



WASHINGTON STATE FOOD POLICY FORUM

2023 Report to the Legislature

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Washington State Food Policy Forum

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Table of Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
ACEP-ALE	Agricultural Conservation Easement Program-Agriculture Land Easements
ARS	Agricultural Research Service
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous and People of Color
CD	Conservation Districts
CSA	Community Supported Agriculture
CSP	Conservation Stewardship Program
DOH	Washington State Department of Health
DSHS	Washington State Department of Social and Health Services
EQIP	Environmental Quality Incentives Program
EBT	Electronic Benefit Transfer
FDPIR	Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations
FMNP	Farmers Market Nutrition Programs
GMA	Growth Management Act
GusNIP	Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program
HB	House Bill
LAMIRD	Limited Area of More Intense Rural Development
LAMP	Local Agriculture Market Program
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
OFF	Office of Farmland Preservation
RBCS	Rural Business-Cooperative Service
RCPP	Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Acronym	Definition
RUH/RHS	Rural Utility Service/Rural Housing Service
SB	State Bill
SCC	Washington State Conservation Commission
SME	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
TEFAP	The Emergency Food Assistance Program
UGA	Urban Growth Area
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
VSP	Voluntary Stewardship Program
WIC	Women, Infants, and Children
WSDA	Washington State Department of Agriculture
WSHFC	Washington State Housing and Finance Commission
WSU	Washington State University



Executive Summary

The Washington State Food Policy Forum (Forum) has convened since 2016 to understand and respond to challenges and opportunities facing Washington's food system. Forum members range across the political spectrum and come from almost all sectors of the state's food system. Members have a breadth of knowledge and experiences, and this combination has evolved into a more collaborative and robust partnership which is evident in the accomplishments during the past two years.

The Forum finalized its charter in 2022, which articulates the Forum's goals, including those mandated by statute and goals regarding equity and the impacts of climate change. The Charter's managing principles serve as a strong foundation for tackling tough state-wide and cross-sectoral issues.

The Forum engaged in new ways in 2022 by selecting three areas of emphasis for the year. Three teams were formed to explore the issues of land use, the farm bill, and state brand and marketing.

The Informing Land Use Policy team hosted a public listening session to inform the development of 11 recommendations. The recommendations included: Urban Infill, City Annexation and UGA Expansion, Mitigation of Lost Farmland, Limited Area of More Intense Rural Development (LAMIRD), Impact of Public Land Acquisition Projects, Water Availability, Solar Siting, Permanent Protection of Farmland, Conservation Programs, Support for Local Governments, and Urban Agriculture.

The federal farm bill, an omnibus, 5-year law governing an array of agriculture and food programs, is up for reauthorization in 2023. The Farm Bill team hosted a webinar for Washington's Congressional delegation to review the Forum's Farm Bill 2023 Recommendations in June of 2023.

Currently, Washington state is one of three US states that does not have an official state brand label or marketing program. During the 2022-23 legislative session, the Forum helped educate legislators about the benefits and need for the state brand (SB 5341) and expressed the Forum's support for SB 5341.

Building on work completed in 2022, the Forum's 2023 priorities are:

1. Increase Connection to Local Food Policy Councils
2. Identify Mechanisms for Diversifying Voices in the Forum
3. Develop a Washington Food System Snapshot
4. Increase Irrigated Ag Lands
5. Bring the Food and Ag Perspective into GMA Requirement for County Comprehensive Plans to Consider Climate
6. Advance Ag's Participation in the Climate Commitment Act

Introduction

The Washington State Food Policy Forum (Forum) has convened since 2016 to understand and respond to challenges and opportunities facing Washington’s food system. The Forum is a valuable venue for conservation, food security, nutrition, and agricultural stakeholders to address needed changes to the state’s food system. Drawing from the experience and perspectives of its members, who range across the political spectrum and come from almost all sectors of the food system, the Forum produced recommendations reports in 2019, 2020, and 2021. Forum reports and resources are shared with over 150 engaged list-serv stakeholders in addition to the broader food system community. See **Appendix A** for a list of Forum members.

Acknowledging that food system issues are complex and need to be addressed holistically, the Forum approaches its work through a system-based lens, see **Figure 1**. There are many points of interconnection between the Forum’s recommendation areas. The Forum recognizes progress requires moving multiple food system changes forward in tandem. The Forum uses an equity lens to guide its work to develop and take action on recommendations so that the Forum contributes to the development of a food system that benefits all people in Washington.

