

Regional Food Coalition Meeting
March 11, 2010
El Petate Steakhouse
1011 Foster Ave., Bridgeport
1 – 3 pm

Participants: Marilyn Lynn – ramafarm@nwi.net, Guy Evans – guy@sunshinefarmmarket.com, Sam Bartling – samantha.bartling@wa.usda.gov, Michael Pilarski – michael@friendsofthetrees.net, Kim Lohse – kim@communityfarmconnection.org, Sherri Schneider – sherri@communityfarmconnection.org, Jane Whidden – jane770@yahoo.com, Vicky Welch – sunnypine@centurytel.net, Cheryl Dawes – irisncw@gmail.com, Nancy Warner – nancy@irisncw.org, Joan Qazi – jqazi@nwi.net, Michel Wiman – mbrockington@wsu.edu, Carey Hunter – info@pinestumpfarms.com, Georgene Fitzgerald – fitzvege@msn.com, Amy Stork – astork@gmail.com, Maureen Sheimo – sheimo@earthlink.net, Eileen Wicks, Vicki Matthews – risingsunbakery@yahoo.com, Wade Troutman – jmw770@yahoo.com, Joan Brownfield – joan.bodytalk@gmail.com

Agenda

Introductions
Recap of first meeting
Vision & Roles
Gathering Our Voice and regional food distribution
Regional food portal concept
Data on local food grown and consumed
Process used in study, “Can the Methow Feed Itself?”
Next steps, announcements and next meeting

Marilynn opened the meeting with introductions and an overview of the agenda. She noted that the group agreed to quarterly meetings at various locations in Chelan, Douglas, Northern Grant, and Okanogan counties rotating facilitation and note taking tasks.

First Meeting Recap – Nancy Warner

Nancy thanked Marilyn for volunteering to facilitate this meeting, requested volunteers to facilitate and take notes at the next meeting, and gave a recap of the group’s first meeting December 9, 2009. The first meeting included a presentation on the recommendations of the IRIS regional food assessment that focused on the direct market sector.

Recommendations included:

- Convene standing coalition
- Form strategic partnerships
- Position regional food system as an economic development strategy
- Develop a funding strategy, shared proposals
- Conduct more research on specific needs

Nancy noted that at the December 9 meeting the group decided to take big tent approach including the whole region, not just organic farmers or any particular size of acreage. Although moving the meeting around probably means that everyone won’t make every single meeting, it does mean that the territory will be covered and understanding of the entire region will grow.

The group had agreed that the market force needs to be changed so that more local people are willing to pay the price for locally produced food. Education, marketing, and developing a brand for NCW are components of that change. In addition, local food distribution needs to be improved so farmers can get their products to local people at a good price.

To gain a better understanding of what is grown and consumed locally, the group thought a good convening question might be: Can NCW feed itself?

Vision & Roles – Marilynn Lynn

Marilynn read the two questions of the homework assignment and started the round-the-table sharing of answers. Group members were asked to fill in the blanks.

1. The mission of the North Central Washington Food Coalition is _____.
2. I will commit the following resources to make that happen: _____.

Marilynn Lynn—*Mission*: to promote a regional food system that provides the connection between healthy communities & local, sustainable agriculture.

Resources: Experience as an organic producer & direct-marketer; organic produce, processed fruit & organic processing kitchen; and experience in networking & collaborative group processes

Guy Evans—*Mission*: to cultivate a strong regional food system composed of diverse producers, processors, and customers. The coalition focuses its efforts on identifying production capacity, latent customer demand for product and the barriers that may exist between the two.

Resources: Knowledge of small-scale production on the Sunshine Farm. What works, what doesn't and the economics of it all. Workshop for producers on running a farm business—what we have learned, what we still don't know—this would cover finance, marketing, labor, and more.

Sam Bartling—*Mission*: People—consumers, providers, farmers' markets, education, schools & stores connection, a place for producers to actually bring their food so we can access it, improve access to locally grown food, increase awareness of our local food abundance and variety.

