

Regional Food Policy Council.....

at Work

Forum on State of Food Policy in the Region

June 1, 2018

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Attendees

Sayuri Barritt, Solid Ground | Scott Bertani, Lifelong AIDS Alliance | Melissa Campbell, PCC Farmland Trust | Richard Conlin, Co-Chair | Robin Crowder, 21 Acres | Aaron Czyzewski, Food Lifeline | Diane Dempster, Charlie's Produce | Paisley Gallagher, Kitsap Harvest | Charlotte Garrido, Co-Chair | Josh Giuntoli, WSCC | Lilly Glove, Pike Market Food Bank | Lily Gottlieb-McHale, PCCFLT Shared Soil | Nikki Hurley, Northwest Harvest | Sabrina Jones, Northwest Harvest | Miguel Jimenez, Rainier Valley Food Bank | Emilyann Kinlow, Puyallup Tribal Health Authority | Judy Kirkhuff, WA State Farmers Market Association | Sharon Lerman, City of Seattle | Sam Mayberry, Food Lifeline | Merlin Nakata, Food Bank Farm | Julian O'Reilly, Neighborhood Farmers Markets | Kathleen Rose, Futurewise | Andrew Schlosser, Northwest Harvest | Sara Seelmeyer | Phyllis Shulman | Ron Shultz, WSCC | Heidi Siegelbaum, Washington Stormwater Center | Leslie Stewart, City of Seattle, HSD | Gwen Vernon, Puyallup Watershed Initiative | Becky Weed, Pierce County Agriculture Committee | Mark Weed, Harlow Cattle Company

PSRC Staff: Rebeccah Maskin, PSRC | Liz Underwood-Bultmann, PSRC | Kristin Mitchell, PSRC

Welcome and Introductions, Public Comment

Richard Conlin, Co-Chair called the meeting to order at 10:05 am. There was no public comment. There were around the room introductions.

Session Overview

Much has changed locally since the Regional Food Policy Council started meeting in 2010. This forum looked back at the work completed, currently underway, and on the horizon for a variety of food system stakeholders. What does food policy look like in 2018? What has changed? What issues should we sustain locally?

Speakers from a public sector perspective included:

- Mary Embleton, King Conservation District
- Charlotte Garrido, Kitsap County
- Sharon Lerman, City of Seattle
- Updates from Pierce and Snohomish counties

Speakers from a food system and organizational perspective include:

- Agriculture | Melissa Campbell, PCC Farmland Trust
- Education | Jonathan Garfunkel, EduCulture

- Farmers Markets | Julian O'Reilley, Neighborhood Farmers Markets, Judy Kirkhuff, WSFMA
 - Anti-Hunger | Aaron Czyzewski, Food Lifeline
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Public Sector

Mary Embleton, King Conservation District (KCD) – KCD has been working on a food system program since 2015. Grant opportunities are provided to fund community projects. They have awarded \$3 million in grants to support cooperatives, food access, incubators – a variety of projects across the food system. Another area of focus has been partnerships with Local Institution Food Team (LIFT) to encourage institutions to buy more local food. KCD staff co-authored a record of food policy milestones within the region: [Legacy of Action](#), which is available on the Tilth Alliance website. Folks from across the food system in King County started planning for a food council in 2000, and in 2004, work began on the King County Food Council using Portland/Multnomah as a model. Then in 2010, the Regional Food Policy Council was established at PSRC. To continue the work and move the dial, stakeholders need to creatively re-envision how we organize around food policy.

Commissioner Charlotte Garrido, Kitsap County – The Kitsap Food Policy Council was created in 2009 but hasn't been meeting regularly since funding was cut in 2014. Kitsap County still has a coordinated effort on food policy and included food supportive policies in its 2016 comprehensive plan. Beginning efforts to create and creating a living history museum of agriculture in Kitsap County are underway in a county park. The barn on the property was refurbished, and longtime farmers are sharing their knowledge through a steering committee. Regarding food policy in general, an ongoing challenge is making the food system and its issues visible to the public.

