

**Initiative for Rural Innovation & Stewardship (IRIS)  
Regional Food System Meeting  
December 9, 2009  
North Central Regional Library  
16 N Columbia St., Wenatchee  
2 – 4 pm**

Meeting Outcomes

- Identify coalition purpose
- Successful coalition function
- Identify pooled contributions

Agenda

- Introductions & food system assessment recommendations
- Coalition purpose & function
- Start up goal/project—contributions
- Next steps
- Next meeting location, date, time, facilitation

Present

Greg McLaughlin, WA Water Trust – greg@washingtonwatertrust.org

Samantha Bartling, NCW RC&D – samantha.bartling@wa.usda.gov

Carey Hunter, Pine Stump Farms – info@pinestumpfarms.com

Joan Qazi, EAT; – jqazi@nwi.net

Guy Evans, Sunshine Farm – guy@sunshinefarmmarket.com

Marcy Ostrom, WSU – mrostrom@wsu.edu

Michael Pilarski, Friends of the Trees – michael@friendsofthetrees.net

Fran Taber, Community Farm Connection (CFC) – frantaber@wildblue.net

Sherri Schneider, CFC – sherri@communityfarmconnection.org

Jennifer Korfiatis, NCW EDD – jennifer@ncwedd.com

David Granatstein, WSU CSNAR – granats@wsu.edu

Maggie McManus, Yaksum Orchard – mcmanus@heirloompears.com

Marilynn Lynn, Rama Farm – ramafarm@nwi.net

Kim Lohse, Farmhouse Table – kim@communityfarmconnection.org

Mike Cochran Farmhouse Table – mike@communityfarmconnection.org

Nancy Warner, IRIS – nancy@irisncw.org

Cheryl Dawes, IRIS – irisncw@gmail.com

Nancy opened the meeting with introductions and an overview of outcomes and the agenda. She pointed out that the meeting to convene a food coalition, which was called on relatively short notice, was the product of a breakout group's work at the Community Success Summit in November (11/18/09). The group, which had discussed next steps based on recommendations from the 2009 NCW Regional Food System Baseline Assessment Final Report prepared by Amy Stork, Joan Qazi, and Carey Hunter for IRIS, placed high priority on formation of a NCW food coalition.

Joan gave an overview of the four models of regional food systems throughout the nation that seem to be associated with success: 1) food councils, 2) networks of not-profits, 3) university-

supported frameworks, with graduate students doing the work, 4) farmers cooperatives.

Nancy listed the recommendations of the Baseline Assessment:

- Convene a standing coalition
- Strengthen partnerships
- Position regional food system as educational strategy
- Develop funding strategies
- Conduct research on innovative ideas

She noted that the entire report consisting of the 13-page final report, an extensive literature review, survey results and ag statistics, and a working regional food system directory, are available on the IRIS website.

David brought up the standing idea of compiling information on the amount of money spent in various localities on regional food, which has not yet been done due to lack of resources. He pointed out the importance of knowing these statistics for economic development.

Nancy shared outcomes listed in a paper by Gayle Feenstra's work cited in the Baseline Assessment Literature Review as a potential starting point for describing What We Want:

- Stable family farms, using sustainable practices (lots of regional capacity)
- Marketing and processing that links farmers with consumers
- Food/Ag business that creates jobs
- Improved access by all to good food
- Policies that enable production and consumption of local food

Discussion ensued. Carey pointed out that linking farmers with efficient distribution should be added to the list along with marketing and processing. Joan noted that improving access to good food also includes understanding the food needs of demographic groups such as Latinos and Native Americans. Marilyn suggested adding an educational piece to the list about food distribution and the value of locally produced food.

Nancy asked the group what type of start up goal/project this coalition might want to consider and what each person or organization could contribute. Michael suggested a complete farm services directory would be helpful; EAT and IRIS directories combined take us a ways down that road. Other ideas include capturing the economic investment in regional food, increasing Hispanic involvement, and developing a local food education program that builds on Okanogan Tourism efforts.

Guy pointed out that pragmatism dictates that their farm market targets westsiders. Because conventionally produced food is so cheap, increasing local consumption of locally produced food will probably consist of a lot of "super micro baby steps." There is a need to change the market force – expand it to include locals buying locally produced food.