Resources: The RC&D is a great tool. It acts as an incubator, convener and "money-funnel." The public and private partnership is a really great tool.

Michael Pilarski—*Mission*: I would emphasize the exchange of information of what we are all doing at our own places because it is really valuable to come here and hear what everyone else is doing.

Resources: What I can offer is the Okanogan Agricultural Library that I have at my house in Tonasket and is open on Wednesdays. I'm open to doing research on crops. I'm working on organizing at the Okanogan County level and on workshops about growing food. I would be willing to put \$100/year institutional membership into the kitty.

Kim Lohse—*Mission*: My personal mission in my work is to see that local food gets to local consumers. That's how we run our market. We try to keep small farms viable and encourage local people to realize that there is good local food out there and they can get it through us. The region needs more awareness of what is available and places to get it.

Sherri Schneider—*Mission*: At this point the mission of the food coalition would be a representation of the huge diversity of the small farms working throughout the region to direct

market their products. We would want to be part of developing new ways of getting these products into the hands of consumers because at the bottom line of farm viability is always being able to sell the products somewhere. There is a huge diversity here that the average consumer does not know about. Getting the word out about that diversity of bounty that is here all around us in NCW, which probably should include Grant County.

Resources: I can definitely commit to advocating and affecting the policy of the new public market development in Wenatchee because that's one of the main things I'm working on. To guarantee that the public market stays focuses on small farms and local food. I can also commit to publishing some of the news of this group in a monthly e-newsletter that Community Farm Connection has just started, which is focused on getting news out to consumers about the farms in the Wenatchee area. I'd have to limit some of the news but I can take your suggestions and see if they are applicable to the mailing list.

Vicky Welch—*Mission:* I think it would be good if we get more organized (write letters, etc.) to make sure that there should be some protection for the best farmlands. We would want to get those protected by conservation easement or some other protection to be sure that they will be able to continue producing for future generations.

Resources: We do essential oil distillery, which is something we teach about frequently, that is different. I enjoy networking. I could be helpful in getting the word out.

Nancy Warner—*Mission:* to increase the local consumption of locally produced food.

Resources: IRIS can facilitate communications between members of the coalition (send out the agenda, notice of the meetings and notes, post things on the website). In the coming year we can help gather the story of food in our region that would help with marketing and branding through *Gathering Our Voice*.

Joan Qazi—*Mission:* is to cement network connections in our regional foodshed that would promote a stronger regional food distribution system.

Resources: I will liaison with the EAT membership to communicate and share any network connections.

Amy Stork—*Mission:* to develop unified regional strategies for increasing consumption and production of food in the region. That should include prioritizing as a group which strategies we think will be most effective and figuring out how the resources that everyone has talked about committing could be applied.

Resources: I can offer services and advise around marketing, branding and research. I just started writing a food column for the Methow Valley News so I hope to be able to share information with the public in the Methow Valley about what is going on. I do a lot of facilitation work and I could potentially help with as a facilitator if the group decided that it wanted to come together and do some strategic planning where we narrow down what strategies we would pursue together and what roles would be appropriate.

Carey Hunter—*Mission:* to coordinate and network to support increased local food production, access and consumption.

Resources: I would be willing to commit my experience (38 years in the Okanogan Valley) and perspective of living here, some contacts in ag statistics and continuing refinement of the data, and networking with the Grange, the Tilth and NCW marketing. I'm willing to contribute an annual membership of \$50 as a local match for when we're looking at grants. I have some knowledge of food preservation. My partner, Albert, can offer the resources of being a

supervisor in the conservation district. He is the chair of the regional planning commission and Eastern Washington Vice President of the State Ag Rural Caucus.

