

LEAD SECTOR: Food System Security

SUPPORTING/OVERLAPPING SECTOR(S): Economy & Jobs, Children & Families, Human Services, Broadband

COMMUNITY GROUP MEMBERS:

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SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

Our group of 13 community members, agricultural experts, educators and practitioners, have been focused on understanding both the immediate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the food system in Jefferson County and how prepared the food system is to deal with future shocks. Combining our collective knowledge and expertise alongside surveys and focus groups with regional food system actors, we conclude that the pandemic has both highlighted and worsened a number of long-standing vulnerabilities in the regional food economy and that it is also ill-prepared to handle further disruptions in the near future. In particular, the pandemic has led to a substantial increase in food insecurity among families who have lost income due to the crisis, disrupted food distribution systems making the availability of local food resources more important, and has stymied the regional food market where regional produce and goods are typically bought and sold.

Therefore, our recommendations can be summarized as two-fold:

1. To support the local farm and food economy to produce, process and distribute the food we need to feed vulnerable members of our community while generating sustainable livelihoods.
2. To support the development of a funded and staffed regional, appointed commission dedicated to strategic planning, policy-making, and integrated coordination across multiple agencies and organizations that prioritizes creating and promoting an equitable and sustainable food system.

Our recommendations consider the food economy as a holistic system that includes food production, food processing, food distribution, food access and consumption, and also attempts to resolve some of the underlying inequalities that underpin and sometimes undermine this system. The recommendations outlined below include a variety of ways the ICC can promote, educate, invest in, and foster community and cultural support for an environmentally and economically sustainable regional food system in the short term and in the future. We see this current moment as an opportune time to create new frameworks, new ways of doing business and new ways of supporting our regional community members. Therefore, we strongly recommend focused and sustained attention with political clout at a regional-level to ensure a healthy, resilient and equitable food system that is able to meet the needs of a diverse and growing community, and withstand and rebound from systems challenges such as pandemics, natural disasters and climate disruptions.

1. Short-Term Opportunity Statement: Support regional food and meal services for vulnerable residents such as food banks, SNAP-Ed, and other programs that provide food to residents.

Background: The economic crisis created by Covid-19 has increased food insecurity in the County and increased demand at area food banks and feeding programs. At the same time, area farmers have lost revenues because of the delayed opening of farmers markets and decreased sales at those markets, along with major decreases in sales to restaurants.

Actions:

To address the problem and capitalize on the resulting opportunity, the following **projects/initiatives** are recommended:

1.1) Food Banks/Feeding Programs

- **Objectives/Desired Outcomes:** Fund infrastructure needed to expand capacity at food banks and other feeding programs.
- **Proposed Lead Organization & Supporting Roles:**
 - Food Banks
 - Chimacum School District
 - OlyCap
 - YMCA
- **Action Steps and Timeframe:**
 - Provide funds for Food Banks to purchase back-up generators and additional storage capacity
 - Provide funds to keep the Chimicum multi-purpose room open for storage and preparation of takeaway school meals
- **Assessment:**
 - The Chimicum multi-purpose room project was awarded CARES funding
 - Funding is still requested to support infrastructural support for the Food Banks

1.2) Olympic Peninsula Farmers Fund

- **Objectives/Desired Outcomes:** Fund programs that make healthy local food available to families who need it.
- **Proposed Lead Organization & Supporting Roles:**
 - NODC
- **Action Steps and Timeframe:**
 - Contracts with local farmers to provide food to food banks and other feeding programs
- **Assessment:**
 - This project was awarded CARES funding

1.3) Jefferson County Farmers Market's SNAP-Ed Match program

- **Objectives/Desired Outcomes:** Fund programs that make healthy local food available to families who need it.
- **Proposed Lead Organization & Supporting Roles:**
 - Jefferson County Farmers Market
- **Action Steps and Timeframe:**
 - Provides a dollar-for-dollar match to double the amount that shoppers using SNAP funds have to spend at the Market
- **Assessment:**
 - This project was awarded CARES funding

1.4) Food boxes for families

- **Objectives/Desired Outcomes:** Fund programs that make healthy local food available to families who need it.
- **Proposed Lead Organization & Supporting Roles:**
 - NODC
- **Action Steps and Timeframe:**
 - Provide food boxes to families who have children in the home who are receiving school lunches
- **Assessment:**
 - This project was awarded CARES funding

1.5) Jefferson County Farmers Market Farm to Food Bank program

- **Objectives/Desired Outcomes:** Fund programs that make healthy local food available to families who need it.
- **Proposed Lead Organization & Supporting Roles:**
 - Jefferson County Farmers Market and/or WSU Extension
- **Action Steps and Timeframe:**
 - The ongoing management and operation of the program needs to be determined, but will likely involve collaboration between the new JCFM manager and the WSU SNAP-Ed Coordinator. It is possible WSU will have capacity to take on this role under the new Coordinator.
- **Assessment:**
 - Assessment of this activity will need to be delayed until the program's home agency has been determined.

