

If you review this plan and have feedback, please use [this survey](#) for comments/feedback.

Goal 1: Cultivate equity and justice in our food system	
1.1 Increase health, wealth and leadership with BIPOC and under-represented communities across our food system.	1.1.1 Create funding, partnership and collaboration opportunities for organizations led by and for BIPOC and other systemically disadvantaged communities to remove barriers to engagement in local food programs (i.e. CSAs, farmers' markets, double up food bucks, community gardening, etc.).
	1.1.2 Create funding, partnership and collaboration opportunities for organizations led by and for BIPOC and other systemically disadvantaged communities to access financial tools for food systems development (i.e. access to capital, low interest loans, microloans, grant programs, and other funding opportunities).
	1.1.3 Build relationships with, and opportunities for collaboration with cultural liaisons to support existing food sovereignty projects already underway.
	1.1.4 Whatcom County planning and communications about food systems should engage with and reflect the diversity of our communities - across class, race and ethnicities, genders, belief systems etc.
1.2 Strengthen support for immigrants to Whatcom County.	1.2.1 Support relevant food policy-related goals in the <i>Child and Family Action Plan</i> and the <i>Health Protection for Immigrant Families Task Force Action Plan</i> , in particular:
	1.2.2 Strengthen the capacity of local employers, businesses, and service agencies to respond to immigration related issues.
	1.2.3 Improve service systems to better meet the needs of families, including immigrant families.
	1.2.4 Require mandatory training for county staff and contractors (particularly criminal justice, health and human services) related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Anti-discrimination/anti-bias approaches ○ Culturally and linguistically appropriate services (CLAS)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Trauma-informed services
	<p>1.2.5 Ensure all materials developed by the County to support food system planning and implementation are offered in multiple languages, and that County-sponsored food system events offer translation services on-site.</p>
<p>1.3 Empower food system workers' to lead healthy and safe lives.</p>	<p>1.3.1 Fund the engagement of food system workers to improve workplace health and safety standards that meet the principles of the Whatcom Food System Plan.</p>
	<p>1.3.2 Adopt a fair scheduling ordinance (i.e. City of Seattle) to make schedules and breaks more consistent with routines that sustain healthy and safe lives for workers.</p>
	<p>1.3.3 Advocate that the Washington State Insurance Commissioner and Healthcare Authority provide food system workers with better and affordable health insurance options.</p>
	<p>1.3.4 Coordinate with local tipped workers to advocate for changes in state laws around tip sharing so that back of house kitchen staff can benefit and tip sharing is more equitable across the board.</p>
	<p>1.3.5 Support a Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) Grant for community space that is open for food system shift workers at non-traditional hours.</p>
	<p>1.3.6 Fund and support Food System Committee in the creation and maintenance of food systems information dashboard, building on the Washington State Health Disparities map, co-created with input from essential food systems workers across sectors that reflect the diversity of our communities.</p>

Goal 2: Protect and regenerate our soil, water, and land

<p>2.1 Protect agricultural land in Whatcom County and increase the acreage used for local and regenerative</p>	<p>2.1.1 Establish a baseline inventory of the number of acres of agricultural land in Whatcom County currently used for local food production. Use the baseline inventory to set an achievable target of acres for local food production and organic food production for the County to strive for. Partner with the Ag Advisory Committee to achieve this.</p>
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<p>food production.</p>	<p>2.1.2 Increase the agricultural acreages placed under conservation easements through the current Whatcom County Conservation Easement Program. Ensure adequate County staff support to facilitate additional Conservation Easement Program outreach, signups, and to leverage state and federal grants. Target additional funds for agricultural acreage utilized for local food production.</p>
	<p>2.1.3 Increase funding to the Conservation Futures Fund. Direct additional revenues to increase the number of conservation easements with a focus on acquiring land that specifically produces food for local consumption.</p>
	<p>2.1.4 When the County updates the 1995 Open Space Plan, revise the public benefit rating system for Open Space: Farm and Agricultural Conservation Land to ensure more land management for agriculture.</p>
	<p>2.1.5 Support land trusts and cooperative projects to develop permanently affordable housing communities adjacent to farmland that provide farmland access for the residents for commercial and non-commercial local food production.</p>
	<p>2.1.6 Work with land trusts to determine acreage goals and farmland preservation strategies specifically for community farms and forests that are locally owned and managed, are working lands, and benefit the public.</p>
<p>2.2 Improve the health of our county's soils.</p>	<p>2.2.1 Increase funding support for WSU Extension and the Whatcom Conservation District to increase technical assistance and educational opportunities for growers to learn soil management best practices and transition from conventional to organic production methods. <i>(Also see related objective 5.3):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>5.3.1 Promote adoption of farm management practices that maximize soil carbon storage and increase water and nutrient availability.</i> ● <i>5.3.2 Coordinate state and federal agricultural adaptation resources (e.g. Inflation Reduction Act funds) to support farmers in making informed business decisions in a changing climate.</i> ● <i>5.3.3 Increase farm resilience to sea level rise, shoreline erosion, and river flooding by protecting and restoring riparian estuary habitat, restoring wetlands and increasing natural water storage.</i> ● <i>5.3.4 Encourage increases in research and development of drought- and heat-resistant</i>