Vicki Matthews—*Mission:* I concur with Amy about having a strategy, having policies in place. I also think it is important to educate the consumers about the true costs of the food that they are getting and about eating properly for health reasons and for the health of the environment.
Resources: I live in Chelan and am working with Maureen Sheimo on a series of four public forums on sustainability.

Maureen Sheimo—I'd like to talk a little about what the City of Chelan is doing with their sustainability steering committee. Throughout 2010, the committee is looking at sustainability in 11 different areas, including agriculture, transportation, building and development, energy, and environmental quality. The 12-member volunteer steering committee is reaching to involve the public with a series of forums. March – agriculture and health; April – climate and environmental quality; May – energy, building, development and transportation; June – economy.

Michel Wiman—Strategic planning is essential to coalesce the smaller microcosms of local groups that have been working on improving local food access and to get local micro-partners involved. Education is huge and would be a great role for involving the people who have been working on this in their communities.

The WSU Small Farms program is doing a project on farmers' markets to try to figure out the economic impacts for people being able to direct-market at their local farmers' market. We're doing a case study at the Okanogan Farmers' Market. It is a three year project. We've done one rapid market assessment at the Okanogan Farmers' Market last fall. We'll be doing two more. We're looking at the ways the farmers and the community and the environment interact. Indicators include the weather, whether people always shop at the farmers' market when it is open, whether they bring their own bags, and others. I would like to be able to report that to this group. We are also interested in updating the statewide consumers' survey and may have a grad student interested in updating information from the consumer preference and opinions survey that was done in 2005.

Joani Brownfield—I have background in graphic design and I would be happy to work on a branding effort to create a brand and to get the name out to the public so that when consumers go to the grocery store to look for that NCW label. I know from time I've spent in Hawaii about the success they've had with a brand called Mountain which goes into the local markets and is advertised in the local newspapers. Only locally produced food of any type has the Mountain label. I'm also currently working on a satellite to Solid Rock Farm to create a community garden on a city lot within Chelan and to move the farmers' market to a more attractive environment.

Wade Troutman—*Mission:* The final statement of the group's mission needs to be very inclusive of all agriculture. I can't emphasize that enough. I consider myself a small farmer but I think other people wouldn't. There are a lot of conventional/traditional farms farmed by people who have lived in this community for a long time and would love to see something succeed. I would be careful on the mission not to get too labeled. The diversity of our agriculture is huge.
Resources: I know some farmers of all different types, some of the largest in the area to some of the smallest. I have a preference for the ones that love the land. I can provide a perspective and I'll try to keep my frustrations out of it as somebody who has farmed all their life and wants to

stay on the land. I produce enough canola to make 50,000 gallons of oil. I feel like I'm doing good instead of going to Lethbridge, Alberta with it to the Cargill plant, like I've had to do in the past, is to go to the biodiesel plant in Odessa. But what I'd really like to do is get the oil pressed even more locally, take the oil to restaurants, have them use it and when they're done with it, collect the spent oil and convert it into biodiesel to run back into my tractor. There are all these things that I want to do but I'm frustrated because I've run into a lot of obstacles.

Gathering Our Voice – Nancy Warner

IRIS has 3 year grant which requires raising matching funds for *Gathering Our Voice*, a program dedicated to building the infrastructure for keeping storytelling going in NCW. Stories about what has worked well in the past are actively shared and used to create strategies for the future. We're trying to work with individuals and institutions to build capacity to gather stories on specific topics. This last year we took a look at what we mean by sustainability, defining it through stories that demonstrate successful practices that feed the economic, environment and community sustainability.

When we did the regional food assessment and we talked at the December food coalition meeting it seemed like maybe we could help with the food coalition while we're also doing *Gathering Our Voice*. This year's topic is focused on food distribution with a placeholder title of "Foodways and Byways." We'll look at how we move food around in this region. How did the tribes do that? How has the Hispanic community done that in NCW? What are the traditions? We want to get a multi-cultural voice this coming year, including the voice of the people who came here to farm from the 1870s to now. What kinds of systems did they have for gathering, processing, and distributing food?