2. Short-Term Opportunity Statement: Increase local food production for local consumption. Local food production would support food security regardless of disruptions to the global food supply and strengthen the local food-producing economy.

Background: Jefferson County has a long history of agricultural production, a moderate climate and a diversified base of small farms, yet it currently relies on producers and distributors outside the region for the vast majority of the food consumed by its population. COVID-19 resulted in disruptions across the global food system which created complications at a local scale. For example, grocery store chains were unable to keep up with the demand for certain staple products or commodities, and local farmers were unable to access the markets they depend on. COVID-19 exposed further flaws in food distribution, food-based labor sector, and government policies which keep local solutions uneasily achieved.

Actions:

- **Objectives/Desired Outcomes:** Support local farmers with the resources they need to plan, produce and process food for area residents.

- **Proposed Lead Organization & Supporting Roles:**

- WSU
- NODC
- County Conservation Futures Committee
- Conservation District
- Jefferson Land Trust
- OlyCap
- Landworks Collaborative

- **Initiatives** could include:

2.1) Develop mechanisms to encourage/facilitate linkages between local farmers and restaurants, schools, and large businesses

■ **Action Steps:**

- Fund the annual conference of Eat Local First Olympic Peninsula, an existing campaign to promote local food, and its marketing campaign (alongside the Jobs and Economy Group)
- Recommend pandemic-responsive incentives and long-term incentives for regional stores to purchase regional food to support revival and recovery of agrarian economy to ensure future local food supply.
- Coalesce current research and identify additional research topics regarding strategies to promote new linkages and

distribution models and a comprehensive understanding of food sources for aggregation of sales.

2.2) Mobilize winter food production models and store winter supply of dry and value-added goods for increased production and emergency preparedness

■ **Action Steps:**

- Provide onsite (farm-based) cold and cool storage, dry-good and general storage with alternative power sources.
 - Ideal request is to fund five farms within the region at \$10,000.
- Provide onsite (farm-based) green/hoop houses to extend growing season.
 - *Ideal request is to fund ten farms within the region at \$10,000.*
- Provide offsite (non-specific to a particular farm) emergency regional dry storage and commercial canning equipment.
 - Ideal request is \$10,000 for space and equipment.
- Provide Food Banks with generators or alternative power supply for existing cold storage.
 - Ideal request would be \$30,000 for three generators.

2.4) Create a new position for a business expert with farm-based enterprise experience to help navigate changing business laws, (changes to payroll taxes, huge spikes in unemployment fraud this past spring, etc) and help source or facilitate co-op buying of seeds, supplies, packaging, or other inputs.

- **Action Steps:** Create a City of Port Townsend or Jefferson County position to undertake these responsibilities. Total cost of 1 FTE, salary and benefits would be approximately \$60,000 to \$66,000

2.5) Examine zoning, permitting and local health regulations to reduce barriers including barriers to agricultural and food enterprise processing

- **Action Steps:** This activity could be led by the same individual described in 2.4 above, but would require consistent interaction with the Planning Commissions of Jefferson County and Port Townsend.

3. Long-term Opportunity Statement: Develop and support a regionally focused food and agriculture group of community leaders, experts and practitioners to research and focus on resolving systemic barriers and creating opportunities for an equitable and sustainable food system now and in preparation for future emergencies/shocks to the food system.

Background: Around the world, local municipalities have adopted governance frameworks that prioritize the needs of and support the growth of regional food economies. These bodies are most effective when they include elected representatives and/or local leaders who are responsible for enacting policy. The pandemic exposed to us that separate groups working in similar but disparate nodes of the food system could be more effective if they were combined, unified and representative of the regional food system including organizations that hold institutional knowledge. A unified governance structure would be able to bring together these disparate actors and nodes of the food system in order to plan and create a more sustainable and equitable approach to increasing regional food production and consumption. We suggest that Jefferson County adopt and appoint a new Food System Resiliency Commission (FSRC). The FSRC would be separate and different in mandate from the existing Port Townsend Food Policy Council; it is our understanding that this latter group has been largely inactive and was not housed within a local government structure to ensure policy change at a local or regional level. In addition, the council lacked access to a budget for staffing and other operational needs.