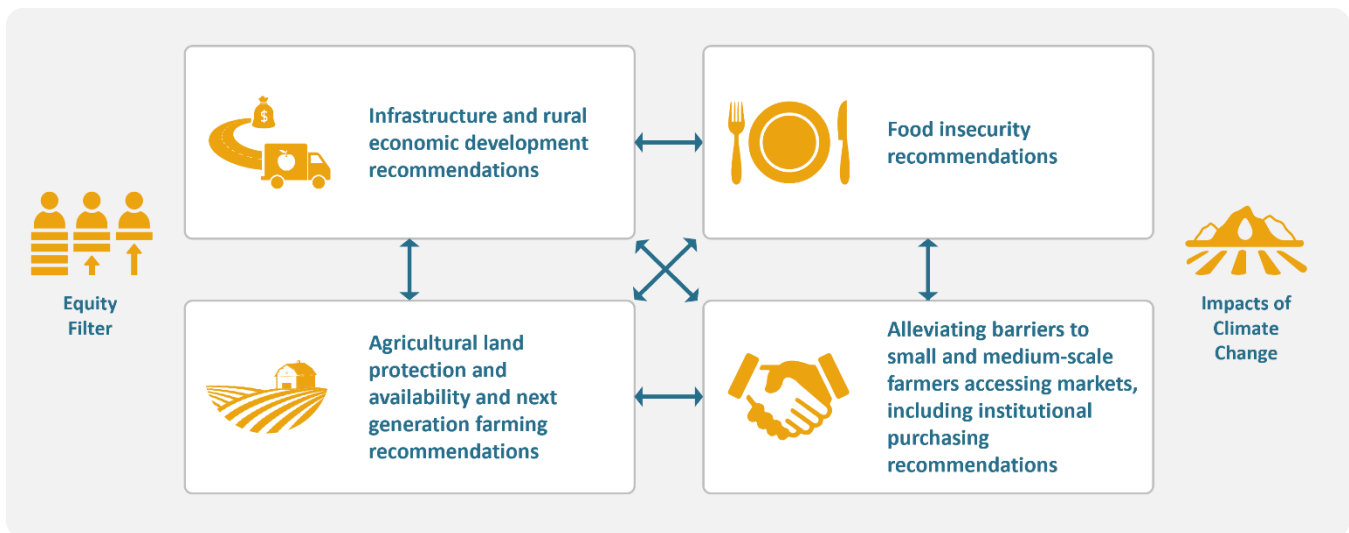


Figure 1 The Food Policy Forum Food System Lens. Through a three-part process beginning in January 2018 the Forum defined aspects of the food system on which to focus.

This report details the Forum’s work from November 2022 through October 2023. The Forum finalized its charter which provides a solid foundation for the group to work from. The Forum disseminated two recommendations reports: Land Use Policy Solutions to Stem Agricultural Land Loss and Farm Bill 2023 Recommendations. The Forum also hosted public listening sessions engaged experts, and wrote public-facing learning memos, to advance its food system lens and consensus recommendations. The Forum advanced a 2019 consensus recommendation to support creation of a state brand and promotion program. Lastly, the Forum launched six priority areas for work in the second half of 2023 and into 2024.

2022–2023 Forum Activity Captured in This Report

2022 Milestones



The Forum Finalized Its Charter



Land Use Policy Solutions to Stem Agricultural Land Loss Recommendations Report

- August 2022: Patterns and Drivers of Farmland and Agricultural Infrastructure Loss
- December 2022: Recommendations Released



Farm Bill 2023 Recommendations

- June 2022: Farm Bill 101
- October 2022: 2023 Farm Bill Listening Session
- January 2023 Recommendations Released
- June 2023: Congressional Delegation Webinar



Advancing 2019 Consensus Recommendation to Create a State Brand and Promotion Program

- May 2022: Team Facing Educational Session and Memo
- June 2022: Full Forum meeting confirming request for WSDA Decision Package

2023 Newly Launched Work



Increase Connection to Local Food Policy Councils



Identify Mechanisms for Diversifying Voices in the Forum



Develop a Washington Food System Snapshot



Increase Irrigated Ag Lands



Bring the Food and Ag Perspective into GMA Requirement for County Comprehensive Plans to Consider Climate Change



Advance Ag's Participation in the Climate Commitment Act

Forum Milestones in 2022

The Forum celebrated several key milestones in 2022. The Forum drafted and finalized its charter which codified a focus on equity and climate among other goals dictated by its statute. The year also marked the launch of three new bodies of work that have roots in the Forum’s earlier consensus recommendations, including work on land use policy, a state brand for food and agricultural products, and the farm bill. In pursuing the three bodies of work, the Forum articulated new recommendations and tried out new roles for advancing the goals stated in its statute. In addition, the Forum onboarded two new member organizations, including the University of Washington and the Washington State University Food System Program. The Forum continues to share its work and approach in different venues. In 2022, the Forum shared its work with the Western Washington Food Systems Partnership and at the Tilth Conference. This section describes how the Forum pursued and achieved progress in 2022.

Tackling the Work in a New Way

Prior to the Forum’s establishment in statute in 2020, yearly budget provisos directed the Forum to produce recommendations reports for the Legislature. In pursuing its three priority areas in 2022, the Forum took action in new ways beyond recommendations development. For example, the Forum hosted formal public listening sessions for the first time. In August 2022, the Forum hosted a public listening session on Patterns and Drivers of Farmland and Agricultural Infrastructure Loss and in October 2022, the Forum hosted a Farm Bill 2023 Summit. The Farm Bill 2023 Summit engaged new voices from outside Forum membership through the speaker lineup, and through a whiteboarding exercise that invited participants to respond to “What does the farm bill mean to you locally?” Both listening sessions informed the Forum’s understanding of the issues and opportunity for recommendations. Also in 2022, the Forum produced its first educational memo on Exploring a State Brand/Marketing Program for Washington, meant to be a resource for the food system community in the state. The memo includes information on the opportunity to pursue a state brand and current and past marketing efforts in Washington based on discussions that occurred during Forum meetings, small team calls, and a learning meeting that included a guest speaker from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture *PA Preferred* Program. The learning session was the first time the Forum engaged experts from outside Washington to understand opportunities. The Forum is also celebrating coming together to offer recommendations on the vast and complex federal Farm Bill policy.

