



**Whatcom
Food
Network**

working toward an
equitable, sustainable,
and healthy food
system for all

Whatcom Community Food Assessment

2013 CFA Update Report: Methodology and Current Conditions

Prepared by Whatcom Food Network CFA Update Sub-committee

The Whatcom Food Network CFA Update Report was prepared by:

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2013 Whatcom Community Food Assessment Update Report

Background and Purpose

The first Whatcom Community Food Assessment was completed in early 2011, primarily using statistical data from 2007-2009. Since then, new data has become available and many organizations have been working on innovative projects to strengthen the local food system.

A key development has been the establishment of the Whatcom Food Network, composed of the organizations, agencies, and institutions working to strengthen our food system. Network members used the 2011 Community Food Assessment as a basis for setting broad goals that represent our common understanding and interests.

In 2013, with funding from the Whatcom Community Foundation and Community Food Coop Farm Fund, a Sub-committee of the Network was formed to update the 2011 Assessment. The Sub-committee's aim was to highlight current gaps, challenges, and opportunities in the food system. More importantly, the Sub-committee hoped to design a process for easily updating information on a consistent basis, and enable community partners to more easily monitor trends and connect with collaborators and resources.

Outputs

The 2013 project resulted in five specific outputs, which were established as on-line tools on the Whatcom Food Network Website (<http://whatcom.wsu.edu/ag/foodnetwork/>):

- An updated one-stop graphic (first developed in 2011) showing the organizations working in each food system sector and the type of support they offer.
- A comprehensive database of tools, resources, and models for anyone working on food system development.
- An interactive web page that enables people to easily learn about challenges and opportunities related to each sector of the food system.
- Selected indicators for measuring change over time.

- Key Informant perceptions of current gaps and challenges, and significant developments since the 2011 Community Food Assessment. This information is contained in the body of this Report.

Methodology

In the spring of 2013, the CFA Update Sub-committee designed the CFA Update Process, with the intention of creating a system that could be easily replicated. Three methods were used to produce the Outputs listed above.

1. **Organization Profiles** were used to provide a snapshot of the many organizations involved in food system development work, learn how they are focusing their efforts, and what resources they recommend.
2. **Key Informants Interviews** were conducted with people representing each sector of the food system. Informants provided their insight on current issues, challenges, and opportunities for action, and also recommended indicators for measuring change over time.
3. **Input from WFN Steering Committee** helped to complete the Assessment process by adding in their knowledge about Key Developments, Resources, Indicators, Collaborations, and Opportunities.

A more detailed description of the methodology, including the key informant interview questions, is presented in Appendix A. The list of key informants and the WFN Steering Committee is in Appendix B, and the Organization Profile form is in Appendix C.

Summary of Findings

One of the questions underlying the CFA 2013 Update was whether the Whatcom Food Network long-range goals should be significantly altered. The study revealed nothing that would warrant changing the Network's long-range goals, however, it did reveal several important issues for collaborators to consider in their work. *The following summary reflects the*

STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS OF CURRENT GAPS AND CHALLENGES

- 1. Water quality and water quantity are continuing to decline.** Of critical concern for our food system is the contamination of our water resources. Groundwater is being impacted by pesticides and other soil additives; surface water is being affected by manure products and the reduction of riparian areas. Contaminated run-off (“stormwater”) continues to harm shellfish beds and fisheries. As climate change continues, intense runoff events in winter and fewer runoff events in summer are anticipated. Multiple stakeholders (farmers, tribes, developers) are continuing to wrestle over access to water.
- 2. Major infrastructure gaps still exist for aggregation, processing, and distribution of local food.** Many organizations and funders have been working on developing the infrastructure for aggregation, post-harvest processing, storage, and distribution of local product, but these efforts are still in their infancy. Institutional markets, such as schools and hospitals are having a difficult time finding reliable sources for local products at the quantity, quality, and price they need, and there is a lack of capacity to process whole foods efficiently. There are also major gaps and inefficiencies in distribution. Major investments are needed to re-build the infrastructure necessary for increasing local access to local product.
- 3. Farm labor issues are largely unresolved.** Representatives from advocacy groups do not have a common definition of “fair” labor practices, or a common vision of immigration reform. From the commercial farming perspective, the need is for predictable, fair, just, cost-effective ways to provide enough legal laborers to farms. From the farmworker perspective, workers are still not getting their basic needs met for livable wages, medical care, training, safe working conditions, and affirmation of their value in the food system.