	<p><i>agricultural crops and flexible infrastructure to support diversified crops.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>5.3.5 Reduce the risk of devastating impacts of extreme weather and natural disasters by encouraging food producers to diversify their products.</i>
<p>2.3 Conserve water and support water efficiency projects and policies.</p>	<p>2.3.1 Work with the Health Department and State officials to explore opportunities for utilizing greywater for growing food. Existing greywater rules need systems and implementation support to align with the needs of small-scale agriculture.</p> <p>2.3.2 Encourage municipalities within the County to set water rate policies that promote conservation and prioritize food production. This could include offering an "irrigation-only" reduced rate to gardeners and urban farmers using municipal water to irrigate their crops.</p> <p>2.3.3 Collaborate with the County's water districts to implement a sustainable funding mechanism for current Whatcom Conservation District initiatives that support water efficiency (i.e. providing technical assistance to producers, offering rebates for water efficient irrigation equipment).</p> <p>2.3.4 Continue the Whatcom Water Alliance rebates for WaterSense irrigation controllers for county residents, and encourage the City of Bellingham to continue their rebate program for WaterSense irrigation controllers.</p> <p>2.3.5 Support efforts to quantify and verify water rights and collaborative efforts to address water supply and salmon recovery.</p> <p>2.3.6 Create a local water exchange system that coordinates the lease and sale of water rights as they are freed up. Prioritize the water rights for local and organic food producers and keep the cost accessible.</p> <p>2.3.7 Initiate and support programs by the Whatcom Conservation District, the Whatcom Water Alliance, and others to reduce water use on lawns, golf courses, and landscaping.</p>
<p>2.4 Ensure water quality through habitat restoration and improved agricultural practices.</p>	<p>2.4.1 Incentivize participation in the Whatcom Farmers for Clean Water program managed by the Whatcom Conservation District.</p>

	<p>2.4.2 Increase the number of acres enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), to improve both water quality and fish habitat. Encourage the Whatcom Conservation District to utilize available state and federal funds to supplement CREP.</p> <p>2.4.3 Explore the development of a “Working Buffers” program. Working Buffers are an approach to riparian conservation that combines stream restoration with low-impact food production in a way that incentivizes sustainable stewardship of the buffer area by the landowner.</p> <p>2.4.4 Ensure public landscape maintenance by the County adheres to best management practices, including integrated pest management, no-spray road maintenance and the use of native plants, and does not negatively affect food production and water sources.</p>
<p>2.5 Protect and restore natural ecosystems and wildlife corridors that community members rely on for food provision.</p>	<p>2.5.1 Increase the number of acres enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to engage more agricultural producers and landowners to plant native trees to enhance wildlife corridors and protect fish-bearing streams and rivers.</p> <p>2.5.2 Secure additional funds and increase capacity in the Whatcom Conservation District's Fish Passage program to convert culverts on County land that currently prevent fish passage.</p> <p>2.5.3 Secure additional funds and increase staff capacity in the Whatcom Conservation District to support programs to improve riparian buffer installations on properties that aren't eligible for CREP, such as the Salmon Recovery Program.</p> <p>2.5.4 Prioritize conservation easement purchases that maintain habitat corridor connectivity to support populations of wildlife for hunting.</p> <p>2.5.5 Enforce the Open Space public access program to enable foraging, hunting, etc. on land enrolled in this program.</p>