Charter

In 2022, through a collaborative process of co-authorship among convening agency staff, the facilitation team, and Forum members, the Food Policy Forum finalized its [Charter](#). The Charter articulates the Forum’s goals, including those mandated by statute and goals regarding equity and the impacts of climate change. The Forum drew from its experience reaching consensus on a myriad of recommendations in 2019 and 2020 to articulate managing principles. These managing principles serve as a strong foundation for tackling tough state-wide, cross-sectoral issues as they provide an agreed-upon framework to return to on how the Forum does its work.



2022 Action Teams

Leaning into existing consensus recommendations, the Forum underwent a robust decision-making process to select areas of interest and create three teams:

1. Informing Land Use Policy
2. 2023 Farm Bill
3. State Brand and Marketing Program

The process to identify these three topics began in December of 2021 and is outlined in **Appendix B**. The work of these three teams is described in this section of the report. All three teams engaged members and nonmembers in new ways, produced meaningful resources for the Washington food system stakeholder community, and continue to see ripple effects of their work. While the Forum has selected different topic areas to focus on in 2023 (see the 2023 Progress Report section of this report), the recommendations and work produced in 2022 remain relevant to the food system in Washington State.

Informing Land Use Policy



Scoping and Launching

In advance of the 2023 state legislative session, the Forum published [Land Use Policy Solutions to Stem Agricultural Land Loss](#). The table below outlines the status of the recommendations and identifies areas where additional work is needed. The Forum recognizes that farmland loss is a complex and multifaceted issue, and that these land use policy recommendations are not an entire solution for the challenges facing agriculture in Washington. Economic viability, succession planning, regulatory barriers, workforce challenges, and other issues remain important and critical to the success of agriculture.

The Forum is a venue for discussing food system issues and the tensions that exist in advancing food system change. Solutions to one component of a system inevitably impact another. The Forum recognizes the complexity of the ideas it is putting forward. The complexity includes protecting rural agricultural lands from sprawl while also supporting affordable housing in increasingly dense urban communities. The Forum drew on the diversity of its members in terms of sector and scale to see the ideas in this document from a variety of vantage points. The Forum understands that each community is best suited to make decisions about the place they live.

The US Census of Agriculture reported a loss of 640,000 acres of Washington's land in farms between 2002 and 2017. Since then, the challenges for farmland have only become more difficult and complex as existing problems have grown and new issues have emerged. To support food production in Washington, immediate action is needed to protect agricultural land from conversion to other uses. Preserving farmland supports communities in building resilience to climate impacts such as flooding, drought, and other extreme weather events.

Agricultural land protection is a key component of the Forum's food system lens that guides its work (see **Figure 1** on page 4). To develop the ideas included in this document, a subcommittee of Forum members participated in months of meetings, discussions, and collaborative engagement to learn more about the drivers and patterns of agricultural land loss and identify areas that warrant more attention from the legislature and stakeholders

statewide. To support the development of recommendations, the Forum hosted an informational session for members, stakeholders, and the public to learn about the patterns and drivers of farmland and agricultural infrastructure loss across Washington. This list of ideas includes practical and actionable land use policy solutions to support the retention of agricultural land.

Preventing farmland loss is an urgent issue. On December 1, 2022, the Forum reached consensus on the 11 recommendations below and believes these solutions will set our state on the path to stem the loss. The recommendations listed are accompanied by further detail in the Land Use Policy Solutions to Stem Agricultural Land Loss report, [found online](#). Since the writing of this Forum resource in December of 2022, there have been incremental successes related to these ideas at various levels of the Washington state food system, but significant additional work is needed to address the rapid loss of agricultural lands. A selection of these indicators of progress are included below.



Recommendations and Successes to Date

Recommendations	Related Legislative Highlights
<p>1. Urban Infill: Relieve the pressure to develop agricultural land by requiring cities to allow more options for in-fill housing, such as accessory dwelling units, duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, and courtyard apartments.</p>	<p>2022-23 Legislative Action Middle Housing Bill passed (HB 1110) Accessory Dwelling Unit bill passed (HB 1337)</p>
<p>2. City Annexation and UGA Expansion: Prior to allowing a city annexation or urban growth area expansion, require the completion of an agricultural impact statement that sufficiently addresses the concerns raised.</p>	
<p>3. Mitigation for Lost Farmland: Require government land use actions that result in the loss of agricultural land, including eminent domain and actions that remove land from agricultural zoning, to be mitigated by conserving adjacent farmland that is comparable in size, soil quality, and agricultural value. If adjacent farmland is not available, farmland in other areas or unfarmed land restored to production can be used for mitigation at a rate of three acres for every acre lost.</p>	
<p>4. Limited Area of More Intense Rural Development (LAMIRD): The Office of Farmland Preservation and Department of Commerce should evaluate how concentrating growth in Limited Areas of More Intensive Rural Development (LAMIRDs) could be used to prevent or mitigate the loss of farmland.</p>	<p>Opportunities for action 2023-24 session. In 2022, SB 5275 was passed to enhance opportunities in LAMIRDs. The Legislature could assess the success and impacts of this legislation, especially as it relates to the protection of farmland.</p>