Gathering stories provides stories to put together for telling our story, stories for educating people about the value of local food, and stories about what the possibilities are for creating a stronger local food system, maybe more like what they used to have in the 40s. Gathering these stories could also provide background and information for the branding that we're feeling the need to do.

We have developed a general interview guide for exploring sustainability that we've used to ask people about successes. We're looking for what worked. We have this interview guide that we could start with and adapt to look at food stories, given these three slices of NCW culture that we want to include. If this strikes a chord with any of you we're looking for help in developing the framework for this year's project. We would do the interviews in May, up to 30 people, 1/3 being tribal, 1/3 being Hispanic, and 1/3 being Anglo-Europeans. It wouldn't be exhaustive, but it could be a pretty good subsample and then we could all use it to promote the message and to generate interest. Nancy concluded by explaining the need for an active advisory group who will help frame the interview questions and recommend top priority interviewees.

Regional Food Portal Concept – Joan Qazi and Sherri Schneider

Joan recapped a small group meeting that discussed the idea of developing a food portal or online hub of some sort. Because many such food sites already exist on the web—places where consumers or buyers and farmers can meet online—we explored how we could distinguish what we might do and make it more valuable and effective for our regional food system. What we could see is that there are two main objectives in terms of farmers and consumers meeting on the web. One type is sites that connect farmers and the larger buyers, such as schools, hospitals, cafeterias, and retail markets. For example, there is a new Food Hub that is being run through

EcoTrust that is making those connections between the larger buyers and the consumers. The other type and what we thought would be more effective for our particular needs would be directed more to the individual consumer in terms of educational needs, informational needs, and access. A number of groups who are involved in food and educating consumers currently exist. The question is: how could this food portal highlight all these different groups and provide one centralized place where people could go to find out about what those groups are doing?

Joan explained that she knows from her experience with EAT, which has a good online presence, the challenge is being an all volunteer group with no paid staff. If a web portal is going to be effective it needs to be a place that people will choose to go before they go anywhere else. To be that kind of a site, it is necessary to have a webmaster that can maintain the website, update it, and keep it current. When you have a farmer who emails with a request to be on the directory, you have to be able to do that right away, which is difficult without dedicated staff.

Joan reported that the small group also discussed the concept of NCW Home, a broader website that would be the point of entry for newcomers to the region, a place to make rapid connections with others, a site that would go on everyone's "favorites" list, and provide an opportunity to integrate across interest areas.

Sherri pointed out that the portal idea started at the Success Summit because each of the micro groups was developing a website without paid staff and struggling through start-up problems of communicating with one another and communicating to the ever-growing base of consumers who wanted to find local food but couldn't. She noted that a food portal needs to be at the top level if it is going to be effective on a website that encompasses NCW. People need to be able to easily see how to navigate through the door to food. Also, such a website needs someone with dedicated time to keep current all the information that is rapidly flowing in from our rapidly growing local and regional food system.

Discussion ensued and Nancy provided a preliminary update about a grant proposal to be submitted to the Knight Foundation by April 8. The group putting together the proposal consists of the Community Foundation; The Wenatchee World; the Icicle Fund; be,clearly; and IRIS. The concept is to develop a portal that would be part of the Wenatchee World, which would be the one-stop-shopping, big-tent clearing house that would be a place where people could go and make all those connections we've been talking about.

Sherri emphasized the need to make sure that food isn't buried because if people want to buy locally grown carrots, they are never going to guess that they have to go through the Wenatchee World website. To be seen by consumers, we have to be right out there in front somehow. We have to find a way to bring all the small conversations together so consumers know what we know. If everyone in Wenatchee had all the connections that we have here to the chicken cooperatives, the apple warehouse extras, and the gleaning programs, we wouldn't have a problem with our food system. But our consumers only know to go the grocery store. That's where they've learned to buy cheap food. They don't know why you should pay a little more for fantastic tomatoes, wheat products, or fresh chickens.

