



Open Steering Committee Meeting Report

February 8th, 2024



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Introduction and Overview

WWFSP, Feb 8th 2024 Meeting

ABOUT WWFSP

The **Western Washington Food Systems Partnership (WWFSP) Steering Committee** is part of Objective 1 of a USDA Regional Food Systems Partnership Grant administered by the Northwest Ag Business Center (NABC) from Sept. 2020 - Sept. 2024. The mission of the group is to increase value-added food production, enhance and improve efficiencies through regional collaboration, support new infrastructure projects for value-added food processing and distribution, provide direct technical assistance, increase the effectiveness of agricultural development initiatives, and support business expansion and access to capital by maximizing coordination of public and private funds. This mission is achieved through mapping existing and proposed ag infrastructure, identifying gaps and creating solutions to fill those gaps, and avoiding or otherwise minimizing competition among parties without hampering the ability to implement individual projects.

ABOUT THE FEB 8 MEETING

On Feb 8, 2024, NABC hosted an open WWFSP Steering Committee meeting at the Heritage Distilling Company in Tumwater's Craft District. Fifty-nine people participated, representing Conservation Districts, Economic Development Councils, Ports, the USDA, the WSDA, farmers and ranchers, processors, and organizations like NABC that support food systems development across Western Washington. Presenting partners included Thurston Economic Development Center, WSDA Regional Markets, USDA, Business Impact NW, Wakulima USA, WA Hmong Farmers Cooperative, and the South Puget Sound Community College.

This special in-person gathering furthered communication among food systems partners in order to identify key infrastructure projects (planned or in process) in the realms of meat, grains, and food hubs, among others. Exercises identified current successes and resources needed regionally for: 1. Business Technical Assistance; 2. Organizational Development; 3. Access to Capital; and 4. Infrastructure Development. The WSDA, USDA, and Business Impact NW presented on current and upcoming ag infrastructure funding opportunities.

MEETING FEEDBACK

1=Strongly Agree,
5=Strongly Disagree

This meeting was helpful to identify resources or connections to move agricultural infrastructure development projects forward. **1.9**

Participants became more aware of existing or upcoming ag infrastructure projects. **1.6**

Participants felt part of a larger movement for food systems development. **1.5**



Mike Peroni, NABC Executive Director welcomes a sold out house.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This document aggregates input from the Feb 8th meeting and is not a comprehensive report of all infrastructure projects and their needs in Western WA. NABC and the WWFSP Steering Committee hope that this can serve as a jumping off point to identify next steps for regional agricultural infrastructure development. Sections 2 and 3 provide key takeaways from the meeting, while specific content from the discussion notes is organized in Appendix A (EXERCISE 1: Mapping Infrastructure Projects by Phase of Development for Meat, Grains, Food Hubs, and Other); Appendix B (EXERCISE 2: Thinking about regional meat, grains, and Food Hubs, participants used three 15-minute rounds to discuss what is working and what resources are still needed for 1. Access to Capital; 2. Infrastructure Development; 3. Business Technical Assistance; and 4. Organizational Development); and Appendix C (EXERCISE 3: Ag Infrastructure Issues & Opportunities in Western WA).

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Focus Areas and Insights

Themes & Key Takeaways

THEMES EXPLORED:

Throughout Feb 8th, participants discussed various themes critical to the advancement of ag infrastructure development in Western WA food systems. These included the importance of communication, coordination, and collaboration among food system entities, the impact of existing public-private partnerships, funding challenges and opportunities, workforce development needs, equipment scalability, waste disposal challenges, and the role of policy and advocacy. Participants mapped food systems infrastructure related to grains, meats, food hubs and other projects, identifying various stages of development and resources needed to move these projects forward.



Jennie Foglia-Jones facilitated the day-long event.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Public-private partnerships, collaborations, and cooperative ventures to develop ag infrastructure, such as those between producers, processors, NABC, and Ports, are critical.
- USDA & WSDA funding has been vital for food systems development. Policy & advocacy work is needed to maintain these funding streams.
- The types of technical assistance NABC, WSDA, Business Impact NW, and others offer are effective and important for growing food businesses.
- Market analysis and feasibility studies are needed prior to implementing infrastructure projects.
- Workforce challenges are persistent. Effective recruitment, training opportunities/apprenticeships to develop needed skills, and funds to raise wages are some strategies to increase the agricultural workforce.
- Equipment for food production and processing must be appropriate for the scale of the operation. Models for sharing equipment can help small-scale producers.



From left to right: Mardi Solomon of Crossroads Consulting, a sticky note wall of infrastructure projects, David Bulindah of Wakulima USA. All photos by Jennie Foglia-Jones LLC.

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Focus Areas and Insights

Themes & Key Takeaways

MEAT

- USDA loans and grants, custom meat sales, and infrastructure like Marzolf's facility and IGFC's new kill floor are enhancing regional resilience.
- Meat processing waste disposal is a challenging issue that benefits from a coordinated approach (ex: Awful Offal, Cedar Grove, WSU on-farm meat compost research programs).
- Collaboration efforts like NWMPA's apprenticeship and the WA Meat-Up, alongside streamlined information pathways and workforce development, enhance industry resilience.
- Advocacy is essential for securing governmental support in the absence of recurring WSDA regional meat funding, while financing, equipment, regulatory knowledge, workforce development, and infrastructure maintenance are critical for the meat industry's growth and sustainability.
- Communication, coordination, mentorship, and regulatory funding are necessary to navigate challenges such as wage balance in the meat industry.