Sharon Lerman, City of Seattle – A recent policy highlight for the City of Seattle is the passage of the sugar sweetened beverage tax. It provides a funding source to make healthy food options more accessible to underserved communities by funding programs such as Farm to Table, Fresh Bucks, and Fresh Bucks Rx.

Normalizing food policy in planning and policy work has been a major outcome over the past ten years. Ten years ago, there were 10 to 12 cities working on food policy, but now there are far more cities in the region and across the country working on it. The food systems movement has made a lot of progress and part of the fabric of what we do, but there is also a lot more work to be done, from continuing to improve access to healthy foods to urban farming.

That the food system is a relatively small part of our economic and political conversation threatens the visibility of the issue. Rapid growth is challenging the food system through increasing displacement and pressures on farming and farmland, and it's important to continue aligning funding and priorities. Seattle, King County and KCD all work closely to move food policy forward and need to work together locally to find funding sources and a collective voice.

Pierce County – A representative from Pierce County was unable to attend the forum, but Diane Marcus-Jones forwarded along some highlights of their work. Pierce County has an active Transfer of Development Rights and Purchase of Development Rights program. Through this program, 550 acres have been preserved since 2013. With nonprofit partners, the county has awarded over \$7 million for agricultural conservation. The county has been recently focusing on marketing and technical assistance to farmers by holding forums and workshops for farmers. A multi-stakeholder effort to tackle farm, fish, and floodplain management issues is being supported by a \$1 million Ecology grant. Areas where the county has seen the most

progress include education and outreach to consumers and coordinating with agencies on permits. Challenges continue to be water rights and drainage, preserving the farming community, and loss of farming infrastructure. Pierce County Fresh provides marketing material and an agritourism map.

Becky Weed, of Harlow Ranch in Pierce County, joined to add that the Pierce County Agricultural Advisory Committee has come together to address issues that impact commercial agriculture, such as drainage. She noted a need for code and permitting changes that are supportive of agriculture, and increased awareness of agricultural issues.

Private Sector

Melissa Campbell, PCC Farmland Trust – PCC Farmland Trust has moved towards being more strategic by focusing on areas where farmland is being lost the fastest. Their main focus is on Pierce and Snohomish counties, and on the 70% of farmers who are set to transition off of farmland. A hot development market has pushed up land value, including farmland, where costs are up nearly 50%. The Trust is accelerating its farmland conservation work, working on four times as many projects in a year as compared to a decade ago.

There are new allies in the farmland conservation space that are providing tools and pressure to conserve the land, including value-oriented investors buying land and leasing it for younger farmers. The Trust does not have enough funding to fully support this model. A challenge for farmland preservation is a lack of a variety of tools to make conservation work. Conservation easements are limited and oversubscribed. The complicated nature of farmland preservation can make the work look disorganized, but property and succession are complicated processes.

Jonathan Garfunkel, EduCulture – EduCulture serves the region and beyond through edible education on Bainbridge Island. They are on one of the oldest continuously-farmed pieces of land in the region. Edible education encompasses the entire role from the food served in school, and K-12 and pre-K are embracing the movement more than ever before. Progress can be seen in the emergence of edible education as a formal field, more attention to meals served in schools, and education built around school gardens. Schools are modeling what is happening in community food systems. Opportunities over the last ten years have included the state Healthy Kids Local Farms program, which gave schools permission to procure more local food. There are opportunities to better connect the program with what has happened in the classroom. Farmers are serve as natural educators too.

Some challenges the food system has faced include seeing education as an active partner; the sector is more often an afterthought. The education sector can be more engaged or explicitly involved--for example, school wellness programs could be tied to food policy. Thinking 25 years out, Mr. Garfunkel spoke of a concept of edible democracy, where everyone has a welcome place at the table, access to healthy food, and a proactive approach for future generations.