4. More people in Whatcom County are struggling with food insecurity. Key informants identified many barriers to healthy food access, including inadequacies in school meal programs, decreases in funding for SNAP (food stamps), and limited access to grocery stores, meal programs, and food banks for low-income people with limited transportation in rural areas of Whatcom County. Of particular concern were inadequacies in programs serving low-income seniors, and the difficulty of changing eating habits in the face of mass marketing.

5. Big opportunities and obstacles exist in regulations, codes, policies and plans that will impact the local food system. Codes and regulations are both obstacles and opportunities to affect change. Almost all of the key informants identified codes and regulations that impacted their work, including:

- Health and safety codes, especially the Food Safety Modernization Act – The FSMA will affect all businesses dealing with food, regardless of scale.
- Whatcom County's Agricultural Strategic Plan – The Strategic Plan aims to preserve and create agricultural land. One complication which must be addressed is the disconnect between the acreage needed for agriculture and the availability of water rights to accompany that land. Right now, it is difficult for many farmers to obtain an adequate, legal supply of water
- Immigration policies – Current policies make it challenging for Hispanic farmworkers to legally and justly work in the U.S.
- Additional opportunities for policy changes that are on the horizon:
 - The County's Comprehensive Plan is in the process of being updated over the next few years.
 - Whatcom County Planning and Development Services will be updating zoning codes.
 - The Community Health Improvement Plan was recently completed, and includes community-wide goals for healthy food access.

6. Communication gaps and lack of a common vision are limiting the ability to affect change. Communication gaps were cited between commodity and direct market

farmers, farm-owners and laborers, county offices and land-owners/developers, regulatory agencies and businesses, tribes and non-native farmers over land and water rights, and within County government. Many informants talked about perceived power, reluctant trust, a tendency to focus on the individual interest rather than seeing the collective interest, and missing voices in key decisions and processes.

STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS OF KEY DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 2011, BY SECTOR

LAND

- Whatcom County conducted a Land Cover Analysis and formally established a Purchase of Development Rights program
- Whatcom County Ag-Watershed Pilot Project launched, including the Natural Resource Marketplace

WATER

- Irrigation districts are working on one unified Water District for Whatcom County
- Birch Bay Watershed Management Project launched
- Whatcom Water Weeks and speaker series is strongly established

FARMING

- Whatcom Agricultural Strategic Plan has been completed; established a goal of 100,000 acres
- Cloud Mountain Farm Center (CMFC) was established as a non-profit educational center, with a new internship program, leafy greens trials, and more agricultural land on Lawrence Road
- Industrial Credit Union has established a CDFI (Community Development Fund Initiative) to support food system development

- Winter Market at Bellingham Farmers Market began

FISHING

- Lummi opened Seafood Market to sell seafood directly to buyers
- Bellingham Technical College is investing in new fisheries facility
- Salmon recovery restoration projects are underway with strong planning and implementation
- Marine Resource Committee established a Speaker Series on fisheries topics

LABOR

- Community to Community Development, Ag. Justice Project, and others have launched a Domestic Fair Trade labeling protocol
- Viva Farms started a farm incubator and training program with WSU for new farmers, especially minority farmers (non-English speakers, women)
- Farm to Family Coalition is supporting Farm Workers rights