Recommendations	Related Legislative Highlights
<p>5. Impact of Public Land Acquisition Projects: Require state agencies to complete an agricultural impact statement for public projects that involve the acquisition and/or conversion of farmland.</p>	<p>Opportunities for action 2023-24 session.</p>
<p>6. Water Availability: Engage with the Department of Ecology, Department of Commerce, and Office of Farmland Preservation to evaluate and clarify the relationship between the Growth Management Act and Watershed Management Act to plan for adequate legal water for agricultural purposes on lands zoned for or currently utilized for agriculture across the state, including the development and implementation of pilot projects that foster collaboration for providing water for people, fish, and farms, such as water banks, irrigation modernization, and other mechanisms to ensure sufficient water supply for agriculture.</p>	
<p>7. Solar Siting: Implement policies that direct solar development onto lands identified as having “least conflict” through the Least-Conflict Solar Siting process on the Columbia Plateau and develop similar policies statewide. As the highest priority, incentivize renewable energy development on preferred sites, such as rooftops, structures, and brownfields.</p>	<p>2022-23 Legislative Action</p> <p>HB 1216 requires Ecology to develop a programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for solar energy in Washington, which must consider the mapping tool produced by the Columbia Plateau Least Conflict Solar Siting process.</p>
<p>8. Permanent Protection of Farmland: Substantially increase the funding for farmland protection transactions, advancing the previous Forum request of \$100 million dollars for the State Conservation Commission to purchase development rights and agricultural conservation easements, with priority given to historically disadvantaged farmers.</p>	<p>Opportunities for action 2023-24 session.</p> <p>\$4 million was allocated for FPLA; however, will need ongoing, additional funding in the next budget cycle.</p> <p>\$12 million for Farm and Forest account at RCO</p>
<p>9. Conservation Programs: Fully fund state voluntary conservation programs to support the viability of agriculture and protect critical areas and habitat.</p>	<p>2022-23 Legislative Action</p> <p>\$50 million for a Riparian Grant Program (\$25 million each for SCC and RCO)</p> <p>\$8.5 million for VSP program implementation</p> <p>\$15 million for CREP</p>
<p>10. Support for Local Governments: Significantly increase financial and technical support for local governments and conservation districts to implement tools to retain farmland, especially for under-</p>	

Recommendations	Related Legislative Highlights
<p>resourced counties at high risk of losing farmland. Support the Department of Commerce to evaluate tools and local regulations that can either support or impede agriculture.</p>	
<p>11. Urban Agriculture: Increase access to fresh food by supporting urban, peri-urban, indoor, and other emerging agricultural production, directing the Office of Farmland Preservation to conduct a stakeholder review of the opportunities and barriers.</p>	<p>2022-23 Legislative Action Urban Agriculture Study at Office of Farmland Preservation (HB 1552)</p>

2023 Farm Bill



Scoping and Launching

Recognizing that each of the [Forum’s goals for Washington’s food system](#) is significantly impacted by the federal farm bill, the Forum identified the 2023 Farm Bill as one of three key topics for action in 2022. In 2022, the Forum drew on the expertise of members to develop a set of consensus recommendations for farm bill titles relevant to the Forum’s work, see [Farm Bill 2023 Recommendations Report](#). In June 2023, the Forum engaged the Washington state congressional delegation in a webinar to raise awareness about the Farm Bill, the breadth of its influence on Washington’s food system, and how the Forum’s recommendations can benefit rural communities, people experiencing hunger, specialty crop producers, research efforts, and conservation programs, among others.

The Farm Bill is an omnibus, 5-year law governing an array of agriculture and food programs that shapes food and agriculture in the US that came up for renewal in 2023 and remains a needed area of action for Congress going into 2024. The Bill includes 12 titles ranging from conservation to nutrition to rural development.

Using the Forum’s 2019 and 2020 consensus recommendations to guide the scope and discussion, a subcommittee of Forum members participated in discussions and collaborative engagement to learn more about the opportunities presented by the 2023 Farm Bill to advance needed food systems change in Washington state. To support the development of recommendations, the Forum hosted two informational sessions for members, stakeholders, and the public to learn about the farm bill process and the impact of the farm bill on Washingtonians.

The Forum recognizes the vastness of the Farm Bill and acknowledges that the Forum’s recommendations address just a subset of the many important funding and programs contained within the Farm Bill. Addressing needs across nutrition, research, rural development, economic viability, horticulture, and conservation are critical to the sustainability and equity of Washington’s food system. On January 12, 2023, the Forum reached consensus on the six recommendation areas below and believes these solutions highlight important needs and considerations for Washington state.

Recommendations

Nutrition

1. Update SNAP benefits by shifting from the thrifty food plan to the low-cost food plan to better reflect how people shop and to ensure adequate benefit to meet need.
2. Update nutrition title programs to simplify access, align across safety net program areas, and support education and training programs.
3. Increase funding for GusNIP grant program to make fruits and vegetables more affordable for SNAP participants.
4. Remove barriers to participating in SNAP for populations currently lacking access (low-income college students, income eligible green card holders, etc.).
5. End the prohibition on simultaneous use of SNAP and FDPIR.
6. Improve TEFAP to support local purchasing.
7. Direct USDA to apply an approach to the procurement of foods for school meals and child nutrition programs that expands existing procurement allowances for local and geographic preference in purchasing, as well encourages procurement approaches that consider factors other than lowest-cost bid in awarding contracts in order to maximize purchasing, to the extent possible and appropriate, from local producers and smaller-scale, new and beginning, and/or socially disadvantaged producers.
8. Increase mandatory funding for the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program to \$50 million per year.
9. Restore Community Food Projects grant program funding to \$9 million per year.

Rural Development

1. Remove population cap barriers to RBCS loan guarantees and related programs for food and agriculture businesses.
2. Remove population cap barriers to critical infrastructure programs (RUS/RHS) for public entities serving farm support businesses such as food packing and processing.
3. Invest in rural drinking water and wastewater treatment systems that support rural residents and agricultural businesses.