GRAINS

- State and local policy needs to align funding priorities with the needs of small-acreage grain producers.
- Infrastructure improvements such as aggregate upright storage and rail transload capacity are critical for enhancing production efficiency and market access.
- Developing small grains processing infrastructure for cleaning, milling, and malting would support innovation for new higher margin markets.
- The Transition to Organic Partnership Program could benefit regional grain producers and others through Organic certification and new value-added market access.
- Grain production requires a specialized skill set and mentorship/education opportunities are less available for this sector than for mixed row crop production. More effort should be placed on new and beginning farmers/ranchers.
- Collaborative partnerships, strong farmer connections, mentorship, university research, and cooperative models are driving innovation and market visibility.
- There are excellent opportunities to partner with research facilities for development of western WA grain crops. This should be pursued in a timely manner.
- Consumer education and market analysis are crucial for driving demand and establishing market position in the regional grain economy.

FOOD HUBS

- Financial support from initiatives like We Feed WA and WSDA grants, alongside USDA-RD VAPG and USDA-AMS LFPP, is crucial for regional food hubs.
- Shared digital platforms, food safety protocols, bookkeeping, business technical assistance and grant writing assistance contribute to the efficiency and sustainability of regional food hubs.
- Assistance is required to secure funding for labor-related expenses, access to angel investors, and reframing the narrative around food hubs for food security.
- Food hubs require streamlined operational processes, including efficient invoicing systems, EBT access, and expanded platform usage like Local Food Marketplace (LFM), alongside regulatory advocacy for supportive policies.
- Adequate refrigeration, shared communication systems, and workforce development initiatives are pivotal for sustainability of food hubs.
- Comprehensive assistance, product development, insurance, grant writing, and collaboration/facilitation are key for food hub growth, while establishing shared standards would enhance clarity and cooperation within the industry.

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Moving Forward Developing Collaborative Innovation

Conclusion:

The 2024 Feb 8th meeting of the Western Washington Food Systems Partnership underscored the importance of collaboration, innovation, workforce development, and regulatory advocacy in advancing local food systems. While significant strides have been made, numerous challenges persist, requiring concerted efforts from stakeholders across grains, meat, and food hub sectors.

USDA loans and custom meat sales bolster the meat industry, while infrastructure investments and waste management contribute to its sustainability. Efforts to enhance resilience in the niche meat sector include infrastructure investments for custom sales, workforce development, and streamlined information pathways.

Scale-appropriate infrastructure across the value chain is vital for small-acreage grain producers; meanwhile, aligning funding priorities at a policy level and fostering a more comprehensive understanding of market opportunities is key.

Financial backing, streamlined operations, and regulatory advocacy are essential for food hub development. Growth and resilience of food hubs can be further advanced by continuing to provide comprehensive technical assistance and facilitating standardization across software platforms.

Moving forward, it is imperative to continue to foster communication and collaboration, advocating for policy changes, securing funding opportunities, and supporting initiatives aimed at addressing workforce, infrastructure, and organizational development needs. By working together, we can create a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable food system for Western Washington.



A huge thank you to our participating partners!

For further inquiries or to get involved, visit wwfsp.org or contact info@agbizcenter.org.



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Appendix A: Mapping Infrastructure Projects

EXERCISE 1: February 8th began with a mapping exercise wherein participants wrote down planned or existing ag infrastructure projects related to meat, grains, food hubs, and other areas and placed them on a matrix based on their phase of development: Idea/Planning; In Pre-Production; In Production; In Operation.

Idea/Planning Phase:

MEAT

- Anaerobic digester for slaughter waste: This innovative approach to waste management could address environmental concerns and promote sustainability within the meat processing industry.
- Carnation Farms (King Co.): This suggests potential plans for agricultural infrastructure development at Carnation Farms, which could significantly impact the local food system.
- Meat products beyond prime cuts (WSU): This indicates a focus on value-added meat processing, potentially diversifying products and increasing profitability for meat producers.
- Regional livestock processing study (Thurston & Pierce Counties): Conducting a study on regional livestock processing highlights a commitment to understanding and addressing infrastructure needs in the meat sector.

GRAINS

- Grain breeding trials for suitable varieties (WSU): Investing in grain breeding trials indicates a focus on improving crop varieties, potentially leading to higher yields, better resilience, and increased profitability for grain producers.

FOOD HUBS

- Cascadian Seafare is developing a cooperative model for locally procured and processed seafood, contributing to a potential area of growth for the regional food industry.
- Millworks Co-op/Shared Commissary Kitchen for local value-added food products (Whatcom Co.): Establishing a co-op and shared kitchen space for value-added food products can support local entrepreneurs and promote economic development in the food sector.
- Port Angeles – Food bank, Food Hub, processing, farm to school (Clallam Co.): This multifaceted approach to food system development addresses various aspects, including food access, processing infrastructure, and farm-to-school initiatives.
- SW WA Food Hub – Local Ranch Box (Thurston Co.): The development of a local Food Hub and the implementation of a Ranch Box program can enhance local food distribution networks and support small-scale ranchers.

OTHER

- Countywide planning policy updates 2024-2044 – Food systems & ag viability: Updating planning policies to prioritize food systems and agricultural viability demonstrates a commitment to long-term sustainability and resilience in the agricultural sector.
- SW WA minimally processed vegetables: This initiative focuses on expanding processing capabilities for vegetables in Southwest Washington, potentially increasing market opportunities for local farmers.

Appendix A:

Mapping Infrastructure Projects

In Pre-Production:

MEAT

- Marzolf Meats USDA slaughter & processing (Snohomish Co.): This project represents a significant investment in meat processing infrastructure, which could enhance the local meat supply chain and support regional livestock producers.

