

# FOOD POLICY FORUM

## MEETING NOTES

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**June 25, 2020: 1:00pm-4:00pm**

Webinar

**Next Forum Meeting:** August 6, 2020

### Food Policy Forum Meeting Attendees

#### Members

| First   | Last                 | Affiliation                                     |
|---------|----------------------|---|
| Aaron   | Czyzewski            | Food Lifeline                                   |
| Addie   | Candib               | American Farmland Trust                         |
| Amy     | Ellings <sup>1</sup> | WA State Department of Health                   |
| Amy     | Moreno Sills         | PCC Farmland Trust                              |
| Brian   | Estes                | LINC Foods                                      |
| Carol   | Smith                | WSCC  |
| Chad    | Kruger               | Washington State University - CSANR             |
| Chris   | Elder                | Whatcom County Public Works                     |
| Claire  | Lane <sup>2</sup>    | WA State Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition    |
| Colleen | Donovan              | WA State Farmers Market Association             |
| Dean    | Takko                | Senator   |
| Derek   | Sandison             | WA Dept. of Agriculture                         |
| Diane   | Dempster             | Clark County Food System Council                |
| Jon     | DeVaney              | WA Tree Fruit Association                       |
| Kate    | Delavan              | WSCC  |
| Laura   | Raymond              | WSDA  |
| Mary    | Embleton             | King Conservation District                      |
| Mary    | Dye                  | Representative                                  |
| Melissa | Spear                | Tilth Alliance                                  |
| Mia     | Gregerson            | Representative                                  |
| Nancy   | Warner               | Initiative for Rural Innovation and Stewardship |
| Nick    | Norton               | Washington Association of Land Trusts           |
| Richard | Conlin               | Puget Sound Regional Council                    |
| Ron     | Shultz               | WSCC  |
| Tim     | Crosby               | Cascadia Foodshed Financing Project             |
| Tom     | Davis                | WA State Farm Bureau                            |
| Trish   | Twomey               | WA Food Coalition                               |

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<sup>1</sup> Amy Ellings served as voting delegate for Babette Roberts, DSHS, and Leanne Eko, OSPI.

<sup>2</sup> Claire Lane served as voting delegate for Christina Wong, Northwest Harvest.

### Additional Attendees

| First    | Last                | Affiliation                 |
|----------|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| Alicia   | McClendon           | WSCC                        |
| Cristina | Rodriguez           | Dep L & I                   |
| Evan     | Sheffels            | WSDA                        |
| Janell   | Harvey              | Spokane Food Policy Council |
| Joanna   | Grist               | PCC Markets                 |
| JT       | Austin              | Governor's Office           |
| Judy     | Warnick             | Senator                     |
| Katie    | Rains               | WSDA                        |
| Mike     | Poteet              | Piece Ag Program            |
| Nicole   | Witham <sup>3</sup> | WSU                         |
| Sandra   | Richartz            | Senate Republican Caucus    |
| Nancy    | Tosta               | Tilth Alliance              |
| Chris    | Iberle              | WSDA                        |

*Facilitation and meeting support provided by Petra Vallila-Buchman and Mary Byrne, Ross Strategic*

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<sup>3</sup> Nicole Witham served as voting delegate for Laura Lewis, WSU.

## FOLLOW-UP FROM RECENT GOVERNOR'S OFFICE MEETING ON THE EARLY ACTION REPORT

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### Overview

Ron Shultz provided the following overview of the meeting the Forum's convening agencies had in June with the Governor's Office on the Forum's early action report:

- This report was developed at the request of the Governor's Office to consider actions the state could take as it transitions from emergency response to recovery.
- The Governor's Office was impressed by the report and noted there are many interesting ideas in the report.
- Food systems topics and activities are likely to be of interest in the upcoming session despite budget cuts.
- There is interest in how the Forum can complement the work of the Governor's Office Food Security Team and participate in the state's pivot from crisis to recovery. Katie Rains from WSDA helps coordinate the Food Security Team.
- Received positive signals about the possibility of a decision package to support the Forum with additional funding.
- The Governor's Office is looking closely at policy and budget decisions through an equity lens.

Derek Sandison and JT Austin thanked the Forum for their work to develop the report.

## EQUITY EDITS IN THE REPORT

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### Overview

- Building upon guidance from the Governor's Office which encourages state agencies to use an equity lens, the Forum's convening agencies have made a few track change edits to the draft report to make considerations of equity more explicit in the report. Many of the actions the Forum developed to address systemic vulnerabilities, some of which disproportionately affect certain groups. The intention of the edits is to further highlight how the report's actions can mitigate systemic inequities that have been exacerbated by COVID-19.
- In addition to in-text equity edits, the co-leads added several comment boxes in the draft report asking for Forum member input to confirm the accuracy of and/or expand on particular statements.

### ***Discussion:***

The Forum discussed the equity edits the co-leads made to the report and a path forward. After discussing the equity edits, the Forum determined to vote on the originally written text and actions and to develop a paragraph for the report on the Forum's commitment to look more closely at the actions with an equity lens in the new fiscal year.