Joan reiterated that there are the two distinct types of food portals. One connects farmers with institutional buyers (larger volume) the other type is where consumers find out where to buy locally grown food, where the farmers' market is, where to take canning classes, where to learn

cheese-making, etc. When we met on a portal we were thinking more of the second than the first which is better covered by things like the Food Hub and other already established websites.

Sherri showed the logo designed by Wenatchee World graphic artists that Rufus Woods has provided as a way to generate income. Sherri suggested that perhaps the logo could be used by the food coalition as a way to generate momentum.

Wade brought up the difference between consumers who are computer literate and may already think to buy local food and those who are not computer users. How do you reach that audience?

Joan agreed with Wade's point and shared discussion surrounding that topic at the portal meeting. Because a lot of people learn by word-of-mouth, the idea of creating some kind of network of mentors/mavens was brought up. To make that work, those people have to be located and willing to be part of that network, but such a network of people could be built out. Sherri noted that the website could provide a tool to help build the word-of-mouth network.

Amy shared that she was hearing the need for a broader campaign exploring a variety of mechanisms for connecting with people. Based on her experience, to be successful an effort like that needs to be consumer driven. It should not be driven by what organizations need. She noted that there is a lot of research indicating that people think of food in fairly distinct ways, different from other things. She suggested looking more broadly at a consumer campaign driven by what people in NCW actually do, the actual barriers that they perceive to consuming local food, and the benefits that they perceive around consuming local food. If WSU is doing a consumer preference survey and there is anyway to shape the information that comes out of that to feed into a marketing campaign, that would be really useful. If someone is already out there gathering that information, it could be used to come up with a branding and communication plan that then can be played out through web presence, media, store signage, word of mouth, or a variety of strategies. It is important to be comprehensive in this kind of thinking (not rely on only one tool) and before spending any money at all in creating a tool, there should be a big picture of what an overall campaign would be for the region.

Data Report – Carey Hunter

Carey shared that she still has to work on raw data that she downloaded from National Ag statistics to get at more specifically at NCW but in the meantime she had some statewide trends to report:

- 18 counties had a per farm increase in value of production. Of the 18, all but two are located in Eastern Washington. Net farm income has increased since a 28 year low in 1999 by 192%. Net value added has increased during the same period by 59%.
- Between 1998 and 2009 Washington Farmers' Markets more than doubled, adding 80 markets.
- The total number of agriculture related degrees including Associate, Bachelor, Master and Doctorate has nearly doubled since 1995 from 162 degrees to 307 degrees in 2008. Carey commented that WSU is the first university in the nation to offer the Organic Ag major.
- Farms owned by individuals or families accounted for 90% of total farms in Washington. Farms owned by individuals or families accounted for roughly 46% of the total farm acreage in Washington in 2002. Carey noted how those statistics speak to the significant part of the picture that individual or family owned farms make up in Washington, and that we can use those demographics to build on.

- Total market values of agricultural products sold increased 37% between 1997 and 2007. During the same period of time, farms with sales less than \$2,500 increased 13% and farms with sales over \$100,000 decreased 15%.
- In 2004, the average size of a farm making \$1,000-\$10,000 represents over 55% of the total farms in Washington. In 2008 this increased to over 61%. Carey noted that it's a growth, but in the lower income areas, which demonstrates something about lifestyle issues.

Discussion ensued and Wade asked if the growth in the lower income gross sales data reflected a lot of retirement situations. Carey replied that these seem to be lifestyle choices that are second or third careers after people have made some kind of nest egg and they're making a quality of life choice. She noted that it has been very common since the 50s to have a farm and have a job off the farm. Wade pointed out that especially in the Midwest, it used to be that farmers would work in the winter at factories. But now what he sees is people who have made a good income obtain a farm as a getaway from suburbia.