GRAINS

- Grain handling & conveyance – SPSCC Tumwater Craft District (Thurston EDC): The investment in grain handling and conveyance infrastructure at the SPSCC Tumwater Craft District facility suggests efforts to bolster the grain supply chain and support local grain producers in Thurston County.
- Port of Chehalis SW WA Grain Project – grain handling & storage (Lewis Co.): The development of grain handling and storage facilities at the Port of Chehalis indicates a commitment to enhancing grain infrastructure, potentially improving access to markets and increasing efficiency for grain producers in the region.

FOOD HUBS

- Millworks Project – Bellingham (Whatcom Co.): The Millworks Project in Bellingham aims to contribute to the local food system by providing infrastructure for food processing and production, potentially fostering economic development and job creation in Whatcom County.

OTHER

- Community Seed Center – Organic Seed Alliance (Jefferson Co.): The development of a Community Seed Center by the Organic Seed Alliance demonstrates a commitment to preserving and promoting seed diversity, supporting local farmers, and enhancing agricultural resilience in Jefferson County.
- Food & Farming Center (Snohomish Co.): The establishment of a Food & Farming Center in Snohomish County signifies a concerted effort to support local agriculture and food production, potentially providing resources and infrastructure to strengthen the regional food system
- Pierce Co. Closed Loop Community Project: This Closed Loop Community Project indicates efforts to develop sustainable agricultural systems that minimize waste and maximize resource efficiency, potentially serving as a model for environmentally conscious agricultural practices in Pierce County.

Appendix A:

Mapping Infrastructure Projects

In Production:

MEAT

- The Island Grown Farmers Co-op (IGFC) is opening a new kill floor this summer: The opening of a new kill floor by IGFC represents a significant milestone in enhancing meat processing infrastructure, potentially increasing capacity and efficiency for regional livestock producers.
- Project Amplifier: Meat processing needs & opportunities study: This project signifies a comprehensive effort to assess meat processing needs and opportunities, potentially informing strategic investments and infrastructure development to support local meat production and processing.

OTHER

- Lopez Food Center: The establishment of the Lopez Food Center represents a significant investment in local food infrastructure, potentially enhancing access to fresh, locally sourced food for residents of Lopez Island and supporting the local economy.
- Rentable cold, freezer, & dry storage facilities for small-scale producers: The availability of rentable cold, freezer, and dry storage facilities offers valuable support to small-scale producers, enabling them to store and preserve their products effectively, potentially increasing market access and competitiveness.
- SW WA Agricultural Business & Innovation Park (Thurston EDC, Tenino): The development of the SW WA Agricultural Business & Innovation Park indicates a commitment to fostering agricultural innovation and entrepreneurship, potentially providing resources and infrastructure to support the growth of agribusinesses in Thurston County and beyond.

Appendix A:

Mapping Infrastructure Projects

In Operation 1:

MEAT

- Jack Mountain Meats (Skagit Co.): An operational meat processing facility contributing to local meat production and processing, supporting regional livestock producers.
- Marzolf Meats WSDA slaughter & processing (Snohomish Co.): An operational slaughter and processing facility providing essential services to local meat producers, ensuring access to processing facilities.
- NW Local Meats - Island Grown Farmers Co-op (San Juan, Island, Skagit, Whatcom): A cooperative venture supporting local meat producers and facilitating market access for their products, strengthening the regional meat supply chain.
- Northwest Meat Processors Assoc.: Represents a collaborative effort among meat processors to support the local meat industry, enhancing processing capacity and efficiency.
- Puget Sound Processing / Heritage Meats: important USDA slaughter and cut/wrap operation serving many farmers in the South Puget Sound region. (Slaughter currently non-operational due to staffing shortages).

GRAINS

- Cairnsprings Mill (Skagit Co.): An operational mill providing grain processing services, supporting local grain producers and enhancing the regional grain supply chain.
- SW WA Grain Growers Coop: Represents a cooperative effort among grain growers to support the local grain industry, enhancing market access and profitability for regional grain producers.
- Talking Cedar Brewing/Distilling (Thurston Co.): An operational brewery and distillery contributing to the local food and beverage industry, supporting local agriculture through sourcing ingredients.
- Valley Agronomics – Donald Facility (OR): An operational facility supporting agricultural activities, providing essential services and resources to farmers in the region.

Appendix A:

Mapping Infrastructure Projects

In Operation 2:

FOOD HUBS

- Cascadia Produce (King Co.): operates as a Food Hub connecting local farmers with consumers and businesses, thereby supporting the regional food economy.
- Evergreen United: Small food hub sourcing from Olympia and delivering to restaurants in Seattle.
- Farmstand Local Foods (King Co.): provides infrastructure and services to local farmers and food producers, facilitating market access and enhancing the visibility of locally produced foods.
- Local Inland Northwest Cooperative (LINC) (Spokane Co.): operates as a cooperative endeavor, strengthening collaboration among farmers and food producers in the Inland Northwest region and promoting local food access.
- NW Food Hub Network: Operates as a network of Food Hubs in the Northwest region, facilitating regional food distribution, supporting local agriculture, and promoting food system resilience.
- Okanogan Producers Marketing Assoc. This association operates as a marketing platform for local producers in Okanogan County, enhancing market opportunities and promoting agricultural sustainability in the region.
- Puget Sound Food Hub (Skagit Co.): This operational Food Hub facilitates the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of locally produced food, supporting local farmers and food producers.
- SW WA Food Hub – Multi-farm box, farm to school, workplace wellness box (Thurston Co.): Offers various services, including multi-farm boxes, farm to school programs, and workplace wellness initiatives, increasing market access for local farmers and supporting community food initiatives.
- Walla Walla Food Hub (Walla Walla Co.): provides essential infrastructure and services to local farmers and food producers, enhancing market access and supporting the regional food system.
- WA Food Hub Network: Represents a coordinated effort among Food Hubs across Washington state, enhancing collaboration, resource-sharing, and market access for local farmers and food producers.
- Whidbey Island Grown Co-op (Island Co.): This co-op supports local farmers and food producers on Whidbey Island, enhancing market opportunities and fostering community food security.