Goal 3: Build a resilient and vibrant local food economy

<p>3.1 Increase the supply of local, sustainable food produced in Whatcom County.</p>	<p>3.1.1 Secure additional funds to support partner organizations that provide small grants and low-interest loans to producers and processors who distribute products locally, and who may not be eligible for traditional sources of financing.</p> <p>3.1.2 Create and expand the network of shared-use kitchens and processing facilities for food businesses, food producers and retailers.</p> <p>3.1.3 Support the development of an affordable, local, commercially-licensed smoker/processor for seafood, which will reduce carbon emissions from long-distance export.</p> <p>3.1.4 Collaborate with tribes to explore opportunities to increase our fisheries resource (i.e. salmon run size) in Whatcom County.</p> <p>3.1.5 Coordinate and support training for meat processing workforce development, including for custom slaughter butchers and WSDA meat cutters, to increase the number of niche meat processors in the County.</p> <p>3.1.6 Analyze County permitting and zoning processes related to meat processing to remove barriers for small-scale butchers and WSDA meat cutters.</p> <p>3.1.7 Remove barriers to and support the development of additional food distribution and processing centers in the County.</p> <p>3.1.8 Support innovative methods to increase the supply of local food (i.e. aquaculture, vertical farming, etc).</p>
<p>3.2 Remove barriers to and build consumer demand for locally-produced agricultural products and facilitate markets for local producers and food businesses.</p>	<p>3.2.1 Increase local food procurement for county departments and county-subsidized facilities and programs (such as childcare and senior meal programs).</p> <p>3.2.2 Direct a portion of the County Lodging Tax Advisory Committee (LTAC) funds towards supporting events that celebrate and enhance area agriculture, fishing, and food activities to build demand for locally grown and sourced foods. Potential events could include Seafeast, Whatcom County Farm Tour, Eat Local Month Restaurant Week, as well as small-city farmers markets (i.e. Ferndale, Lynden, etc).</p>

	<p>3.2.3 Encourage cities within the county to waive all applicable fees for farmers and seafood markets and mobile markets, especially those in low-income areas.</p>
	<p>3.2.4 Invest in a relationship with the Port of Bellingham to identify opportunities to collaborate on food system projects that build demand for locally produced foods.</p>
<p>3.3 Expand workforce development and readiness to prepare community members for successful food system employment.</p>	<p>3.3.1 Fund and develop a county network of skilled workers to host the creation of skill, technical training, and apprenticeship opportunities within and outside current institutional education systems in the county (i.e. Bellingham Technical College and Whatcom Community College).</p>
	<p>3.3.2 Support the Workforce Training and Retraining Advisory Group committee at Whatcom Community College. Encourage inclusion/appointment of community organizations led by/for essential food systems workers.</p>
	<p>3.3.3 Work with the Washington State Department of Commerce Tribal Liaison and collaborate with the Lummi Nation and Nooksack Indian Tribe to expand access to workforce development opportunities for their tribal members.</p>
<p>3.4 Support new and beginning farmers in acquiring farmland and support effective transition of farmland to the next generation of farmers.</p>	<p>3.4.1 Advocate for the creation of a Beginning Farmer Tax Credit at the state level which would provide a sales and use tax exemption for beginning farmers.</p>
	<p>3.4.2 Advocate for the creation of a real estate excise tax exemption at the state level for transfer of ownership between current landowners and beginning farmers.</p>
	<p>3.4.3 Provide funding for the Conservation Easement Program’s buy-protect-sell initiative to continue the program once federal grant funds are exhausted. The buy-protect-sell initiative helps make land more affordable for beginning farmers.</p>
	<p>3.4.4 Develop a program to connect landowners who are either enrolled in or eligible for the Open Space: Farm and Agricultural Conservation Land program with farmers who are interested in leasing land.</p>
<p>3.5 Invest in local and cooperative ownership of food</p>	<p>3.5.1 Support, collaborate with, and promote community development organizations that offer succession planning, employee ownership options (e.g. Employee Stock Ownership Programs,</p>

<p>system businesses.</p>	<p>cooperatives, etc.), and similar business succession and retirement programs to preserve jobs, local ownership, and civic engagement.</p>
	<p>3.5.2 Provide grant writing support and technical assistance to cooperatively-owned food and agriculture businesses applying for state and federal funding.</p>