Horticulture

1. Increase funding for Specialty Crop Block Grants.
2. Prioritize lower barrier entry for BIPOC and new/beginning farmers to access Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP) grants. For example: a. Ensure set-asides for Tribes for LAMP grants. b. Reduce or minimize cost share requirements for BIPOC and new/beginning farmers.
3. Maintain and expand funding for the Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP), established in 2018 Farm Bill and incorporating four sub-programs: a. Farmers Market Promotion Program b. Local Food Promotion Program c. Regional Food Systems Partnerships d. Value-Added Producer Grant

Conservation

1. Increase funding for working lands conservation programs, especially the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).
2. Change eligibility for conservation title programs to support urban agriculture.
3. Hone programs such as CSP and EQIP to specifically incentivize and support climate-smart farming practices.
4. Increase funding and capacity for conservation technical assistance, especially related to climate-smart, soil health, and/or organic practices.
5. Increase the pace of agricultural land protection through ACEP-ALE by increasing program funding to meet demand and reduce barriers to participation by increasing federal cost share and covering transaction costs.
6. Invest in watershed infrastructure including water storage and irrigation systems.
7. Help small-scale and historically marginalized producers access existing USDA programs by creating an Office of Small Farms, piloting a payment system that increases CSP and EQIP payments to small-scale farmers, adjusting application processes to match small-scale grower's needs, and increasing outreach to improve farmers' awareness of the funding opportunities.
8. Develop new programs that address barriers to land access for new, small scale, young and historically marginalized farmers.
9. Improve NRCS program application processes and increase transparency.

Research

1. Prioritize research (and extension and educational opportunities) focused on BIPOC communities. a. Build equitable access to higher education for BIPOC and first-generation students

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2. Increase agricultural research and education funding, for example or to include: a. Provide \$100 million dollars/year in mandatory funding for the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program. b. Dedicate funding to soil health, organics, climate change, and specialty crops. c. Increase the Specialty Crop Research Initiative by \$50 million dollars/year. d. Increase funding for the Research Facilities Act.
-
3. Increase support to USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and universities and other organizations to support agriculture infrastructure research.

Economic Viability

1. Expand access to risk management tools such as farm revenue insurance while allowing producers to better manage the financial and operational risks associated with quality losses and trade-related market disruptions to which the producers of perishable commodities and specialty crops are particularly vulnerable.
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2. Increase support for the Market Access Program and the Foreign Market Development Program to continue access to international markets for Washington agricultural producers and promotion of Washington products overseas.
-
3. Increase federal support for workforce development for a variety of agricultural sectors, including skilled meat processing.



Successes to Date

2023 Farm Bill Recommendations Dissemination via June 23, 2023, Webinar: The Farm Bill Team hosted a webinar on the Forum's Farm Bill 2023 Recommendations for Washington's congressional delegation on June 23, 2023. Attendance was strong, with staff from nearly all congressional offices, including staff on the House Committee on Agriculture, attending. The delegation was eager to connect with constituents, projects, activities, or examples of programs happening in Washington that relate to the Forum's Farm Bill recommendations.

State Brand and Marketing Program



Scoping and Launching

Currently, Washington State is one of three US states that does not have an official state brand label or marketing program. In 2019 the Forum put forward a consensus recommendation related to a state branding program. ***Increase purchases of Washington farm products with procurement policies and better visibility and promotion of Washington products in the marketplace. Create a Washington state brand program that makes local products – and specific producers/farms – more visible and easier to code and track through existing supply chains.***¹

With the goal of advancing the 2019 consensus recommendation, the Forum established a state brand and market program as a priority area for 2022. This work included investigating state-level programs across the country, understanding Washington efforts past and present, and making a recommendation to WSDA to submit a decision package to establish a state brand program.

To advance its work, the State Brand and Marketing Team hosted a learning meeting in May of 2022. Speakers included a representative from Pennsylvania’s “PA Preferred” brand and staff of local brand efforts in Washington, including Forum members with experience with Eat Local First, Washington Grown, and Puget Sound Fresh. The team found that lessons learned regarding Washington’s experience with state brand efforts did not exist in one consolidated or accessible place. As such, the team decided to author a [context document: Exploring a State Brand/Marketing Program for Washington](#).

These two initial steps of convening a learning meeting and producing a context document, provided the Forum with a common understanding of the need for an opportunity to pursue its 2019 recommendation on establishing a state brand program. The team proposed that the Forum request that WSDA submit a decision package to fund a state brand and agricultural promotion program. The full Forum agreed to this path forward during the June 2022 Forum meeting.

During the 2022-23 budget request period, WSDA submitted a decision package for funding to develop and implement a state brand program. On November 28, 2022, the Forum submitted a letter of support for full funding of the decision package.

Equity Considerations

In June 2022, Forum members used the [Forum’s equity filter](#) to identify equity considerations for the design and implementation of a Washington state brand program. The Forum recognizes that standing up new programs come with the potential for unintended consequences. A detailed list of possible unintended consequences and the Forum’s ideas to reduce inequities, generated from using the equity filter, are outlined in **Appendix C**. These equity considerations were shared with WSDA.

¹ See [2019 Consensus Report: Market Access Section, Recommendation # 3B](#).



Successes to Date

- The Forum helped educate legislators during the 2022-23 legislative session through legislative hearings and work sessions about the benefits and need for the state brand (SB 5341) and expressed the Forum's support for SB 5341.
- Using its equity filter, the Forum determined that ongoing operational support is needed for the long-term success of the state brand program and to ensure it is inclusive of and beneficial to the full range Washington producers, across scales and types of production, etc. While some funding was allocated for a staff person at WSDA to do research and development of the state brand, the Forum recognizes that additional funding is needed and important.

