



# Food System Committee

Tuesday, March 26, 2024

4:30-6:00 PM

Zoom and in-person

## Minutes

### **Members Present:**

Name	Sector	Present
Margaret Gerard	Local Sales Farming	X
Nikki Oleson	Processing/Distribution	X
Sierra Crook	Food Access	X
Noelle Beecroft	Nutrition/ Public Health	X
Sean Hopps	Labor	X
Trevor Gearhart	Natural Resources	X
Rhys-Thorvald Hansen	Whatcom Food Network	X
Paul Burrill	Fishing	
Rob Dhaliwal	Export Sales Farming	X

**Others Present:** Laura Ridenour, Jessica Gillis, Alexander Harris, and Friesla Staff: Reece, Nate, and Dave.

**Call to order:** Rhys-Thorvald started the meeting at 4:35 pm.

### **Land Acknowledgement**

### **Determination of Quorum**

Quorum

### **Approval of minutes**

Sean motioned, Trevor seconded, all approved.

### **Public Comment**

Laura Ridenour introduced the Regional Food System Partnership Grant Opportunities. The deadline is the second week of May. Whatcom Food Network would like to support writing one grant in support of implementing the Food System Plan. She will gather partners on an application.

### **Friesla Meat Processing**

Noelle had visited Friesla's business a few months ago and invited them to speak to the Food System Committee. Noelle introduced the concept of a significant lack of meat processors in our region. Farmers need to travel to Moses Lake or South of Olympia with their animals. She came across Friesla, which builds custom meat processing systems, both onsite and mobile. Friesla is based in Ferndale. Noelle introduced Reece Lodder, Head of Sales and Marketing.

Reece gave an overview of Friesla's business, including their mission to provide meat producers, processors, and entrepreneurs the tools to take back local meat processing on their terms, time, and site. Friesla offers two types of processing units: mobile and modular. Additionally, Friesla offers USDA

Compliance. Reece introduced Nathan Chase, Operations Manager, and Dave Hofford, Technical Manager. They operate nationally and every community has similar challenges to meat processing.

The Food System Committee asked about specific barriers and experiences in Whatcom County. Reece mentioned the following:

Critical protected areas and well heads, as well as critical aquifer areas ordinances limit what can be on farmland. There have been 12-15 attempts to put meat processing facilities in Whatcom County, but codes prohibit them. Friesla believes that the codes do not reflect modern technology for waste management and other environmental concerns. There are a limited number of sites in Whatcom where a meat processing facility could be possible.

The Committee is still in information gathering, but will connect with Friesla as they talk to Council about this.

### **Public Health Advisory Board**

Ali shared that the Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB), another advisory committee to the County Council, has a seat available for someone from the Food System Committee. The Food System Committee originated in PHAB. With the growing food system concerns, such as food access, it's important for someone to fill that seat.

PHAB meets on the first Thursday of the month from 7:00-8:30 am. Interested people should tell Ali. The group will discuss at their next meeting.

### **Climate-Smart Farms and Forests**

Sean shared that there are an array of collaborations regarding these lands, lots of different actors working on locally-managed, working lands to benefit local communities. He shared some examples: Stewart Mountain Forest Project, Whatcom County's farmland preservation programs like the Conservation Easement Program, and the Ejidos project, a farm led by farmworkers. Noelle added that Fettered Farm in Eastern Washington is a farm and forest research land gifted to WSU Stevens County Extension.

There are a lot of funding opportunities available and Sean is interested in bringing more collaborations together. This is a way to address some of the land conservation in the food system plan.

Rob shared that these sort of projects need sustainable funding and used the Lawrence Road property as an example of how funds to purchase land are great, but farms need operational support too.

### **Ag Innovation Center**

Trevor had drafted a letter of support for a proposed Ag Innovation Center, which was introduced a few meetings ago. Henry Bierlink presented on it last meeting. The Committee had time to reflect and voted to approve this letter of support. Ali will put it on letterhead.

### **Food System Update**

Ali shared her monthly update. The County funding process begins in June and she will keep the group posted.

The group has received American Rescue Plan Act Dollars for a couple of projects. The East Whatcom Regional Resource Center Kitchen will be updated to allow for commissary use. There is a project plan and team and it is expected this will be completed by the end of the year.

This year, there will be unlimited SNAP Market Match at Bellingham, Lynden, and Bellingham Farmers' markets. Ali is committed to getting the County to fund this in the future as well.

In line with 3.1.2 in the Food System Plan (create and expand the network of shared-use kitchens and processing facilities for food businesses, food producers, and retailers), Ali is supporting other potential kitchen sites.

Last week, the Whatcom County Library Board approved a Freedge (free food library in a refrigerated unit), to be located at the North Fork Library. Sustainable Connections is hosting participating in a freedge presentation next week: <https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/03c4dc67-003b-4abe-b255-fe41c962d777>.

Rob added that small producers often don't know the potential for legal action. Noelle said the mobile butchers have to have USDA-inspectors on site. Ali shared that the Freedges are approved by the health department.

### **Retreat Planning**

The Food System Committee retreat is on April 8<sup>th</sup>, from 1-4 pm. Trevor, Rhys, and Ali worked on the purpose/goals of the retreat:

- Review the core purpose and functions of the Committee,
- Agree on some organizing structure,
- Have clearer structure in inviting partners and community in collaboration and engagement, and
- Start building out committee calendar for the next 12 months.

Nikki asked if we can review the charter before retreat. Ali will send.

The retreat will be open to the public, per the Open Public Meetings Act. There will be time at the beginning for members of the public to introduce themselves and then at the end for public comment.

Rhys shared their ideas for developing task forces around either different goals in the food system plan or on different core functions.

Rhys will send a more detailed agenda by the end of next week.

Anyone who cannot join, Rhys will cover the content with them. Ali will set up a zoom for parts of the meeting.

### **Final Public Comment**

Laura wants to open up a working group to more broadly collaborate on the issue of food security in Whatcom County.

Jessica Gillis distinguished between Cloud Mountain Farm Center and Lawrence Road. Lawrence Road is where the incubator farm is. Cloud Mountain nursery is doing well.

### **Wrap Up**

Next meeting is April 23<sup>rd</sup> 4:30-6. Retreat is April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1-4pm. Meeting adjourned at 6:01 pm.