Judy Kirkhuff, Washington State Farmers Market Association (WSFMA) and Julian O'Reilly, Neighborhood Farmers Markets –WSFMA is a statewide nonprofit and will be celebrating its 40th year in 2019. WSFMA just hired a new director who will help the organization to focus more on policies, serving as an incubator for more farmers, supporting the local economy, and supporting local farmers markets. There has been a 10% increase statewide in the number of farmers markets with a 30-60% increase statewide in attendance and sales for across the state.

Successes in the last decade include collaboration and food access. Seattle markets have worked to let people know they can use their SNAP benefits at the farmers market, and adoption of the Seattle sugary beverage tax has stabilized the funding to support the Fresh Bucks program. Focused collaboration with city transportation and parks departments have led to permitting changes for farmers markets. The farmers markets in Seattle have also evolved from a more competitive environment to a collaborative one, and now meet regularly and work together.

Continued challenges to farmers markets include supporting food access, adapting to the variety of payment methods, educating new farmers, long term site availability, and access to cold storage in Seattle to keep food miles driven down. Gains in visibility and popularity mask a continued need for municipal support. Seattle farmers markets are still not breaking even and need to continue to fundraise.

Aaron Czyzewski, Food Lifeline – Food Lifeline has been working for food security in Western Washington for almost 40 years. In the past 10 years, demand for support spiked during the recession. There have been significant improvements in product flow through state-of-the-art technology to help support the distribution system. Awareness and care about food waste and repurpose have grown considerably, but there is still more to be done.

Emphasis on fresh, local foods has increased and changed sourcing guidelines from restricting sugars to partnering with farmers. Sourcing local requires additional longer-term strategic planning. Examining and working on the root causes of hunger, including poverty, systemic poverty/racism, lack of housing, and the cost of food will decrease demand.

Challenges to the anti-hunger sector include coordinating among hundreds of partner organizations with diverse clientele and missions. Improvements to network capacity have occurred, but transportation and traffic congestion, cold storage, changes in tax policy challenge the system. National policy concerns include the farm bill and SNAP. For every meal Food Lifeline provides, 12 meals are provided by SNAP. Proposed legislation could remove 2 million people from SNAP eligibility. Collaboration is necessary to see how food policies interrelate and examine how municipal, state and federal governments work together.

Ron Shultz, Washington State Conservation Commission – The Conservation Commission is supporting the development of the state food policy forum. So far, this group has worked to self-educate about the variety of food systems topics of importance across Washington state. To this point, the state forum has focused on grounding itself with “101” discussions on several topics and is now shifting to more in depth “201” topics, including production, consumer demand, processing, distribution, the next generation of farmers, land availability, nutrition education, cold storage, and working to get kids interested in working in agriculture.

State food policy could be a conduit to bring local and regional food policy work to the federal level, including things like concerns about the farm bill. The group is looking to budget strategic planning at the local level, in addition to the forum. A future project could identify a geographic area with multiple farms and strategize how to support the agricultural community through farm infrastructure preservation and reducing burdens due to growth pressure or incompatible uses. Participation on the forum is open to interested parties.

Recap

PSRC staff will send an email out to the group asking to provide feedback on thoughts about priorities and comments on today's presentations and how to move forward. Forum participants were asked to share initial impressions or questions from the day's conversation. Questions and comments included:

- How may the region leverage technology companies to accelerate and disrupt?
- The group needs more farmers at the table during these types of conversations.
- The status of the Washington State Food Policy Roundtable's work is in flux, as the backbone group taking on that work has ceased operations. At this point, Washington doesn't have a non-profit organization comprehensively tracking statewide food and farm policy.
- The Roadmap to Washington's Future project has been receiving input from around the state on the Growth Management Act's function, and tremendous pressure on food production has been noted as a part of the process.

Announcements

United Way of King County announced their [Free Summer Meals program](#) including hiring for summer AmeriCorps positions.

For more information, contact Liz Underwood-Bultmann at LUnderwood-Bultmann@psrc.org