There was general discussion and agreement that changing the market force would need to come from a broad coalition of agricultural interests. To be successful this coalition will need to be a big tent affair where the efforts of all are shown respect. Nancy noted that IRIS has limited capacity but a possible baby step could be to focus a *Gathering Our Voice* project on the story that would help create a NCW brand. Everyone has a piece of the success when we take time to

look for it. This would be a good way to incorporate the Hispanic and native voice as well.

Marcy asked about how to engage mid-size farmers because many of them are getting out of the business. Sherri suggested that we find ways to engage standing agricultural businesses so we could all be part of the same conversation. David noted that “sustainability” has been co-opted as a term and that it is not helpful in defining who is included in the tent at this point.

With this backdrop Guy suggested that a reasonable way to bolster a regional food system would be to forge strategic partnerships with a subset of the agricultural community rather than just have a lot of big meetings. Michael said the idea of an Okanogan Summit would be to provide a venue for brokering partnerships that would build the food system, i.e., an event where people could discover common areas and interests and become advocates for the broader goal.

Nancy noted that Fran, Joan, Sherri and she had gone to a Sustainable Connections workshop in Bellingham last winter to learn about how they have created such a dynamic and successful community. They use the big tent approach, inviting everyone in to discover and amplify their own successes by being exposed to those of others.

Marcy made the comment that there really is not black and white when it comes to agriculture. Marilynn seconded this notion saying that sustainability provides common ground between conventional and small farming from economic, environmental and social standpoints.

With the role that IRIS can play as a catalyst in the region, Nancy noted that we seem to be on the trail to creating a coalition that reflects the issues brought up so far.

In terms of near-term baby steps, Fran said that branding is a really good place to start because when you get into those discussions it coalasces your reason for being. Marketing and education are also included in branding discussions.

Maggie asked the question about where the packing sheds fit into this “big tent.” For example, her family's organic fruit has to be trucked all the way to Yakima because there aren't enough organic growers in her local community to designate an organic packing line. It costs money to change so how do we get the packing shed people to the table to figure out how to make that change? One idea to get the packing shed people involved would be to offer them a local branding program that may give them an edge over packing sheds that don't promote local.

Sherri noted that the Pybus Market project has the potential to provide that NCW branding bridge for local growers, packing sheds, and entrepreneurs. She also said the coalition could be helpful in supporting the public market. Maggie suggested that if packers offered farmers an option to distribute some of their crop locally many might participate. At this point that is not an option for growers.

David made the point that other values besides money come into play when consumers make decisions about what to buy. Kim added that the recognition of local farmers and their story adds value that consumers appreciate. Sherri noted that NCW is rich in agricultural products and local consumers ought to be able to go to the store and take advantage of that richness.

The idea of holding another Summit similar to what IRIS hosted in 2003 to help people understand how the regional food system works and could work was suggested as a mid-term

baby step we could begin planning for now. Marcy added that the previous IRIS Family Farm Summit was not focused on NCW – it took a more national approach using local examples. Nancy suggested that it would be good to organize a series of coffee shop conversations about regional food systems in NCW as part of an outreach effort that would engage people in a meaningful way prior to the Summit.

David suggested that we think about what questions we would like to address at the Summit and in work prior to it. We want to explore future scenarios about the cost, kind, and quality of our food. And we want to look at how we can build resiliency into our food system given climate change and industrial inputs. We're concerned about keeping farmers in business as we face these changes.

Nancy described the work some folks did in the Methow this past year to address the question: Can the Methow feed itself? The group agreed that this is the central question. And if we can feed ourselves how? And if not what is stopping us? Another baby step would be to explore this question through a series of small group meetings (coffee shops), data collection, and scenario testing. This could all coalesce in a publication, e.g., white paper or other.

Next Steps

- We need better numbers on what is being grown and consumed locally. Carey will have access to state data. She requested help from David, Marcy, and Joan to formulate a query that she can run to get some of those numbers. She will bring the results to the next meeting.
- Nancy will ask folks from the Methow group who did the study on the Methow feeding itself to give presentation at next meeting.
- Sherrie, Joan, Ben, Nancy, and Cheryl will huddle on how we might design a regional food portal for the web and bring that concept back to the group at the next meeting.

Next meeting

March 11, 2010  
El Petate Steakhouse  
1011 Foster Ave., Bridgeport  
1-3pm  
No-host lunch noon-1pm  
Meeting facilitator: Marilynn Lynn