Goal 4: Ensure access to healthy food for all

<p>4.1 Build and design our communities to ensure food access and eliminate food deserts.</p>	<p>4.1.1 Assess the policy barriers (i.e. non-compete clauses) that may prevent grocery store locations in recognized areas with low access to food.</p>
	<p>4.1.2 Consider waiving permit fees for grocery stores in USDA-designated Low Income, Low Access census tracts (aka “food deserts”).</p>
	<p>4.1.3 Conduct a non-profit grocery store feasibility study to see if selling surplus food at low cost to food insecure individuals is a viable model for Whatcom County.</p>
	<p>4.1.4 Increase transportation access to food. Locate existing programs along transportation routes and reroute public transits for more equitable access to food access points as necessary.</p>
	<p>4.1.5 Collaborate with community groups, such as the Birchwood Food Desert Fighters, the Whatcom County food bank network, and the Foothills Community Food Partnership to mitigate the impacts of and eliminate the causes of food deserts.</p>
	<p>4.1.6 Work with the Whatcom County Food Bank Network to assess the needs at food banks service capacity (i.e. infrastructure, staffing/volunteer capacity, and funding needs). Identify opportunities for shared resources.</p>
	<p>4.1.7 Explore opportunities for more commercial kitchens and cold storage available for community groups addressing food access (i.e. food banks, homeless services, neighborhood groups).</p>

	<p>4.1.8 Direct County Parks and Recreation to explore upgrades to the Senior Center kitchen facilities to increase the capacity of the Senior Meals Program. Explore opportunities for shared use of this facility with other community groups addressing food access.</p>
	<p>4.1.9 Identify and implement strategies like a Healthy Corner Store Initiative program or a Good Food Rebate program/tax incentive, for neighborhood retailers and grocery stores to stock and promote nutritionally-dense food options, including local fruits and vegetables.</p>
<p>4.2 Create and promote opportunities for people to grow, prepare, and share their own food.</p>	<p>4.2.1 Identify interest, land and funding to develop more community gardens in Low-Income/Low-Access neighborhoods. Partner with the WSU Extension Master Gardeners and the City of Bellingham Greenways program to identify opportunities to acquire and expand community seed gardens and community gardens in Bellingham.</p>
	<p>4.2.2 Increase support for community educational programs for gardening, seed banking, cooking, and food preservation. Focus efforts on Low-Income/Low-Access areas in the county.</p>
	<p>4.2.3 Engage Tribal partners and cultural liaisons to learn about barriers to and opportunities for hunting, foraging, and fishing as strategies to increase access to healthy food.</p>
<p>4.3 Invest in programs that make healthy food more affordable.</p>	<p>4.3.1 Adequately fund the Whatcom County food bank network to meet the dramatic increase in food insecure individuals in the county. Ensure that a portion of the increased funding to food banks are directed to purchase food directly from Whatcom County producers.</p>
	<p>4.3.2 Ensure consistent funding for and increase the number of farmers markets and food outlets that accept nutrition incentive programs for SNAP recipients.</p>
	<p>4.3.3 Work with WIC to expand its services to stores in underserved areas (i.e. the foothills region).</p>
	<p>4.3.4 Advocate that the state increase funding in the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program to increase the benefits available per participant from \$20 per season to \$30 per season.</p>
	<p>4.3.5 Encourage large communal meal sites (community centers, senior centers, workplace cafeterias, etc.) to adopt healthy food procurement policies that prioritize access to healthy, locally grown foods.</p>

4.4 Scale up food recovery efforts in Whatcom County.	4.4.1 Coordinate efforts and collaboration between food recovery organizations, grocery stores, food banks, and community groups to ensure equitable and consistent food recovery to alleviate conflict over reclaiming food.
	4.4.2 Advocate for incentives for food businesses and farmers to donate surplus food.
	4.4.3 Fund and expand the Sustainable Connections Food Recovery program. Identify need and funding for a food kitchen to better utilize time-sensitive food use.

Goal 5: Mitigate emissions from food system activities, and adapt our food system to a changing climate.

MITIGATION: Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture and the food system activities that contribute to climate change.