OTHER

- Cloud Mtn. Farm Cntr.: Provides resources and support for local farmers and food producers in Whatcom County, enhancing agricultural productivity and sustainability in the region.
- Eat Local First: Focuses on education, communications, marketing, and building demand for locally sourced food, enhancing consumer awareness and support for local agriculture.
- Farm Equipment Sharing “Library” from Conservation Districts: Offers shared resources for farmers, reducing operational costs and improving access to essential equipment.
- Genuine Skagit Valley: Promotes and supports local agriculture in Skagit Valley, enhancing market opportunities and fostering community food resilience.
- Incubator Kitchen at 21 Acres: Offers small-scale production facilities for small farms, supporting local food entrepreneurs and enhancing the diversity of products available in the market.
- Taproot Kitchen: Operates as a Food Hub on Lopez Island, facilitating food aggregation, distribution, and market access for local farmers and food producers.
- WA Food & Farm Finder: Provides a centralized platform for consumers to locate and connect with local farms and food producers, increasing market access for farmers and promoting local food consumption.
- We Feed WA: Represents a statewide initiative aimed at supporting local food systems and addressing food insecurity, providing essential resources and support to farmers, food producers, and Food Hubs across Washington state.

EXERCISE 2: Thinking about regional meat, grains, and food hubs, participants used three 15-minute rounds to discuss what is working and what resources are still needed for: 1. Access to Capital; 2. Infrastructure Development; 3. Business Technical Assistance; and 4. Organizational Development.

Appendix **B**

(MEAT)

What's Working

SUMMARY: USDA loans, custom meat sales, infrastructure investments (e.g., Marzolf's facility, IGFC's new kill floor), waste management by Cedar Grove, and collaboration initiatives (e.g., NWMPA's apprenticeship program, WA Meat-Up), alongside streamlined information pathways and workforce development efforts, collectively enhance the resilience and success of the regional meat industry.

ACCESS TO CAPITAL

- USDA loans offer significant financial support, providing up to \$600,000 at a low 1% interest rate for the installation of facilities and permitting.
Despite the benefits of USDA loans, recipients face the challenge of needing dual knowledge-sets and running two businesses simultaneously.
- The Oregon Cattlemen's Association is actively investing in the Northwest Meat Processors Association (NWMPA), suggesting potential collaboration opportunities for similar initiatives in Washington state.
- The practice of selling custom meat products offers a viable revenue stream for meat growers and processors.
- WSDA grants

Where is Support Needed?

SUMMARY: Advocacy is crucial for governmental support in the absence of recurring WSDA funding, while financing, equipment, regulatory knowledge, workforce development, and infrastructure maintenance are essential for the growth and sustainability of the meat industry, underscoring the need for communication, coordination, mentorship, and regulatory funding to navigate challenges such as waste disposal regulations and wage balance.

ACCESS TO CAPITAL

- The previous availability of WSDA Meat & Poultry funding was beneficial for the industry, but unfortunately, it is no longer available.
Advocacy is needed, highlighting the importance of governmental support in driving advancements within the meat and poultry sector.
- Financing for expansion: There is a need for financial resources to support the expansion of existing meat production and processing facilities, indicating a demand for funding opportunities to facilitate growth within the industry.
- Gap funding sources to help cover upfront costs for recipients of reimbursement-based grants



For more information on WA Meat Up visit www.wameatup.com @wameatup

Appendix **B**

(MEAT)

What's Working

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

- Darron Marzolf's initiative to construct a model processing facility and associated outlets in Snohomish demonstrates a proactive approach towards enhancing meat processing infrastructure.
- Cedar Grove Composting's waste management services provide an effective solution for handling waste generated from meat processing activities, indicating a sustainable and environmentally conscious approach within the sector.
- The Island Grown Farmers Co-op (IGFC) is set to open a new kill floor in the upcoming summer season, representing a significant infrastructure development that will bolster local meat production capabilities and support the regional agricultural community.
- Schenk Packing, located in Snohomish County, contributes to the meat processing infrastructure by providing essential services, further strengthening the local meat supply chain and supporting the regional economy.

BUSINESS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Collaboration: Effective communication and collaboration with relevant stakeholders facilitate access to valuable resources and support networks, enabling meat businesses to address challenges and capitalize on opportunities within the industry (e.g., WA Meat Up).
- USDA Regional Food Business Centers, like the Northwest and Rocky Mountain Regional Center, will boost food system resilience and competitiveness. They support small and mid-tier food businesses by fostering collaboration, providing data analysis, and facilitating access to funding, with a focus on underserved farmers and ranchers.
- Streamlined Information Pathways: The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) offers streamlined pathways to information and resources for meat businesses, enhancing accessibility and facilitating informed decision-making.
- Island Grown Farmers Co-op (IGFC): Initiatives like IGFC provide valuable technical assistance and support to meat businesses, contributing to their success and sustainability within the regional food system.

Where is Support Needed?