2023 Progress Report

The Forum identified several topics for priority action during a January to June 2023 planning process. See **Appendix D** for more information on the process to identify 2023 priorities. The following section describes the progress of the Forum in pursuing the six 2023 priorities:

1. Increase Connection to Local Food Policy Councils
2. Identify Mechanisms for Diversifying Voices in the Forum
3. Develop a Washington Food System Snapshot
4. Increase Irrigated Ag Lands
5. Bring the Food and Ag Perspective into GMA Requirement for County Comprehensive Plans to Consider Climate
6. Advance Ag's Participation in the Climate Commitment Act

Increase Connection to Local Food Policy Councils

The Forum's statute directs the Forum to “identify ways to improve coordination and communication among city, county, regional, and state food policy entities and communication between these entities and state agencies.” The convening agency staff are leading a team that includes Forum members representing local food policy entities in Whatcom and Clark Counties to develop a survey to understand the nature, scope, and needs of local food policy entities in Washington. The survey will inform additional Forum action to improve coordination and communication with and among local food policy entities. Results from the survey will be shared publicly on the Forum’s website and disseminated through a variety of channels, including WSU Extension, Conservation Districts, Tilth Alliance, etc.



Identify Mechanisms for Diversifying Voices in the Forum

The Forum has convened a team to discuss diversifying voices in the Forum to build on a multi-year conversation about the need and opportunity to bring new voices into Forum discussions and decision-making. Prior work of the Forum on the topic includes, administering a survey to understand Forum member identity, professional scope of work, and experience with community engagement; including non-members as expert speakers in meetings; and creating the opportunity for members to invite non-members to team meetings as technical or subject matter experts or participants with important lived experience to share. The intention of non-member engagement is to enrich discussion by providing diverse perspectives and experiences and expertise not currently represented by Forum membership.



Develop a Washington Food System Snapshot

The Forum committed to producing a resource that provides an understanding of the current state of Washington's food system. An initial list of resources was compiled by Forum members during the February 2023 Forum meeting. The document, [Resources for Understanding the Food System in Washington](#), can be found online. This work is on pause until 2024.



2023 Teams: Advancing Forum Recommendations

Increase Irrigated Ag Lands

The Increase Irrigated Ag Lands Team draws from a 2019 consensus recommendation: regarding the impacts of climate change on water availability: ***Work with policy makers, university researchers, tribes, and agencies to project future agricultural water availability needs across the state, and to identify strategies to reduce water use conflicts.***² Additional motivation to work on irrigated ag lands comes from a decision the Forum made at its October 2020 meeting to ***Convene a sub-group of Forum members interested in Washington water supply and demand issues to engage with SMEs and stakeholders.***



The team is currently developing a Forum learning session on Climate Adaptation: Understanding WA's Current and Forecasted Water Supply in Relation to Food Production and Consumption to build understanding of the water supply picture statewide to inform what the Forum could contribute that is value added to what is going on already.

Questions guiding the team's work include:

- What is the relationship between water supply and water demand and agricultural production? How does irrigation impact crop production and economics?
- What does the dynamic problem of water supply and demand look like? How has new knowledge or insight on water supply in Basin X changed in the last 10 years and what new questions or challenges are stakeholders contending with? What stakeholder groups are engaging and about what? Which populations are impacted by water supply and demand?
- What does engagement with tribes look like in each basin?
- What are regional differences in water supply and anticipated changes and what will the impact be on production, including forage production?
- Where will we see changes in temp and precipitation?
- What do climate trends mean for our state?
- What do new and changing demands on production mean for rural economic development, infrastructure, etc.?

² See [2019 Consensus Report: Impacts of Climate Change Section, Recommendation # 1](#)

- What do we mean by increase in irrigated acres? To what extent are we talking about addressing current water supply issues versus preparing to absorb greater demand because of climate impacts in the region?
- What are other demands of the Columbia River supply (e.g., fish, power, etc.)?
- What water conservation practices is agriculture using (e.g., like drip irrigation, that have increased efficiency of water use per acre)?
- To what extent is the food/ag voice at the table where water supply issues and opportunities are being discussed?

Bring the Food and Ag Perspective into GMA Requirement for County Comprehensive Plans to Consider Climate



The Bring the Food and Ag Perspective into GMA Requirement for County Comprehensive Plans to Consider Climate Team draws from several consensus recommendations, including ***Ensure agricultural adaptation resources are well coordinated, funded, and staffed to support farmers in making informed business decisions in a changing climate.***³

To address the new climate element in local comprehensive plans required by HB 1181 and the Growth Management Act, the team sent a letter to the Department of Commerce to support an update to their county guidance. This letter included recommendations that have already been approved by the Forum that relate to climate change and are relevant to local government covering three key areas:

- Climate practices: Supports both climate resilience and mitigation
- Water: Addresses current and future water scarcity
- Farmland protection: Supports local food supply and ecosystem services, avoids future emissions by preventing development

Advance Ag's Participation in the Climate Commitment Act



The Advance Ag's Participation in the Climate Commitment Act Team draws from two 2019 consensus recommendations and one 2020 consensus recommendation regarding the impacts of climate change on agricultural resilience. ***Ensure agricultural adaptation resources are well coordinated, funded, and staffed to support farmers in making informed business decisions in a changing climate.***⁴ ***Support conservation programs and resources that provide direct financial assistance to farmers to implement best management practices that address impacts of climate change and also provide employment opportunities and economic development.***⁵

