc. To help them move forward with essential work.
- ix) One value of having these meet-ups is that the feedback from participant can be used in the community food assessment and can help inform the future focus of their work.
- x) Liked the “how to get food to people in a diff way?” could be a really nice prompt that can cross all sectors. Could be a nice framing question for a meet-up.
- xi) Lost opportunities due to COVID– could be a good time to chronicle those so that we can pick them back up when the time comes. Some of these will need to be addressed.
- xii) Feedback points to adaptability of people as an opportunity, and needs for tech to support innovative ways to get food to people.
- xiii) How has the climate changed since the last meet-up to ensure we are including needed pivots.
  - (1) Ander – I would like to hear more from folks working on food access (Naomi and Amber) - have any of the barriers gotten better? Once thing I noticed is that the pandemic has brought to light what wasn't working – access to tech, labor issues = equity issues. Equity and systemic issues are at the forefront of our current societal crisis. How will access to meals and technology and other food justice issues play out?
  - (2) Cheryl – From a grower's perspective, seeing people, we deal with customers who are now wanting to grow their own food. What we're seeing is the psychological impact of the pandemic – people's moods and priorities are shifting. Lonely, stuck with same people and family dynamics – shifts in the sociology of people. Getting food to people in a different way is influenced by all of this. People are upset, exhausted, feeling penned in. Not sure where people are at the moment. People are under so many stresses and changes to their everyday lives (example: people with children in public school).
  - (3) Rhys – people really appreciate a space to feel heard in challenging times. And providing this will pay off in sharing of ideas and relationship building.
  - (4) Mardi – how nimble people feel like they need to be and can be right now. So many unknowns that how do you make any decisions? Being nimble is currently a best strategy, including for food systems sectors. How can they be most nimble in our food system? This is and will be an on-going issue – how can we do more of that?
  - (5) Becky – the way that we operate has changed but our work hasn't changed.
  - (6) Gavin – one of the things that remain to be seen is what long-term changes we're going to see in our food system. How able are farmers going to be to adapt to those changes? How can we assist in that transition so that we don't end up losing a bunch of farms and farmland due to the changes that are likely to happen?
  - (7) Laura – given the framework for how we do business and how people get business and civil unrest bringing attention to existing problems. I love the idea of focusing on equity and justice in our food system. This is an opportunity. Legal implications of businesses

that are trying to pivot. There are opportunities for changes that didn't exist because we didn't have the opportunity to use force major, for example, before COVID. Grocery stores and co-ops are locked into contracts which limits our local food economies ability to shift and adapt to serve food banks, vulnerable populations, etc. **What are the opportunities now that might not have existed otherwise?**

**5) Plan events for 2020:**

a) Who's interested in seeing another meet-up happen – all present are in agreement to hold another meet-up.

b) **Who is interested in stepping up to helping to make the event happen:**

- i) Rhys
- ii) Laura
- iii) Ander
- iv) Kerry
- v) Kether
- vi) Mardi

c) One at a time or series?

- i) Cheryl concerned that things are changing so quickly that we can't be as nimble
- ii) Every other month would likely be max for Kerry's work load
- iii) Would be difficult to plan any in-person events in the next 6 months
- iv) **We would like to plan for 1 more right now, but hold off on making it a series so that we can pivot as needed.**
- v) In terms of creating a container for what might be lost right now, we can start thinking about what the topics might be for future forums based on feedback from these meet-ups.
- vi) Maybe we could have a place in our communications where we can post things that we want to address down the road.

d) **When? Mid-July – Kerry will send out a doodle to SC for weeks of July 6 and 13.**

e) **Kerry will contact event planners to begin planning subcommittee meetings.**

6) Tech: are people able to access the Dropbox?

f) Mardi and Laura having issues because free accounts have limited capacity – they will need to delete some of their Dropbox files.

7) Adjourn: See you all at the August SC meeting and at the July online event!