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

- Adequate equipment tailored to the scale of both the animals and the processing facilities is essential to ensure efficient and effective meat production, especially poultry slaughter and processing.
- Conducting site-specific feasibility studies for projects like the Tenino Ag Park is crucial to assess the viability and potential challenges associated with infrastructure development.
- There is a need for access to comprehensive regulatory information and knowledge regarding waste disposal.
- There is a demand for trained professionals with expertise in various aspects of meat production and processing, highlighting the importance of workforce development initiatives.
- Securing suitable land and zoning permissions for slaughter facilities and butcher shops is vital to support the expansion and sustainability of the meat processing sector.
- Maintaining existing infrastructure is crucial to preserve operational continuity and meet the growing demand for locally sourced meats.

BUSINESS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Communication: Enhancing communication channels is vital to ensure effective collaboration and information sharing among stakeholders in the meat industry.
- Coordination: Coordinating efforts at a regional level can streamline resources and support mechanisms for meat businesses, fostering efficiency and effectiveness.
- Connection to Resources: Facilitating connections to existing resources helps meat businesses access the support and guidance they need to thrive in the industry.
- Regulatory Funding: Advocating for continued funding from the state legislature is crucial to sustain and expand support programs for the meat sector.
- Navigating Regulations: Assistance with logistics, including compliance with HACCP regulations, is essential to ensure operational compliance and food safety standards.
- Mentorship: Increasing the capacity of skilled butchers to mentor apprentices helps address workforce shortages and ensures the continuity of essential skills in meat processing.
- Local Market Training: Providing training for producers on selling local meat equips them with the knowledge and skills needed to market their products effectively and sustainably.

Appendix **B**

(MEAT)

What's Working

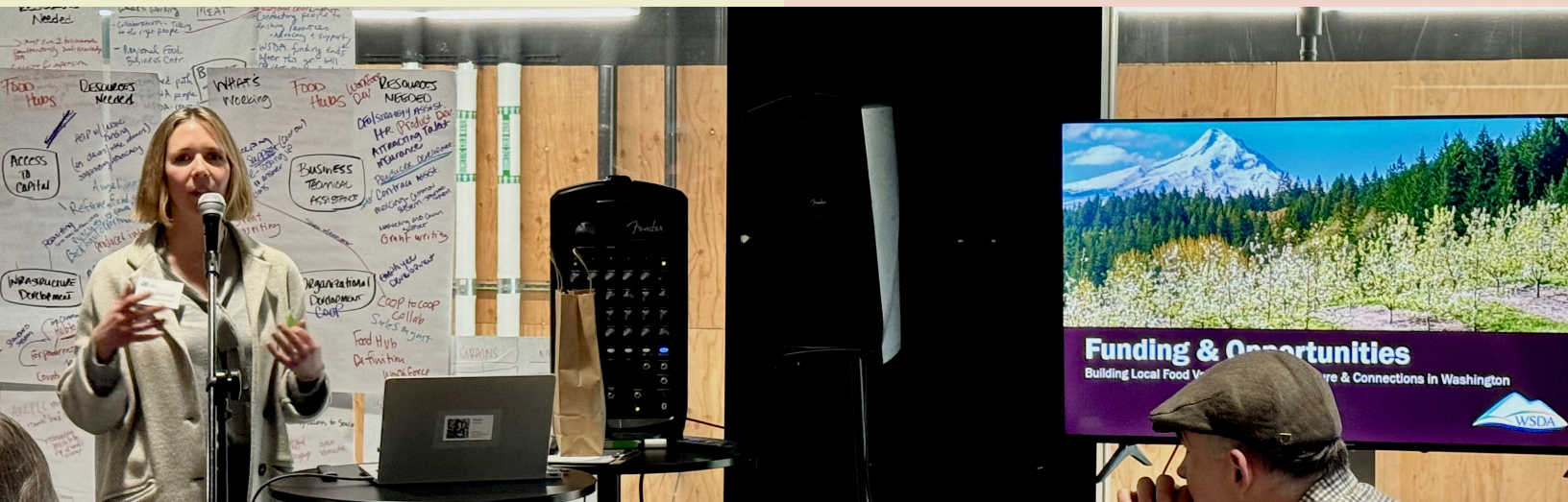
ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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- Cedar Grove Composting's waste management services provide an effective solution for handling waste generated from meat processing activities, indicating a sustainable and environmentally conscious approach within the sector.
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Where is Support Needed?

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Laura Raymond, Washington State Department of Agriculture Regional Markets speaking about WSDA Funding Opportunities on Feb 8th, 2024

Appendix **B**

(GRAINS)

What's Working

SUMMARY: The Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) supports Organic certification and new market access for regional grain producers, driving market opportunities; collaborative partnerships and strong farmer connections enhance resilience and profitability, while mentorship, university research, and cooperative models such as the SW WA Grain Growers Coop bolster innovation and market visibility within the grain industry.

ACCESS TO CAPITAL

- Demand: There is a recognized demand for regional grains, which creates opportunities for producers to access capital for expanding production and meeting market needs.
- Market potential: The potential for growth in the regional grain market presents opportunities for accessing capital investments in infrastructure, technology, and expanding production to capitalize on market demand. (Note: More information is needed to understand market potential, synthesizing global and local market analysis.)
- Public/private partnerships: Collaborative efforts between public entities like the SW WA Grain Growers and the Port of Chehalis demonstrate successful partnerships that can provide access to capital through joint ventures, investment opportunities, or funding initiatives aimed at supporting regional grain production.
- WSDA Organic, new markets: The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) plays a role in facilitating access to capital by supporting Organic certification and opening up new markets for regional grain producers. This support enhances market opportunities and increases revenue potential for grain growers.

Where is Support Needed?