- One focus point of the conversation was regarding how the qualifying metrics for relief aid are not representative of the full diversity of agricultural operations in our state. There was an interest in making this fact more explicit in the report. It was suggested that the opportunity statement can be edited to make clear that there are wide ranging impacts on a variety of scales of agriculture.
  - One issue raised for specialty crops is that employment counts are being used as a standard for qualifying for relief aid. Fruit and vegetable productions can have a few hundred employees, but still be a small operation. Employment counts are being used as a stand-in metric for resiliency of farm operations, but they are not very accurate metrics for resiliency.

- It was noted that various agricultural sectors have had enormous losses (processing contracts, etc.). USDA is using a metric of gross income. However, for some farms, the cost of one fertilizer application can alone be higher than the cut off for the gross income threshold. There are pandemic response bills that may be excluding some growers unintentionally (e.g., bills included red potatoes, but not white potatoes).
- The discussion on the equity edits highlighted the need for the Forum to be clear and in agreement on what communities and sectors have been most impacted by the COVID-19 response.
  - Forum members noted there has been inequitable impact on people of color, and that this fact should be more explicit in the report.
  - It was noted that there may be some people in the state who were not considered low income before, but who are now. COVID-19 has impacted a broad range of people, and there may be people using emergency food services for the first time during the pandemic.
  - Several Forum members agreed it would be important to outline who works in our food system and who has been impacted by food establishment closures. Farm worker issues have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. Some Forum members liked the idea of adding language about agricultural worker safety in the context sections. Other Forum members felt that the issue of agricultural worker safety is beyond the scope of the Forum’s expertise.
  - It was noted that the “digital divide” has been a major issue when responding to COVID-19. People without internet access likely need access to online platforms to find where food is being distributed.
- To some Forum members, the equity edits seemed to not be grounded in agreed upon problem statements (one of the Forum agreements is to work in areas where there is consensus on the scope and nature of the problem) and others felt that adding contextual equity edits without revising the action language is a missed opportunity and perhaps a disingenuous process.
  - Various Forum members expressed concern over being asked to edit the context statements but not update and reflect on the actions.
  - It was also noted that the Forum’s approach to equity should be considered in light of the fact that the Forum is a predominately white convening of people.
  - It was suggested that the Forum’s recommended actions are in fact already a product of POC stakeholder engagement because several Forum members regularly engage with their constituents/stakeholders and people directly affected by these policies/actions.
  - It was suggested that one important value of the Forum is the diversity of perspectives already within the Forum. The Forum is not fully representative, and not all interests are represented, but the Forum has done a remarkable job to identify a path forward during the COVID-19 crisis.
  - There are ways that the Forum could do a better job to engage individuals and communities that have lived experience with the recommendations/topics the Forum engages in. One way the Forum has done this is through inviting subject matter experts to the implementation team calls.
- Forum members determined that there had not be adequate time to process and contribute to these edits in a meaningful way and did not feel comfortable voting on the equity edits at this time.
  - It was noted that decisions around investment in response actions to COVID-19 are happening very quickly. The Forum is more valuable to the extent that it can provide timely information and guidance to decision processes unfolding right now.
- **Decision:** Forum members were each asked how they would like to proceed with the consensus voting. The options were:
  - 1) Do not complete voting today and spend more time refining the equity language. Hold a separate meeting for voting.
  - 2) Have consensus voting on equity edits and actions.

- 3) Have consensus voting without the new equity edits and commit to including a paragraph on a commitment to incorporating an equity lens in the new fiscal year. The Forum would be able to review this paragraph before the report is consider final.
  - Via a vote, the Forum came to consensus on option #3.

## CONSENSUS VOTING AND DISCUSSION: EARLY ACTIONS RELATED TO COVID-19

### Overview of Voting Process

1. Voting procedure was as follows: asked each member if they have ‘no’ or ‘stand aside’ votes for any of the actions so that the discussion could focus on objections or areas of clarification. Actions with no objections/clarifications are considered as a consensus vote of ‘thumbs up, I can live with it’.
2. Definition of consensus is “I can live with it.” Full consensus is 100% support.
3. Actions that do not receive 100% support but garner two-thirds support would be added to an appendix as promising ideas.
4. Members can choose to ‘stand aside’ if they feel they do not understand the opportunity sufficiently to weigh in. A ‘stand aside’ does **not** count against consensus.
5. The Forum chose to vote on the version of the report **without** the new equity edits and commit to including a paragraph on how the Forum would move forward with incorporating equity. The Forum would be able to review this paragraph before the report is consider final.