PROCESSING/DISTRIBUTION

- CMFC food processing hub is being built with a USDA grant obtained by Northwest Agriculture Business Center
- North Cascades Meat Producer's co-op was formed
- Mobile slaughterhouse is being established
- Local Orbit set up for online ordering and invoicing
- Acme Farms + Kitchen opened processing kitchen in Bellingham

CONSUMPTION

- Mobile Food Bank is servicing East Whatcom County

- Harvest of the Month program is in all Whatcom County school districts
- Bellingham School District Bond passes with money for a central kitchen
- CSA sales expanded to workplaces
- CSAs are made more accessible with EBT – piloted with a few farms
- Common Threads Farm moves to Bobbibrook on the south side of Bellingham; Farm camps are held onsite, and school gardens expand to more than a dozen schools
- Grow NW Magazine established.

Appendix A: Methodology

Three methodologies were used in this study, and are described in greater depth below.

- A. Organization Profiles**
- B. Key Informants Interviews**
- C. Input from WFN Steering Committee**

A. Organization Profiles

An Organization Profile form (presented in Appendix C) was used to gather information from 56 community organizations. In addition to updating contact information, the form included questions about WFN action areas and goals for food system development. The Organization Profile also listed three open-ended questions about partnerships, specific projects, and resources.

Spanning the summer of 2013, the Whatcom Food Network Assistant collected Organization Profiles from WFN contacts via email, and from attendees at the spring WFN Forum. Ninety-five organizations received by email an Organization Profile that was partially completed using the information already listed in the WFN database. They were asked to fill it in and return it. The Sub-committee closed the data collection on September 20, 2013 after three rounds of emails and one round of reminder calls.

Organization Profiles – Response Rates

Of the 95 Organization Profiles sent or solicited, 56 were returned (a 59% response rate).

SECTOR	Land/Water	Farming/Fishing	Labor	Waste	Processing	Distribution	Consumption
# of responses	21	27	10	5	13	24	28
Percentage	37.5%	48.2%	17.9%	8.9%	23.2%	42.9%	50%

Respondents were asked to note all sectors of the food system in which they worked. The majority of respondents identified themselves as working in the Consumption and Farming/Fishing sectors, and many organizations identified themselves as working in more than one sector.

Respondents then were asked to check WFN goals and action areas that their organization was actively working towards. Over half of respondents reported working on all four goal areas.

GOAL AREA	Collaboration and Participation	Thriving Economy	Social Justice	Environmental Stewardship
# of responses	45	38	34	30
Percentage	80.4%	67.9%	60.7%	53.6%

B. Key Informants Interviews

Key Informant interviews were conducted to gather stakeholder perceptions of the status of the food system at a single point in time. The Subcommittee identified eleven key informants, with one or two informants representing each sector: land & water, farming & fishing, labor, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste. A list of key informant names and positions is in Appendix B. Key informants were asked to respond to the following questions:

Interview Questions

1. GOALS and PROJECTS: *What projects is your organization working on to strengthen the food system? (What would success look like? What measures do you use? Are there opportunities coming down the line for this sector? Are there other projects in this sector we should know about?)*
2. KEY PARTNERS and COLLABORATIONS: *Which organizations or businesses do you work with?*

3. *GAPS: What unmet needs, challenges, or barriers do you see in this sector of the food system?*
4. *RESOURCES: Are there resources/documents/reports that are helpful to you in your work or that you've created?*

The Whatcom Food Network Assistant conducted the interviews in May, June, and July of 2013. Three interviews were conducted by telephone, and eight were conducted in person at the informant's place of work. Interviews lasted 30 - 60 minutes. Notes were taken and interviews were tape-recorded for accuracy and quotes. The interview notes were read by two reviewers who independently analyzed the data. The discussion of Current Gaps and Challenges, in the body of this Report, represents the consensus about the major themes that arose from the data analysis by the interviewer and the two reviewers.

