



# Food System Committee

Tuesday, October 24, 2023

4:30-6:00 PM

Zoom and in-person

## Minutes

### **Members Present:**

Name	Sector	Present
Margaret Gerard	Local Sales Farming	X
Nikki Oleson	Processing/Distribution	X
Riley Sweeney	Food Access	X
Noelle Beecroft	Nutrition/ Public Health	X
Sean Hopps	Labor	X
Trevor Gearhart	Natural Resources	X
Rhys-Thorvald Hansen	Whatcom Food Network	X
Paul Burrill	Fishing	
Rob Dhaliwal	Export Sales Farming	

**Others Present:** Laura Ridenour, Matt Unger, Dakota Stranik, Von E., Holly O'Neil

**Call to order:** Riley started the meeting at 4:32 pm.

### **Land Acknowledgement**

### **Determination of Quorum**

Quorum

### **Approval of minutes**

Noelle motioned, Sean seconded, all approved.

### **Public Comment**

Ali read a statement from Derek Long, Executive Director of Sustainable Connections and Cloud Mountain Farm Center, about the Lawrence Road property and incubator farm closure.

Holly O'Neil, owner of River Farm in the South Fork of the Nooksack, has been exploring ways to move the farmers from Lawrence Road to River Farm. The River Farm board is interested in continuing the incubator program and may be able to lease three acres of land. She is identifying ways for the farmers to have their own equipment, so if others know of funding opportunities, please let her know. Moving to the South Fork will be good for the farmers and will also bolster the farming community in the Foothills region. [The Foothills Food Access Plan](#) calls for more connections between area farmers and the Foothills Food Bank.

Laura Ridenour shared a Whatcom Food Network (WFN) update. The WFN updated their purpose statement and is focused on implementation of the Food System Plan. They want to focus on supporting the strength of the organization, equity, food sovereignty, food provisioning, and food access. They are

working on a co-director model. WFN will work with FSP to develop shared resources, look at federal grants, funding, and work plans.

Riley will be stepping down from the Food System Committee at the end of the year. The Food Access position will be open.

### **Updates on the Food System Plan**

Ali provided an ARPA update. So far, food-related ARPA dollars have been allocated to Whatcom County Food Banks, [PNW Platefuls](#), and the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center Kitchen.

Ali is working on the 2025 County Comp Plan update, which is [required by resolution](#) to include input from the food system committee. She is also meeting with the WFN regularly to discuss the implementation of the food system plan.

Ali provided updates on the three actions she is working on:

#### **3.1.2: Create and expand the network of shared-use kitchens and processing facilities for food businesses, food producers, and retailers**

ARPA allocated \$150,000 to upgrade the east Whatcom regional resource center kitchen. Ali plans to form a kitchen subcommittee to work towards that network creation.

#### **4.3.1: Adequately fund the Whatcom County food bank network**

Ali is working on ways to get the county to financially support food banks. Historically, the food banks have received about \$130,000 from the County, which is no longer enough. Sean reminded the group that the food banks should source local produce when feasible. Margaret reminded the group of the Tip the Scales program during COVID, where food banks can buy leftover farmers market produce. As a farmer, she appreciated it.

#### **4.3.2-4.3.4: funding for SNAP's Market Match, WIC, and the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program**

Ali is working to get funds to supplement the Market Match program at Twin Sisters and Lynden markets.

2.1.6 reads "Work with farmers and land trusts to determine acreage goals and farmland preservation strategies." Whatcom Land Trust is drafting their strategic priorities for the next 6 years.

Sean added that the Ejidos project is a great example of land trust land that is supplemented by government funds. Sean still has questions about forests vs farmlands and will explore that, as well as dive deeper into the potential of land trusts in food system actions 2.1.2-2.1.7.

Margaret said WLT purchased 40 acres near her farm and she was wondering if it will be used for ag land.

### **Implementation Organizational Discussion**

Ali asked the committee to review the food system plan and answer three questions. Discussion summaries are included next to the questions.

**What role should the Food System Committee members play as a whole?** Riley said that the FSC role is to tell the government what is important and what needs money. We want to make sure the communications and advocacy piece doesn't fall apart.

Rhys wants the committee to employ an equity lens and uphold the whole, big picture. They are also committed to tracking what folks in the community are working on.

**How do you as an individual want to show up?** Noelle is working on a lot of nutrition and food access work and will continue to show up in that way.

Ali suggested, given Margaret's involvement in the Farm Fund, that she could take on a role around identifying potential solutions to imminent gaps in funding for small scale farmers.

Noelle has been asked to work on a kitchen project at the Lynden Fairgrounds, run by Karen Steensma.

**How do you (FSC) want to be updated on what everyone is doing?** Nikki said it would be helpful to determine what is county funded and what is appropriate to try to find private funding for.

Noelle suggested having a newsletter with updates. Ali suggested sharing verbally at meetings. The group briefly discussed replying all in member emails and the violation of the Open Public Meetings Act. Ali suggested sending updates to her before the meeting and there can be committee time to discuss.

**Prioritization Activity:** Rhys facilitated a conversation about mapping out priorities. The committee members will look at the matrix between meetings and fill it out. Committee members will come prepared to meetings having filled out this spreadsheet.

The prioritization document is adapted from [University of New South Wales' Project Complexity Matrix](#).

### **Wrap Up**

Next meeting is November 28th from 4:30-6pm.

Meeting adjourned at 5:54.