### Voting Results

- All 59 implementation actions reached consensus.
- The following table depicts the Forum actions in which some members chose to ‘stand aside’ for voting. The stand aside votes do **not** count against consensus. This information will be added as an appendix in the final report.

| Action Number | Action Description  | Stand Asides and Rationale   |
|---------------|---|--|
| 1.1.C         | <b>Stabilize lines of credit, extend collateral positions, and create a guarantee fund to allow lines of credit from banks or credit unions.</b> Consider work and activity by NW Farm Credit Services, CDFIs like Craft3 and Business Impact Northwest, and look to Department of Commerce and Office of Financial Management. | <b>Christina Wong, Northwest Harvest</b><br><i>Rationale:</i> It is unclear if growers of color would be able to access these traditional lines of credit. Considering how the CARES Act Pay Check Protection forgivable loans unfolded (minority owned businesses were largely shut out of that program, with much of the problem being that they did not have established relationships with traditional SBA lending associations), there is concern that a similar situation could happen for growers of color if this action were implemented. |

|       |  |   |
|-------|--|---|
| 1.1.H | <p><b>Ensure Small Business Administration and Small Business Development Center services are available to farming and food microenterprises in Washington</b></p>   | <p><b>Christina Wong, Northwest Harvest</b><br/> <i>Rationale:</i> It is unclear if growers of color would be able to access these traditional lines of credit. Considering how the CARES Act Pay Check Protection forgivable loans unfolded (minority owned businesses were largely shut out of that program, with much of the problem being that they did not have established relationships with traditional SBA lending associations), there is concern that a similar situation could happen for growers of color if this action were implemented.</p>   |
| 2.4.A | <p><b>Provide \$100 million in funding to existing WSCC programs for the purchase of conservation easements or development rights to secure multi-benefit agricultural lands owned by producers most impacted by COVID-19.</b> These tools not only provide direct cash support for producers in need but also reduce land costs for the next generation of farmers while protecting the conservation values of the property in perpetuity. The SCC's Office of Farmland Preservation has developed the flexible administrative structure, technical expertise, and relationships with conservation practitioners necessary to get significant funding on the ground to support farmers in dire need.</p>  | <p><b>Mary Dye, Representative</b><br/> <i>Rationale:</i> Viable land production takes a level of commitment that only happens when a person has faced the inherent risk by investing fully through personal ownership. Land Trusts constrain the value of land and limit opportunity for individuals in the free marketplace.</p> <p>It is preferable to invest in infrastructure that improves productivity; makes it easier for farmers on land to make a viable living; improves long-term profitability; and increases the value of land over time.</p> <p><b>Tom Davis, Washington State Farm Bureau</b><br/> <i>Rationale:</i> WSFB policy supports the use of shorter-duration easements and opposes publicly funded permanent easements. Since this action involves permanent easements using public funding, WSFB has concerns about this action.</p> |
| 2.4.B | <p><b>Allocate pass-through funding to the SCC to expand existing land linking programs that connect open agricultural ground with producers looking for additional acreage.</b> The COVID-19 crisis has both increased demand for locally sourced food and amplified economic uncertainty among small farmers, meaning that supporting farmland succession and transfer is more critical than ever. Land linking programs, such as PCC Farmland Trust's Farm to Farmer program, act as a very cost-efficient way of not only preventing farmland conversion, but of cultivating a more resilient community of producers, all while making the most out of land with existing infrastructure and access to markets. With a proven, successful program structure in place, the Farm to Farmer network is uniquely poised to scale up in the near future to serve a broader geographic area impacted by this crisis.</p> | <p><b>Mary Dye, Representative</b><br/> <i>Rationale:</i> Viable land production takes a level of commitment that only happens when a person has faced the inherent risk by investing fully through personal ownership. Land Trusts constrain the value of land and limit opportunity for individuals in the free marketplace.</p> <p>It is preferable to invest in infrastructure that improves productivity; makes it easier for farmers on land to make a viable living; improves long-term profitability; and increases the value of land over time.</p>  |

## LOOKING AHEAD: THE FORUM'S WORK IN THE NEW FISCAL YEAR

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### Overview

- The Forum co-leads will be considering the following items and would like Forum input:
  - What work is needed between now and our August 6 meeting to support the report and ideas within it?
  - The Forum's work in the new fiscal year and beyond.
- It was noted that the Forum will need to reconcile the work of the current proviso with the language of the new statute. The next phase of work for the Forum is to develop a work plan; this will help the Forum move from planning to implementation.
- The Forum will meet again on August 6 to discuss the following:
  - The Forum's approach to implementing an equity lens.
  - Developing the workplan to fulfill the budget proviso (i.e., implementing the immediate actions in the report)
  - Where we are with a budget request for the Forum (a special session may or may not occur in August)
  - How we will we share the report with Legislators

### Next Steps

- The Forum co-leads will draft a paragraph on the Forum's commitment to equity that will be shared with Forum members for review.
- Ross Strategic will capture the results of voting and the stand aside rationales and will incorporate these edits into the report.
- When final, the report will go to OFM for review first. Then the report will go to the Governor's Office and Legislature. The Forum will then work to support implementation of relevant actions in the report.
- If you have any questions, please contact Petra at [pvallila@rossstrategic.com](mailto:pvallila@rossstrategic.com).

### Discussion:

- There could be a special session in August. During the August 6 meeting, the Forum could consider how to align communication of the report with session.
- Claire Lane: It's great to be moving forward together on these issues towards further conversations about equity and our food system.
- Carol Smith: Thanked the Forum, noting the outcome of this meeting is really hopeful and agrees the Forum should give more thought and time on the equity issue.