



## NABC Lunch and Learn Q & A

Assessing Food System Infrastructure Needs to Increase Markets for Meat, Grains, and Food Hubs: Outcomes from Feb. 8, 2024 Open WWFSP Steering Committee Meeting

Responses by Aba Kiser & Mardi Solomon

June 13, 2024

### Resources:

- [Open WWFSP Steering Committee Meeting Report](#)
- WWFSP [Food System Resource Library](#)
- Eat Local First [Food & Farm Finder](#)
- [WA Meat Up](#)
- [WSDA Local Food System Infrastructure Grants](#)
- [Resilient Food System Infrastructure Grant](#)
- For more info, contact Aba Kiser, [abakiser@agbizcenter.org](mailto:abakiser@agbizcenter.org), or Mardi Solomon, [mardi@agbizcenter.org](mailto:mardi@agbizcenter.org).

### Q&A

**Q:** Can you tell us more about the mapping exercise you did at the meeting, how it was visualized in the report, and any key takeaways from that specific exercise?

**A (Aba):** When people arrived at the meeting, we asked them to write on sticky notes any infrastructure projects they were aware of focused on meats, grains, food hubs, and “other”. We had three colors of sticky notes: one for projects in the idea or pre-planning phase, one for the production phase, and one for projects in operation. The project lists were compiled into Appendix A of [the report](#). This is not a comprehensive list, but a good snapshot.



**Q:** Would it be possible to make something like that a digital, evergreen, evolving resource so people who weren't at the meeting and may know of projects that didn't get mentioned could add to the list? It also would be great if such a resource could track the development of these projects.

**A (Aba):** Yes. We have been discussing how to make and maintain a useful resource like that. You can see the success of the [Food & Farm Finder](#) and how much they have to do to maintain the resources and keep them relevant. Something similar to that with infrastructure resources would be good. We were able to create the report, which is a stagnant document, but there is so much potential for organizations that have the experience with that kind of online resource to create a living document.

**Comment (Micha Ide):** Perhaps we could use something like an online whiteboard with sticky notes (e.g., Jamboard).

**Comment (Mike Peroni):** The Regional Food Systems Partnership grant that funded a lot of these activities is ending. NABC is planning how to move these activities under the NABC umbrella. We will continue to look for partnerships with people that already have the expertise and digital infrastructure to house something like that. There are a lot of upcoming projects and it would be great to have a site where people can go to check in on their progress, and to keep it simple.

**Comment (Mariah DeLeo):** It's my great dream that the WA Food & Farm Finder become this resource infrastructure. We have set up separate maps, including a new [Wholesale Finder](#) that has different filters. If we are able to keep investing in the one resource, people can use it over and over. As someone involved in building it, I definitely know how much work it takes and how much work it will be to make it really robust and usable. I do think the fact that people have to update their own profiles is the thing that keeps the site living and accurate. Having one person in charge of updating info is what has doomed so many similar projects in the past.

We use a lot of shared, crowd-sourced spreadsheets, and this is one easy way for people to add and update information. For example, there is a [PNW Co-packer Locator](#) (by WSDA, Oregon Dept. of Ag, Oregon State Univ.). And the Food & Farm Finder created a [BIPOC farm and food business list](#) that we have been using for years. People update it and it's one of the most comprehensive lists we have. So we could have something just as simple as that which all of us can use, enter our resources into, and we can make sure it is accessible and people can add and change it. I'd love to have people contribute to one specific place where we can all go.

**Comment (Emily Manke):** On the WWFSP.org website we have some resources that we want to be evergreen and regularly updated. We link to Google sheets and it's super simple and low-tech.

**Comment (Mardi):** And we also have a [Food System Resource Library](#) on the website. It was done in Diigo and built so people can add to the list.

**Q: Does anyone else have other events or resources your organization is investing time and energy into that you want to share?**

**A (Micha):** The next [WA Meat Up](#) call is happening on June 26. You can [sign up for the listserv](#) for more info, or email Micha at [Micha.Ide@agr.wa.gov](mailto:Micha.Ide@agr.wa.gov). We will be discussing meat processing at this virtual meeting.

WA Meat Up is a collaborative effort between WSDA Regional Markets Program and WSU Food Systems. It launched right before the pandemic and we had a big summit in Seattle that brought meat producers, processors, and chefs together. There was a pivot to COVID response but now we are easing out of that. We have a truck and trailer that travels around the state doing workshops with meat scientists from WSU Ext. in Spokane and Pullman. We just had a 2-day workshop in Puyallup. The next one is in Ellensburg next week, and there will be another in Southwest WA. We have quarterly calls and I believe we will have another in-person summit in the fall.

**Q: I notice in the report how impactful the [WSDA Local Food System Infrastructure Grants Program](#) has been on infrastructure development and I'm pondering how that is intersecting with this**

**work. I know there is award information on the website, but I'm curious how impacts of those two efforts are going to be tracked in the future.**

**A (Micha):** Our WSDA team has been doing some internal tracking to see what types of projects have been funded and their impacts.

**A (Ivy Fox):** We are in a transitional phase right now of moving into ongoing funding, so we are working internally on systematizing things to understand the impact and value. Nothing is concrete yet. We will be pausing after the next round of funding, until the next biennium. Feedback is welcome and appreciated.

**A (Micha):** We didn't have continual funding for the WSDA Meat and Poultry Assistance Program so during the pandemic we had a specific grant program just for meat and poultry producers. The last two rounds were rolled into our Local Food System Infrastructure Grant, but for this last round we didn't have a set amount just for meat. It was generally included. I believe our team is working on a "decisions package" to request continued funding for that program and potentially to include grants specifically for meat.

As state employees, we cannot do advocacy work, but if you are so inclined, you could make sure the folks who represent you understand how important that resource is to the meat producers and processors in your area.

The [Resilient Food System Infrastructure Grant](#), that is a USDA grant administered by WSDA, is open right now. It's a different grant with similar impacts. It's a bigger lift and there is a required match, similar to a lot of USDA grants, but it's a great resource for bigger infrastructure projects.

**Comment (Aba):** At the Feb. 8 meeting, we invited folks who represent funding organizations (i.e., USDA, WSDA, Business Impact NW) to present on local opportunities. We have slides presenting that info, although it is not included in the report.