This team is committed to elevating the important role of agriculture in both climate mitigation and resilience and sees great opportunities for agriculture's role in greenhouse gas and carbon emission reductions. As such, it is essential that the state's agricultural sector is considered and adequately represented in program and funding

³ See [2019 Consensus Report: Impacts of Climate Change Section, Recommendation # 3](#)

⁴ See [2019 Consensus Report: Impacts of Climate Change Section, Recommendation # 3](#)

⁵ See [2020 Consensus Report: Opportunity 1: Support implementation programs and resources that provide immediate financial assistance to farmers to promote resilience in the face of a changing climate and ensure long-term food security, Recommendation A.](#)

decisions related to the allocation of funds generated from Washington’s Climate Commitment Act. At present, the team is working to understand how the allocation decisions are made, all the while building stakeholder support for the importance of investing in agriculture. As necessary, the team may arrive at a point in which it makes specific allocation and investment suggestions to the legislature.

To date the team has engaged the following stakeholders to understand the program structure, agency implementation efforts, and the fund-allocation process:

- Washington State Department of Agriculture
- Washington State Department of Ecology
- Washington State Conservation Commission
- Washington State Environmental Justice Council

Appendix A: Forum Membership

° Indicates participation in the 2022 Land Use Policy Action Team

* Indicates participation in the 2022 State Brand Action Team

^ Indicates participation in the 2022 Farm Bill Action Team

Member		Organization
Aaron	Czyzewski [^]	Food Lifeline
Addie	Candib [^] (Alternate: Dani Madrone [°])	American Farmland Trust
Ali	Jensen	Whatcom County Health Department
Alyssa	Auvinen [^]	WA State Department of Health
Aslan	Meade (Alternate: Tina Sharp)	Thurston Economic Development Council
Babette	Roberts [^]	WA State Department of Social and Health Services
Brian	Estes [*]	LINC Foods
Brooklyn	Holton [*]	Initiative for Rural Innovation and Stewardship
Caleb	Gwerder	Washington Farm Bureau
Chad	Kruger [^]	Washington State University - CSANR
Chris	Elder [°]	Whatcom County Public Works
Chris	Voigt ^{°*^}	WA State Potato Commission
Christina	Wong ^{*^} (replaced by Jake Garcia in Oct. 2023)	Northwest Harvest
Claire	Lane [^]	WA State Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition
Colleen	Donovan	WA State Farmers Market Association
Dan	Wood ^{°^}	WA State Dairy Federation
Derek	Sandison (Alternate: Laura Raymond [*])	WA Department of Agriculture
Diane	Dempster (Alternate: Kristine Perry) ^{°*}	Clark County Food System Council
Jon	DeVaney ^{°^}	WA State Tree Fruit Association
Jen	Otten (Alternate: Marie Spiker)	University of Washington
Judy	Warnick	WA State Legislature
Kate	Delavan ^{°^}	WA State Conservation Commission
Kirsten	Ringen (replaced by Chris Cary in Oct. 2023)	Food Northwest

Member		Organization
Leanne	Eko [^]	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Linda	Neunzig ^{°*}	Snohomish County
Marcia	Ostrom [*]	Washington State University - Food Systems Program
Mary	Dye [^]	WA State Legislature
Mary	Embleton ^{°*}	King Conservation District
Melissa	Spear ^{*^}	Tilth Alliance
Mia	Gregerson [^] (Alternate: Alicia Finch) [*]	WA State Legislature
Michelle	Hennings	WA Association of Wheat Growers
Nate	Lewis	WA Farmland Trust
Patrick "PJ"	Cawley	Charlie's Produce
Richard	Conlin	Conlin Columbia Partnership for Cities
Tim	Crosby	Thread Fund
Tom	Salzer	WA Association of Conservation Districts
Yasmin	Trudeau	Washington State Legislature

The Forum remembers the great contributions of the late Ron Shultz of the State Conservation Commission.

The Food Policy Forum is currently supported by the following staff:

Washington State Conservation Commission: *Kate Delevan, Karla Heinitz, and Alicia McClendon*

Washington State Department of Agriculture: *Laura Raymond*

Ross Strategic: *Petra Vallila-Buchman, Sarah Sarfaty Epstein, and Micaela Unda*

Appendix B: Process to Identify 2022 Priorities

December 2021 Focused on

- Brainstorming important topics that warrant the Forum's attention within the six topic areas identified in the Forum's 2019 report.

January 2022 Members Opted-in To Topical Calls

- Discussed the December Forum brainstorm and determined what actions the Forum can take to move those ideas along.
- Weighed in on which topic/action pairings are ready to move. Topical calls covered:
 - Agricultural Land Protection and Availability and Next Generation Farming
 - Alleviating Barriers to Small and Medium Scale Farmers Accessing Markets, Including Institutional Purchasing
 - Infrastructure and Rural Economic Development
 - Food Insecurity
 - Impacts of Climate Change

February - April 2022 Confirmed 3 priority areas for action

- Teams discussed and presented ideas for how the Forum can take different kinds of action in 2022 to support food system change.
- Teams discussed with each other the ideas and signed up to support moving the actions forward. Using Poll Everywhere, three actions were identified as immediate work for the Forum
 - State Brand
 - Farm Bill 2023
 - Land Use Policy