Sherry commented that Wade's observation supports what she has seen in farmers' markets around the state, the conflict between "hobby" farmers doing it more for fun and the family farmer who is trying to earn his entire income from that direct marketing.

Carey shared the following summary from a presentation at a recent Office of Farmland Preservation task force meeting in Okanogan:

- 90% of the farms are owned by individuals or families
- there has been an increase in local food processors in the last few years
- the net farm income is higher than it has been in nearly 20 years, rising 192 % since a low in 1999

Carey pointed out that the Office of Farmland Preservation represents an entity at the state level with whom we should be networking. She also suggested taking advantage information made available by conservation districts and the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS).

Can the Methow Feed Itself – Amy Stork

Amy was not involved in the study, but knows the people who did it. They are Anaka Mines, Hans Smith and Dana Visalli, each with a different area of expertise around botany, farming and Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Last year they decided to use available information and look at the question: Can the Methow Feed Itself? They determined the elements that make up a complete diet that can be grown in our region, including oils, proteins, fruit and vegetables. They then determined how many calories per day of each type of food it takes to sustain a person. They determined a crop rotation that would generate all of the inputs to produce that complete diet and a minimum number of acres for that crop rotation system. They then took an overview perspective to determine what land would be available in the Methow, by looking at GIS county overlays.

Putting it all together, they came up with a number of acres available, how many of the required crop rotations into which that broke down, and how many people could be fed. They came to the conclusion that, yes, the Methow could conceivably feed many thousands of people. Currently there are 5,000 year round residents in the study area encompassed between the towns of Methow and Mazama.

The project had a limited scope, addressing only: could the land produce enough calories of the different types required. They didn't look at trade for other goods, such as producing surplus of some things to be able to trade for textiles and other things that couldn't be produced there. They didn't look at water availability. They didn't look at the available skill base to determine who would actually be the farmer or determine the number of farmers it would take to produce the food. They didn't look at the labor or processing aspects. They also didn't consider ownership structure. It is theoretically possible to grow the food, but they did not address the question from the way land ownership actually works. The entire study, which was a theoretical exercise, is available on the Methow Naturalist website.

Discussion ensued and Vicky Welch pointed out that the researchers were assuming peak oil. She noted that although she used to be able to grow enough food on 3 acres in the Methow to feed 400 people, that included use of fuel and access to machinery, and it wasn't all hand labor.

Wade pointed out that starting point for a theoretical study of NCW is the fact that there is a certain amount of solar energy hitting the landscape and a certain amount of water, whether with rainfall or irrigation that can hit it and there is a fairly simple equation to calculate per acre how much solar energy can be captured with so much water to create so many calories. There is a choice of what to do with the calories, whether to produce fuel for equipment, food to eat, or pasture for horses. Not everyone is going to choose to live the lifestyle of using horses for farming.

Amy noted that the study was not meant to be prescriptive; it was simply looking at the land base.

Nancy commented that the large audience when the Can the Methow Feed Itself study was presented suggested that the question was a great conversation starter and a good way to get people thinking. How we might use that question to guide our work and to engage people? It could be an investigation. If we were designing a summit, we could have teams of people looking at questions like how would we use the water or how much grain could we grow to produce our own food or how much grain could we grow to produce our own fuel.

Marilynn noted that the question seemed central to what she had heard about the mission for the group. Wade pointed out that we produce food for hundreds of thousands of people around NCW. We export huge amounts of food out of this area, but there is no system to keep it in the area. The question is not CAN we feed ourselves, but HOW do we feed ourselves?

The group agreed that the question to focus on is: **How** do we feed ourselves with our own food?

Next Meeting:

June 10

Twisp PDA

10am to 1pm

Amy Stork will facilitate a strategic planning session at which the group will figure out its purpose and define roles. The planning will help in determining shared strategies and prioritizing funding sources toward pursuing funding to achieve agreed upon goals.