Actions:

3.1) Create a new employment opportunity for a “Food System Resilience Lead”
This position, at .75 FTE would require funding of between \$53,000 and \$56,000, salary and benefits. At 1 FTE, the cost would be between \$60,000 and \$66,000

- **Objectives/Desired Outcomes:** This staff position would be responsible for over a three-year period at a minimum:
 - Organizing, facilitating, leading, and promoting this FSRC
 - Developing a matrix of relationships with community gardens, shellfish producers, fishers, foragers and hunters so those are ready and available for emergency activation
 - Researching and understanding the systemic challenges food producers face in the region and bringing these challenges to the attention of the FSRC for mitigation (e.g. including investigating particular models that can be utilized from other institutions such as Northern Arizona University’s FEWSion)
 - Activating more education around the diverse modes of food procurement and issues of accessibility

- **Proposed Lead Organization & Supporting Roles:**
 - Port, PUD, City and County
 - Potentially housed in DEM or WSU Extension or supported by several counties (e.g. Jefferson, Clallum, Kitsap)

- WSU, UW, other regional food resilience committees

3.2) Work with the ICC to create a structure for a regional FSRC, including membership and bylaws

- **Objectives/Desired Outcomes:**
 - Recruit members who are representative of the constituents of the food system and food system organizations such as WSU, NODC, JCFM, OlyCap, Food Bank Farm to Food Bank project, Peninsula Food Coalition, Indigenous peoples, School District, Chefs, Grocery Store, Local 2020, Large-scale agribusiness and small-scale agribusiness, food processor, community-at-large member
 - Develop a North Olympic Food Resiliency Plan which includes specific policy and land-use arrangements to support regional food production, distribution and access.
- **Actions Steps to consider (not exhaustively):**
 - Work with Land Trust and/or Planning Commission to create more innovative cooperative housing and community trust models for making agricultural land accessible
 - Revisit county-wide development plans to:
 - Regularly review and make recommendations to update city and county codes
 - Ensure lands with designated vital soils are preserved for agriculture and not real estate.
 - Coordinate with housing planning agencies to manage housing needs for agrarian workforce and food production labor.
 - Consider and implement strategies to enable the purchase and placement of agricultural land into a public trust for community food production
 - Increase opportunities for acquisition of affordable agrarian land for small-scale food system enterprise. Initiatives could include:
 - Promoting low-cost, alternative financing for start-up businesses as well as support for conservation easements, cooperative ownership, incubator farms and other mechanisms to reduce the cost of entry into farming, with a goal of financing ten farms of a minimum of five acres each per year, in each of the following ten years.
 - Leasing new farmers unproductive lands designated for agriculture but currently not in use.
 - Developing a fundraising strategy that will be able to underwrite the cost of legal and tax services for small farms

- Developing opportunities for aging farmers to pass the land on to new farmers and ensure they have the means to retire without selling their land for development.
- Incentivize new farmers to grow storage crops such as grains, nuts, beans and seeds
- Create associations for larger scale restaurant supported agriculture (RSAs), school supported agriculture (SSA), and healthcare supported agriculture (HSA) associations for economies of scale in purchasing for restaurants, schools, the hospital and other regional businesses to purchase directly from an aggregation of regional growers
- Create an educational awareness campaign around the environmental and social benefits of supporting regional food systems and subsidize markets to sell these products at price points accessible to all income levels.
- Evaluate and coordinate the emergency preparedness of the food sector in Jefferson, Clallam and Kitsap counties including:
 - Researching other rural populations' approaches to food emergencies such as the Alaska Food Policy Council or the Community Food Emergency and Resilience template
 - Analyzing the need for additional food-related policies and/or modification to existing policies to accommodate and adapt to future emergency-related work
 - Understanding the Counties' existing emergency procedures and any gaps in resources, knowledge of authority, know-how, or accessibility
 - Creating an emergency food cache system
 - Inventory supplies and set standards to monitor safe storage (humidity, temperature, possible infestations etc.)
- Find financially sustainable wage-sources for food processing workers
- Establish a navigable, online portal for multiple types of end-users in the holistic food system
 - to find the equipment, finances, and other resources (including university resources) to produce food,
 - to find available food at no cost during crisis or due to lack of ability to purchase, and
 - to identify transparently the interconnected agencies in support of food access and their current initiatives and projects.