SUMMARY: Policy reforms at state and local levels are necessary to align funding priorities with the needs of small-acreage grain producers; infrastructure improvements, mentorship programs, and accessible technical assistance are vital for enhancing production efficiency and market access, while consumer education and market analysis are key for driving demand and ensuring market security in the regional grain economy.

ACCESS TO CAPITAL

- Policy informing funding at state/local levels: Policies can help align funding priorities with the needs of regional grain producers and support initiatives aimed at enhancing production, infrastructure, and market access.
- Redesigning policy to adequately reflect the needs of small-acreage grain producers: There is a call for policy redesign to ensure that it is inclusive and supportive of producers operating on smaller scales.
- ARCPLC model: There is interest in utilizing programs such as the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs to provide support and stability for regional grain producers. Implementing or adapting these models could help mitigate risks and ensure financial security for producers.
- Grants for Organic certifications (e.g., TOPP): Providing grants for Organic certifications, such as the Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP), can incentivize producers to transition to Organic practices and access premium markets. This support can be instrumental in expanding Organic grain production and meeting growing consumer demand. (Note: Need to rework “base acreage” requirement within the TOPP program to include smaller acreage production systems.)



Aba Kiser, Watershed Productions reporting out on Exercise 2; Grains

Appendix **B**

(GRAINS)

What's Working

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

- Scale-appropriate combines: The existence of a few (note: not many) scale-appropriate combines in Western WA addresses some of the needs of regional grain producers, enabling efficient harvesting operations that are suited to their operation size. (Note: Access to more small-scale equipment and addressing transportation issues may be required to meet a wider producer need.)
- Small farm equipment rental programs: Programs facilitated by Conservation Districts that offer small farm equipment rental services provide accessible and affordable options for farmers, enabling them to access necessary equipment without the financial burden of ownership. (Note: Work may be needed to ensure adequate promotion and use of these programs. Timing and logistics may be a significant hurdle.)
- Strong connections among local and niche market farmers foster a supportive agricultural community, facilitating collaboration, information sharing, resource exchange, and enhanced market opportunities for regional grain producers. These connections contribute to the development of a resilient and diversified agricultural sector, ultimately increasing profitability and sustainability.

Where is Support Needed?

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

- Small-scale grain production requires specialized infrastructure to address unique needs.
- Mid-scale harvesting equipment: Tailored equipment bridges the gap between small and large-scale production, offering efficiency and scalability for regional grain producers.
- Drying & cleaning: Essential infrastructure ensures quality and market readiness, critical for small-scale producers.
- Storage: Adequate facilities preserve grain quality and maintain inventory for small-acreage operations.
- Processing: Access to, or relationships with, scale-appropriate processing facilities or value-added enterprises (brewing, distilling, baking) allows producers to add value and diversify market offerings.
- Cost of equipment: Affordability of equipment is crucial for small-acreage producers to invest in necessary machinery without incurring excessive financial burdens.
- Shared resources: Collaborative sharing of resources such as equipment, facilities, and infrastructure among producers can reduce costs and improve efficiency for small-acreage grain production. (Note: How to ensure adequate use of Conservation District Programs?)
- Transportation and storage of Organic and conventional: Infrastructure is needed for both Organic and conventional grain that meets National Organic Program guidelines, to ensure market access and diversification options for small-acreage producers.
- Commercial scaling: Infrastructure that supports the scaling up of operations from small to commercial levels enables growth and expansion opportunities for regional grain producers.
- Land access & assessment: Access to suitable land and assessment of land resources are essential for small-acreage producers to establish and expand their grain production operations.

What's Working

BUSINESS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Administrative and financial resources: Resources for administrative, financial, and executive staffing are available within organizations like the Northwest Agriculture Business Center (NABC) and other technical assistance organizations supporting the operational and managerial aspects of small-acreage grain production.
- Experienced farmers: Despite challenges, experienced farmers with generational knowledge do exist who have the capability to share knowledge and mentorship.
- Innovative market: The presence of an innovative market, including partnerships with artisan bakeries, brewing, and distilling industries, provides diverse market opportunities for small-acreage grain producers.
- Strong demand: While anecdotal, there appears to be a strong demand for regional grains, although further comprehensive market analysis is needed to confirm.
- University research support for regionally adapted varieties: Collaborative research efforts with universities such as Oregon State University (OSU) and Washington State University (WSU) provide valuable insights and resources for small grain breeding and sustainable seed systems, fostering innovation and improvement in regional grain production.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Co-op model: The Southwest WA Grain Growers Cooperative serves as an example of a successful cooperative model, where farmers come together to pool resources, share knowledge, and collectively market their products, enhancing the viability and sustainability of small-acreage grain production.
- Public-private partnership: Collaborative efforts between public and private entities are proving successful in supporting small-acreage regional grain production, fostering cooperation and leveraging resources to benefit producers. EX: Port of Skagit and Port of Chehalis.

Where is Support Needed?

BUSINESS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Capacity for experienced farmers to serve as mentors, providing guidance and support to new and aspiring grain producers.
- Promotion/access to existing technical assistance services to ensure that small-acreage grain producers are aware of, and can readily access, available support.
- Translating complex technical grant language into understandable terms for small-acreage producers, facilitating their participation in funding opportunities.
- Translating specialized grain terminology into understandable language for small-acreage producers, improving communication and knowledge sharing within the industry.
- Resources and information on rotation crop practices is essential for small-acreage producers to implement sustainable farming practices and maintain soil health in grain production systems.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Support for operations: including infrastructure development, logistics management, and administrative functions, to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of small-acreage grain production operations.
- Vertical integration and value-added opportunities, especially for existing grain farms that could diversify revenue streams and increase regional economic development.
- Skills for grain producers to market themselves, enabling them to effectively promote their products and manage business operations.
- Access to skilled labor is essential for small-acreage grain producers, requiring resources to recruit, train, and retain qualified staff to support farm operations.
- Support is needed to facilitate collaboration between policymakers and grain producers, ensuring that policies and regulations are reflective of the needs and interests of small-acreage producers.
- WA "Small" Grain Commission: There is an opportunity to better represent and serve the interests of small grain producers, potentially by establishing a WA Small Grain Commission specifically focused on addressing the needs of small-scale producers.