Appendix C: State Brand Equity Considerations

The Forum recognizes that standing up new programs come with the potential for unintended consequences. The following are unintended consequences members of the Forum identified for mitigation before a state brand program is designed and implemented. A state brand program may:

- Result in a widening of the gap in competitive advantage for well-resourced, traditionally well-connected farms and smaller, lower-resourced, historically marginalized farms because larger farms will have an easier time accessing this program that will be designed to create a competitive advantage for those farms who participate.
- Increase judgment on businesses that cannot buy Washington products, especially in the beginning of the program. This may cause some entities to lose customers. The program should emphasize celebration and incentivization rather than creating tension.
- Decrease access to Washington products for low-income consumers because the cost of Washington products may increase to bring greater value to the producer. Addressing the accessibility of Washington product must be taken up by other mechanisms, not by reducing the value of products to the producer. While there are many contributing factors to price of production and marketing, a proposal should not ignore impacts on food affordability.
- Increase the practice of 'local washing' whereby stores market Washington products that are not in fact Washington products.

Ideas to reduce inequities:

To ensure the program is inclusive of all scales of Washington agriculture and provides supports across the state, the program should be responsive to the needs of less resourced geographies, producers with less access to systems and funding, and historically marginalized agriculture professionals. The Forum has developed the following list of equity considerations.

- Incorporate producer voice early and often throughout the process. This should include producers across the state, representing various scales of agriculture.
- Build in additional support and resources for already under-resourced farms to make up for competitive gap that already exists in the market. These could include:
 - Technical assistance – provided in culturally relevant formats and linguistically accessible
 - Intentional, focused outreach
 - Scaled pricing, or reduced cost; scalability of participation
 - Education and e-marketing support
 - Language access
- Consider how to communicate with consumers about participating farms. Allow participating farms a degree of agency in determining what is communicated about their farm, what they think their competitive advantage is, rather than a one-brand-fits-all communications strategy.

- Consider whether the label could accommodate the name of the participating farm.
- For example, Eat Local First WA Food and Farm Finder has many designations available to participating enterprises. These include, BIPOC-owned, woman-owned, LGBTQ+-owned etc.
- Ensure the existing hyper-local programs have resources to continue to promote product.
- Consider mechanisms to reduce financial barriers to participation, particularly in correlation to farm revenue. Develop a sliding scale membership structure that correlates participation based on size of farm enterprise.
- Design a website with mapping application to increase visibility for participating entities.
- To increase participation of small value-add enterprises, specific approaches to outreach to facilitate inclusion should be considered in program design. While these will mirror approaches to increase accessibility to small farms, it is important to make sure both are being reached.
- Consider collaborating with trusted partners already working with small enterprises (business license, state entities).
- Conduct robust outreach and data collection related to producers' needs to build a program that is responsive to the current landscape. Conduct a producer needs assessment and follow-up evaluation in an equitable manner that succeeds in achieving a representative sample. Techniques might include implementing a representative survey and using techniques to reach producers who might not be on any farm list. Seek out mechanisms to incorporate lived experience throughout the process. Consider compensating community members to provide input into the program.
- Research and incorporate best practices from other branding programs/states that touch on inclusivity, sustainability, accessibility, and other values identified.

Appendix D: Process to Identify 2023 Priorities

From January to June 2023, the Forum engaged in a work planning process to reflect on its progress in 2022 and identify priority topics for action. The diagram below depicts how the Forum used a January 2023 reflection session to identify topics that warrant the Forum's attention, including describing the Washington food system landscape, diversifying voices, and increasing connection with local food policy councils. During the March Forum, members participated in opt-in breakout groups to explore interest and capacity amongst members to increase connection to local food policy councils; determine mechanisms for diversifying voices in the Forum; describe current snapshot of WA Food System; and/or advance any number of recommendations that warrant attention. Breakout groups discussed the potential scope and level of effort needed to support emerging ideas.

Based on the March breakout discussion on recommendations topics that warrant the Forum's attention. In April, the Forum discussed five recommendation topics, including Food Waste Reduction, Irrigated Ag Lands, Bring the Food and Ag Perspective into GMA Requirement for County Comprehensive Plans to Consider Climate, Support Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP), and Advance Ag's Participation in the Climate Commitment Act. A prioritization exercise elevated three recommendations topics for the Forum's 2023 workplan.

January: Focused discussion on...

- What do you wish was different about the Forum's work in 2022?
- What would you change for the future?
- What needs our group's attention in 2023?

February: Focused discussion on...

- Information Gathering: Existing Data Sources for Understanding the Washington Food System Landscape
- Diversifying Voices in the Forum

March: Breakout room discussions on...

- Advance any number of recommendations that warrant attention
- Increase connection to local food policy councils
- Determine mechanisms for diversifying voices in the Forum
- Activity to describe current snapshot of WA Food System

April: Members pitched recommendations topics that warrant attention

- Food Waste Reduction
- Irrigated Ag Lands* determined to be a priority topic
- Bring the Food and Ag Perspective into GMA Requirement for County Comprehensive Plans to Consider Climate*
- Support Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP)
- Advance Ag's Participation in the Climate Commitment Act*

June: Confirmed the following priority areas for action

1. Irrigated Ag Lands
2. Bring the Food and Ag Perspective into GMA Requirement for County Comprehensive Plans to Consider Climate
3. Advance Ag's Participation in the Climate Commitment Act
4. Develop a WA Food System Snapshot
5. Identify Mechanisms for Diversifying Voices in the Forum
6. Increase Connection to Local Food Policy Councils