5.1 Reduce GHG emissions from farming and food system activities.	5.1.1 Support existing programs for energy efficiency improvements and alternative energy solutions for agricultural businesses throughout Whatcom County.
	5.1.2 Create a recognition program for agricultural businesses that achieve target levels of energy efficiency, conservation, and renewable energy use.
	5.1.3 Work with livestock producers in the County to reduce methane emissions from activities related to ranching and livestock production.
	5.1.4 Advocate for government and other incentives to encourage the use of low-emission vehicles on-farm and throughout food transportation systems.
	5.1.5 Encourage integrated crop and livestock production on farms in a closed loop system to reduce the transport of manure and the use of chemical fertilizers.
	5.1.6 Encourage producers to reduce their use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, the manufacture and transport of which contributes to greenhouse gas emissions.
	5.1.7 Encourage the reduction of short-term plastic use (e.g. plastic mulch) on farms.

	<p>5.1.8 Encourage producers to participate in the Washington State Conservation Commission’s Sustainable Fields and Farms Program, a grant program that provides funds and technical assistance to assist farmers in implementing practices that sequester carbon.</p>
<p>5.2 Reduce waste in our food system and specifically reduce food waste by 50%.</p>	<p>5.2.1 Adopt public procurement policies that guide food waste reduction at County facilities and events. Aim for zero waste events in all County facilities.</p> <p>5.2.2 Support a statewide plastic stewardship program. Businesses who produce packaged goods would share the cost of ensuring those materials are properly recycled.</p> <p>5.2.3 Expand curbside food waste and yard waste pickup for composting countywide.</p> <p>5.2.4 Support recommendations and goals of the 2021 <i>Whatcom Solid and Hazardous Waste Management Plan</i> specific to food waste and recovery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Increase support and advertising for the WSU composting education programs through the Master Composting and Recycling Program. ● Increase recovery of organic materials from multifamily, commercial, and industrial sources. ● Periodically assess programs in development and the funds available and reallocate funds on an as-needed basis to meet the implementation priorities for waste reduction, recycling, and composting. ● Support and fund commercial education through targeted outreach, commercial waste audits, and technical assistance specifically related to Construction/Demolition and food waste. ● Develop food waste management programs, including potential programs that connect restaurants with farmers who would use food waste as livestock feed.”
<p>5.3 Adapt our agricultural production systems and practices to a changing climate. <i>(see also, Goal 2)</i></p>	<p>5.3.1 Promote adoption of farm management practices that maximize soil carbon storage and increase water and nutrient availability.</p> <p>5.3.2 Coordinate state and federal agricultural adaptation resources (e.g. Inflation Reduction Act funds) to support farmers in making informed business decisions in a changing climate.</p>

	<p>5.3.3 Increase farm resilience to sea level rise, shoreline erosion, and river flooding by protecting and restoring riparian estuary habitat, restoring wetlands and increasing natural water storage.</p>
	<p>5.3.4 Encourage increases in research and development of drought- and heat-resistant agricultural crops and flexible infrastructure to support diversified crops.</p>
	<p>5.3.5 Reduce the risk of devastating impacts of extreme weather and natural disasters by encouraging food producers to diversify their products.</p>
<p>5.4 Protect food system workers during extreme weather events.</p>	<p>5.4.1 Develop local programming and technical assistance for farm workers and owners about heat stress and wildfire smoke and the impacts on farmworkers.</p>
	<p>5.4.2 Support investments in protective equipment and infrastructure (e.g. respirators, air conditioned and heated break rooms, shade structures) to protect food chain workers during extreme weather events.</p>
	<p>5.4.3 The County will support local, essential farm workers advocacy for improvements in protections from extreme weather conditions at the State level. Potential improvements include: The definition of extreme conditions, frequency of rest breaks, the pace of work, access to drinking water during heat and smoke, access to shade and/or air conditioned spaces during extreme heat, increased access to heated spaces during extreme cold, and no-penalty time off allowances for employees who wish to stay home during extreme weather.</p>
<p>5.5 Fortify our food system against - and support recovery after - climate disruptions.</p>	<p>5.5.1 Promote and support local, state and federal emergency management efforts to provide food system businesses with disaster preparedness and climate resilience resources and tools.</p>
	<p>5.5.2 Conduct a food supply chain audit to understand where bottlenecks in food distribution/processing exist and what local infrastructure is needed to fill in supply chain gaps in case of climate disruption.</p>
	<p>5.5.3 Assess existing state and federal programs that help producers recover from natural disasters to identify gaps and opportunities for County action.</p>