



NABC Lunch and Learn Q & A
Southwest WA Agricultural Business & Innovation Park
Responses by Aslan Meade, Dir. of Strategic Alliances,
Thurston Economic Development Council,
with additional input from Jennifer Colvin of Colvin Ranch
November 14, 2024

Resources:

- [Southwest WA Agricultural Business & Innovation Park](#)
- [Thurston Economic Development Council](#)
- [Pacific Mountain Workforce Development Council](#)
- [South Puget Sound Agricultural Producer Needs Assessment, WSU Ext., May 2017](#)
- [Meat Production and Processing: Infrastructure and Labor Study in the Central and South Puget Sound Region, July 2023](#)
- [WWFSP Lunch & Learn about regional study of meat production and processing in central and south Puget Sound, Mike Poteet, Pierce County, Sept. 13, 2023](#)

Q&A

Q: Will there be a commercial kitchen at the Ag Park?

A: We have heard the need for commercial kitchens for years. WSU Extension and Thurston Economic Development Council (EDC) have done extensive research on commercial kitchens and there are a lot of challenges. It is almost impossible for them to pencil out financially. They need to be subsidized in some way, and we are not interested in creating a nonprofit, so this is not a service we plan to offer at this time.

I mentioned Simply Organics. They are a private company that will have space in the Ag Park. They do not intend to rent out their kitchen for other users, but they will source from local farms.

Q: What services for farmers are you envisioning?

A: The chef at the Ag Park, will be sourcing locally.

A: (Jennifer Colvin) The USDA meat processing facility will start by focusing on beef. There have been many feasibility studies done regarding the need for more processing facilities in our region. Today, in order to sell individual packages of meat, it has to be processed in a USDA certified facility which means transporting animals to Eastern WA or Oregon for processing. The new facility will enable meat producers to grow their businesses and service wholesale and institutional accounts.

Q: What is the relationship between the Ag Park and the Southwest WA Food Hub?

A: Thurston EDC and other partners run the Southwest WA Food Hub, which is a cooperative of over 30 growers working together to source and distribute food throughout the region. The SW WA Food Hub is located at Port

of Chehalis (it was at a Port of Olympia building in Tumwater previously). We did look at putting it in the Ag Park, but it is further off I5, and I don't see it moving to the Ag Park.

Q: What is the relationship between the Ag Park and the SW WA Grains Project?

A: Right now, most of the grain operation is at the Port of Chehalis, and a lot of the funding related to grain has gone there. They have rail transload at the Port of Chehalis and we received several million dollars to create a grain storage facility there.

NABC has been the lead on that project, and Thurston EDC and WSU Ext. have partnered with them through the whole process. The EDC, NABC, and WSU Ext. have all worked together for the past ten years to find regional solutions to support local ag. We are involved in and supportive of the grain efforts and it is very exciting to see what has happened, except for this year when the weather was horrible and almost all of our grain was destroyed.

The EDC was able to secure funding to put a grain storage and handling facility at the Craft District in Tumwater, where South Puget Sound Community College has a craft brewing and distilling training program.

We are always open to options. If the right business wanted to locate at the Ag Park (e.g., malter, flour mill, etc.), we would support it, but I like the idea of all of the grain operations being in one place.

Q: Do you still have room for tenants at the buildings that are constructed, and if so, what kinds of tenants are you looking for?

A: The two buildings are fully rented at this time. It takes a long time to find public funding to build a building, like what we did for the north building, so we are looking for a private sector business (ideally an agriculture-related business) that can build their own building, and possibly include extra space to rent to other tenants.

The EDC has done the majority of recruitment for tenants, and a business that supports regional agriculture, like the meat processing facility Colvin Ranch is working on, is a dream. We also would like to have a brewery or something that draws people to the region and boosts agritourism like in Tumwater, which has multiple restaurants, breweries, and distilleries all generating retail activity in one building.

From a manufacturer and processor to an agritourism kind of business with retail, we are wide open to exploring new tenants for additional buildings.