Appendix **B**

(GRAINS)

What's Working

MARKETS

- Culinary Breeding Network: The Culinary Breeding Network represents a successful model for integrating culinary attributes into the breeding process, aligning grain varieties with market demands and consumer preferences. This innovative approach enhances the marketability of regional grain products by prioritizing traits that appeal to chefs, bakers, and consumers.
- Shared branding & marketing: Initiatives like the SW WA Grain Growers Co-op demonstrate successful collaboration among producers to collectively brand and market their products. This shared approach enhances visibility, creates economies of scale, and increases market access for regional grain products.

Where is Support Needed?

MARKETS

- Consumer education about regional grains, their nutritional benefits, and their role in supporting local agriculture. Increased consumer awareness can drive demand for regional grain products and stimulate market growth.
- Access to market information and insights derived from farmers' direct experiences can provide valuable intelligence for producers, enabling them to make informed decisions and adapt their strategies to market dynamics effectively.
- Investing in research on grain varietal development and suitability, particularly through institutions like Washington State University (WSU), can lead to the identification of improved varieties that are better adapted to local growing conditions and market demands.
- Conducting comprehensive market analysis is essential for understanding various aspects of the grain market (e.g., Organic markets, bottlenecks, futures stock market dynamics, global influences), and developing strategies to address market challenges and capitalize on opportunities.
- Enhancing market security and resilience involves implementing measures to mitigate risks, ensure supply chain stability, and adapt to external shocks or disruptions. This may include diversifying market channels, strengthening relationships with buyers, and implementing risk management strategies to safeguard against market volatility.

Appendix **B**

(FOOD HUBS)

What's Working

SUMMARY: We Feed WA and WSDA Grants, along with Value-Added Producer Grants (USDA-RD VAPG) and Local Food Promotion Program grants (USDA-AMS LFPP), offer crucial financial support to regional Food Hubs, while shared digital platforms, food safety protocols, bookkeeping, NABC support, and grant writing assistance contribute to their efficiency, compliance, and sustainability.

ACCESS TO CAPITAL

- Local Food Promotion Program grants: Grants offered through the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) LFPP support regional Food Hubs in promoting and marketing local food products, increasing consumer awareness and market access.
- Value-Added Producer Grants: The USDA Rural Development's VAPG program provides funding opportunities for regional Food Hubs to add value to agricultural products, expand market opportunities, and enhance profitability.
- We Feed WA: The We Feed WA initiative is proving successful in providing access to capital for regional Food Hubs, potentially through grants, funding opportunities, or financial support aimed at strengthening local food systems.
- WSDA Grants: Grants provided by the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) offer financial assistance to regional Food Hubs, supporting infrastructure development, operational expenses, and other capital needs.

Where is Support Needed?

SUMMARY:

Assistance is needed to secure funding for labor-related expenses, access angel investors, and reframe the narrative around Food Hubs for food security. Also critical is permitting for facility operation, creating back-haul opportunities, establishing efficient producer invoicing systems, providing access to EBT, and expanding access to platforms like Local Food Marketplace (LFM). Advocating for supportive policies is needed to ensure adequate refrigeration infrastructure, implementing a common system for hub-to-hub communication, and investing in workforce development. Hubs need CFO/strategy assistance, HR support, product development, insurance coverage, producer development, contract assistance, common invoicing systems, marketing and communications support, grant writing, and employee development, as well as facilitating co-op collaboration and defining Food Hub standards.

ACCESS TO CAPITAL

- Help with labor funding: Assistance is needed to secure funding for labor-related expenses, such as hiring drivers or workers for warehouse handling and distribution, as well as for organizing and advocacy efforts to support the mission of Food Hubs.
- Angel investors: Access to angel investors who are willing to provide capital investment in exchange for equity or ownership stakes could provide a valuable source of funding for regional Food Hubs, supporting their growth and sustainability.
- Reframe as food security/resilience: There is a need to reframe the narrative surrounding Food Hubs to emphasize their role in promoting food security and resiliency within local communities. This reframing could attract additional funding and support from stakeholders interested in addressing food system vulnerabilities and promoting sustainability.
- Gap funding sources to help cover upfront costs for recipients of reimbursement-based grants

Appendix **B**

(FOOD HUBS)

What's Working

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

- Food safety/traceability: Implementation of food safety and traceability protocols within regional Food Hubs ensures that products meet regulatory standards and consumer expectations, enhancing trust and confidence in the local food system.
- Utilization of shared digital platforms: The implementation of digital platforms, such as the Local Food Marketplace (LFM), and shared software platforms, is proving successful in regional Food Hubs. These platforms facilitate connections between producers and consumers, streamline operations, manage inventory, track sales, and coordinate logistics, ultimately enhancing operational efficiency, customer satisfaction, and the overall functioning of the local food system.

Where is Support Needed?