C. Input from WFN Steering Committee

In December of 2013, an initial summary of the findings from the Key Informant Interviews was presented to the Whatcom Food Network Steering Committee. The Steering Committee helped to complete the Assessment process by adding in their knowledge about Key Developments, Resources, Indicators, Collaborations, and Opportunities. The members of the WFN Steering Committee are listed in Appendix B.

Appendix B: Participants

Key Informants Interviewed for this Report

- Samya Lutz, Long Range Planner of Whatcom County Planning and Development Services: LAND
- Sue Blake, Water Resource Educator of WSU Whatcom County Extension: WATER
- Henry Bierlink, Executive Director of Whatcom Farm Friends: FARMING
- Pete Granger, Program Lead of Marine Advisory Services of WA Sea Grant: FISHING
- Rosalinda Guillen, Executive Director of Community to Community Development: LABOR (farmworker)
- Elena Perez, Community Organizer of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 21: LABOR (commercial)
- Jeff Voltz, Project Manager of Northwest Agricultural Business Center: PROCESSING/DISTRIBUTION (processing)
- Sue Cole, Director of Public Affairs of The Markets, LLC: PROCESSING/DISTRIBUTION (institutional procurement)
- Shelly Zylstra, Planning Director of Northwest Regional Council: CONSUMPTION
- Astrid Newell, Community Health Manager of Whatcom County Health Department: CONSUMPTION
- Rodd Pemble, Recycling Manager of Sanitary Services Company: WASTE

Members of the WFN Steering Committee:

- Adrienne Battis, Community Food Coop
- Sue Blake, WSU Extension Whatcom County
- Colleen Burrows, WSU Whatcom County Extension
- Hannah Coughlin, ReSources
- Rosalinda Guillen, Community to Community Development
- Melissa Morin, Whatcom County Health Department
- Holly O'Neil, River Farm of the Evergreen Land Trust
- Diane Smith, WSU Extension Skagit County
- Sara Southerland, Sustainable Connections Food & Farming Program
- Caprice Teske, Bellingham Farmers Market
- Cheryl Thornton, Cloud Mountain Farm Center

Appendix C: Organization Profile

Whatcom Food Network Organization Profile

Has your organization signed the WFN Declaration of Support? Yes No

Organization name: _____

Website: _____

Mailing address: _____

Main WFN contact for this organization, or your:

Name: _____

Title: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

What Food System Action Areas and Goals is your organization actively working on (e.g. with programs or campaigns) within the food system?

Collaboration and Participation: Increase community resilience in the face of changing social, economic, and environmental conditions.

Collaboration and Participation: Leverage regional strength to access resources and raise awareness.

Collaboration and Participation: Facilitate community dialogue in policy development and decision-making.

Thriving Economy: Promote job growth in the local food system.

Thriving Economy: Encourage institutional procurement of local and regional foods.

Thriving Economy: Develop strong regional food infrastructure.

Social Justice: Advance community understanding of food sovereignty.

Social Justice: Create opportunity and justice for farm and food workers and their families.

Social Justice: Increase equitable access to and consumption of fresh, healthy, and local food.

Environmental Stewardship: Secure an abundance of healthy and available land.

Environmental Stewardship: Secure an abundance of clean water for people, farms and fish.

Environmental Stewardship: Encourage pro-active environmental stewardship.

What Stages of the Food System is your organization working in?

Land & Water Farming & Fishing Labor Waste Processing
 Distribution Consumption

How do you address these goals?

Technical Assistance (*expertise, training, tools, and assistance*)

Education & Advocacy (*providing info, promoting awareness to target audiences or the community*)

Policy & Funding (*providing financial resources, developing or influencing legislation/regulation*)

What other organizations or agencies in the food system does your organization collaborate with?

Are there specific programs or projects that you are working on that you want Whatcom Food Network members to know about?

Project Name(s):

Brief Description(s) or links to more info:

What resources and reports have you found most useful in your work or have you created in regards to the food system?