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

- Permitting for facility operation: Access to permitting is crucial for Food Hubs to begin operations, ensuring compliance with regulations and safety standards.
- Back-haul opportunities: Creating opportunities for back-hauling can optimize transportation efficiency and reduce costs for Food Hubs, improving overall logistics.
- Producer invoicing: Establishing efficient invoicing systems for producers simplifies financial transactions and ensures timely payments, fostering positive relationships.
- Access to EBT: Providing access to Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) systems enables Food Hubs to accept payments from customers using Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, expanding accessibility and inclusivity.
- Expansion of LFM access: Expanding access to platforms like LFM for more Food Hubs enhances market reach and facilitates connections between producers and consumers.
- Messaging to lawmakers: Advocating for policies, including county-level mandates for local food purchasing, can create a supportive regulatory environment that promotes the growth of regional Food Hubs.
- Refrigeration: Adequate refrigeration infrastructure is essential for maintaining food quality and safety, particularly for perishable products.
- Common/standard system for hub-to-hub communication: Implementing a standardized system for inventory management, fleet management, transport logistics, and technology adoption facilitates collaboration and efficiency among Food Hubs, streamlining operations and enhancing overall effectiveness.

Appendix **B**

(FOOD HUBS)

What's Working

BUSINESS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Bookkeeping: Effective bookkeeping practices contribute to the financial management and stability of regional Food Hubs, ensuring accurate records and compliance with financial regulations.
- Grant writing: Assistance with grant writing helps Food Hubs secure funding opportunities, enabling them to invest in infrastructure, expand operations, and enhance services to better serve their communities.
- NABC support – Co-op Development: The Northwest Agriculture Business Center (NABC) provides valuable support in the development of cooperatives within the regional Food Hub network, fostering collaboration and shared resources among producers.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Collaboration: Collaborative efforts among stakeholders contribute to the success of Food Hubs, fostering partnerships and resource-sharing to achieve common goals.
- Communications: Effective communication strategies facilitate coordination and information sharing among Food Hub stakeholders, enhancing operational efficiency and transparency.
- Co-op development: The development of cooperative models within the Food Hub network promotes collaboration, shared ownership, and collective decision-making, strengthening the resilience and impact of the hubs. EX: WA Food Hub Network, NW Food Hub Network
- Funding: Access to funding sources supports the development and sustainability of Food Hubs, enabling investments in infrastructure, programs, and initiatives.
- Producer participation: Active engagement and participation of producers within the Food Hub network contribute to its success, ensuring a diverse and consistent supply of locally sourced products.

Where is Support Needed?

BUSINESS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Workforce development and attracting talent are crucial for building skilled teams improving operational efficiency and fostering growth.
- Access to a Chief Financial Officer (CFO) or strategic planning assistance provides guidance in financial management and long-term planning, contributing to the sustainability and growth of Food Hubs.
- HR support assists with employee recruitment, retention, and management, ensuring a skilled and motivated workforce.
- Resources are needed to support the development of diverse new products
- Adequate insurance coverage to protect food hubs from potential liabilities
- Supporting the development of producers helps strengthen the supply chain and ensures consistent and high-quality products
- Contract negotiation assistance and management ensures mutually beneficial agreements for suppliers, partners, and customers.
- Implementing a common or standardized invoicing system streamlines financial transactions and improves communication between food hubs and their stakeholders.
- Resources for marketing and communications help food hubs effectively promote their products and services, reach new customers, and build brand awareness.
- Assistance with grant writing helps Food Hubs secure funding opportunities to support their operations, infrastructure development, and community initiatives.

Appendix **B**

(FOOD HUBS)



Where is Support Needed?

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Investing in workforce development initiatives enhances the skills and capabilities of employees within food hubs, improving operational efficiency and effectiveness.
- Providing opportunities for ongoing training and professional development ensures that employees have the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in their roles within food hubs.
- Facilitating collaboration between different food hub networks fosters knowledge-sharing, resource pooling, and collective problem-solving, enhancing the overall effectiveness of the regional food hub network.
- Implementing effective sales management strategies ensures that food hubs can efficiently market and sell their products, maximizing revenue and profitability.
- Establishing a clear and standardized definition of what constitutes a food hub helps clarify the role and purpose of hubs within the local food system, facilitating communication, understanding, and collaboration among stakeholders.



Appendix C:

Issues and Opportunities

EXERCISE 3: Ag Infrastructure Issues & Opportunities in Western WA (Here's what we know)

Using a large group discussion format, this list of known issues and opportunities within ag infrastructure development was added to and aggregated during the Feb 8th meeting.

Infrastructure & Processing:

- Scaled Processing
- Co-packing
- Commercial kitchen access
- Packaging
- Waste Management (including food waste and mortality composting)

Workforce & Professional Development:

- Staffing (Wage gaps, trained workforce)
- Professional Development & Business Mentorship
- Succession planning – land transfer opportunities
- Farmworker Housing – affordable
- Lack of labor for culturally relevant crops

Financial & Capital:

- Capital (Startup & Expansion)
- Grant accessibility – lowering the threshold for applications
- Grant writing programs with Dept. of Commerce
- Decrease costs for certifications
- Economic Analysis

Land Access & Usage:

- Water rights, buffers, etc.
- Land acquisition for minority groups
- Wastewater management
- Supporting voluntary stewardship
- Soil amendments

Distribution & Marketing:

- Distribution (especially to rural areas)
- Marketing and promotional support
- Track market development – new markets, saturation, etc.

Regulatory & Policy:

- Navigating legal and regulatory frameworks
- Policy & advocacy for local food systems' interests
- Comprehensive Plan conversations & coordination

Energy & Environment:

- Energy efficiency and resiliency – renewable energy
- Security of infrastructure (especially urban)

Coordination & Communication:

- Coordination and communication among ag Business Technical Assistance orgs.
- Avoiding competition regionally for funding and other resources
- Meaningful Tribal food program engagement