

FOOD POLICY FORUM

MEETING NOTES

May 8, 2025: 1:00pm-4:00pm

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Diversifying voices in the Forum:** The Diversifying Voices Small Team is developing strategies to support the launch and scope of future Forum small teams, with a focus on ensuring diverse perspectives are represented in upcoming work.
- **Engaging local food policy entities:** The Forum will host a webinar on May 28 aimed at strengthening connections and exploring opportunities for collaboration among local food policy entities.
- **Operating in uncertain times:** Participants reflected on the Forum's role amid shifting policy and funding landscapes, identifying key functions such as coordination, shared learning, and systems-level insight.
- **Two-year work planning process:** Participants reviewed and refined a list of focus areas developed from the March member survey and April opt-in calls, contributing additional ideas and helping shape the Forum's list of priorities for 2025-2027. [This document](#) outlines suggested priority topics for the Forum to consider, based on input from the member survey, opt-in calls, and the May 8 Forum meeting.

FORUM MEMBERSHIP APPOINTMENTS

Kate Delavan, State Conservation Commission (SCC), began the meeting by sharing an update on legislative appointments to the Food Policy Forum. The Forum is authorized to include four legislative members—two from the Senate and two from the House—appointed by their respective leadership. While the House is expected to finalize its appointments in June, Representatives Gregerson and Dye were acknowledged for their ongoing participation. On the Senate side, Senator Warnick was reappointed, and Kate welcomed Senator Rebecca Saldaña as a new member, replacing Senator Trudeau. Senator Saldaña provided a brief introduction, highlighting her long-standing interest in food systems, consumer education, and advocacy, as well as her current role on the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. The full [membership roster](#) can be found on SCC's Food Policy Forum website.

SMALL TEAM UPDATE: DIVERSIFYING VOICES

Petra Vallila-Buchman, Ross Strategic facilitator, provided an update on the ongoing work of the Diversifying Voices small team, which continues to meet and will convene next on May 16. She emphasized the team's evolving role in supporting other small teams launched by the Forum to consider non-member engagement. The group is focused on creating a more inclusive and welcoming environment within the full Forum meetings and identifying how non-member voices can be included in smaller discussions and Forum work moving forward. As the Forum transitions to prioritizing work, the Diversifying Voices team is positioning itself to determine how diverse perspectives can be integrated into future conversations.

SMALL TEAM UPDATE: ENGAGING LOCAL FOOD POLICY ENTITIES

Piper Casey, Ross Strategic, highlighted that one of the Forum's statutory responsibilities is 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." Building on [research](#) presented in February by Jen Otten and Marie Spiker from the University of Washington, the Forum is hosting a webinar on May 28 to strengthen connections with and among local food policy entities. The event will include networking, presentations from Forum members and local food policy entities, and small group discussions to explore collaboration opportunities. Forum members with ties to local food policy entities are welcome to attend by coordinating with the facilitation team. A summary of insights from the webinar will be shared at the June 5 Forum meeting.

TWO-YEAR WORK PLANNING PROCESS

Petra Vallila-Buchman introduced the Forum's two-year work planning process by revisiting two of the Forum's foundational elements, the [managing principles](#) as outlined in the charter and the [food system lens](#). The food system lens encompasses the following components: food insecurity, infrastructure and rural economic development, agricultural land protection, next-generation farming, market access, and impacts of climate change all framed through an equity lens. Petra emphasized the importance of shared understanding of problems, responsiveness to emerging issues and identifying common ground. Claire Lane, WA State Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition, provided historical context, noting that the food system lens focus areas originated in the Forum's initial budget proviso and were later formalized in legislation. Participants also discussed the potential inclusion of seafood and shellfish in the Forum's scope, with general agreement that its work is not limited to terrestrial agriculture.

This year's work planning process is being condensed into two meetings, May and June, rather than the typical five to six-month timeline. This shift was made to allow the Forum to act more swiftly in light of the report due to the legislature in October. The process began with a member survey in March, and a series of opt-in calls in April, which gathered input on priority topics and the Forum's potential roles. A [handout summarizing ideas from the survey and opt-in calls](#) was shared for review and discussion.

Petra noted that many of the ideas raised align with existing Forum recommendations, suggesting a need to revisit and assess the status of past work. There is also a growing interest in the Forum supporting cross-sector learning and policy landscape analysis, particularly as current uncertainties continue to unfold.

OPERATING IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Hilary Aten, SCC, acknowledged the challenges posed by state budget cuts and shifting federal funding. She emphasized the importance of the Forum's collaborative role in navigating these changes and advancing its statutory goals.

Participants were invited to reflect in the chat on the most important roles the Forum can play in this unprecedented moment. Claire Lane, Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition, and Chris Cary, Food Northwest, highlighted the consistent recognition of the Forum's strength in convening cross-sector voices and the positive energy around collaboration. Participants see the Forum playing a multi-dimensional role encompassing policy, education, and coordination.

To guide further reflection, Petra posed three questions:

1. How can the Forum leverage the opportunity to submit a report to the legislature in October?
2. How and to what extent should the Forum adapt its operations to better inform members about the rapidly changing policy and funding landscape?
3. How and to what extent should the Forum take on the task of understanding and interpreting the current landscape of challenges and opportunities?

Melissa Spear, Tilth Alliance, shared that she is frequently contacted by legislators and organizations seeking insights into the impacts of federal policy and funding changes on agriculture. She noted the need for a more coordinated, system-wide understanding, something the Forum is well positioned to provide given its cross-sector representation.

The session concluded with a reminder that this planning process is not just about identifying new and existing priorities but also about preparing the Forum to act effectively in a time of significant change. Petra also highlighted the importance of implementation and follow-through, noting that some past recommendations lacked clarity on their reception and impact.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS: REFINING AND NAMING 2025-2027 PRIORITIES

Following individual silent reflection on the handout summarizing issues and actions raised in the member survey and opt-in calls, participants joined four breakout groups. Each group was tasked with identifying missing topics, refining ideas, and considering how to group or differentiate topics.

Participants updated their Zoom names to represent their sector focus, helping ensure cross-sector representation in small group conversations regarding future priorities.

Small Group Report-Backs and Key Themes

Each group shared highlights from their discussions, revealing several cross-cutting themes and strategic insights:

- **Group 1**, reported by KayDee Gilkey, WA Association of Wheat Growers, emphasized the value of synthesizing existing data to avoid overburdening producers with new surveys. The group also highlighted the importance of equipping stakeholders with synthesized insights to better engage policymakers. Food security was identified as a central theme, closely tied to economic development and farm viability. The role of land-grant universities and extension services was also noted as critical to advancing food system efforts.
- **Group 2**, reported by Maressa Valliant, Sustainable Connections, noted that seafood should be included in food system discussions and stressed the importance of resilience, drawing on lessons from COVID-19. They identified a gap in data on the economic contributions of small and mid-sized farms and suggested reframing the Forum's work through a systems lens to better illustrate interconnections. The group also noted the need for stronger educational components in food system initiatives.
- **Group 3**, reported by Marcia Ostrom, Washington State University, focused on agricultural education and technical assistance, particularly in the context of climate change and shifting crop systems. They noted the need for better funding for extension services and suggested linking technical support to Climate Commitment Act funding. The group also discussed the need for faster policy action and proposed forming a dedicated team to advance recommendations more efficiently.
- **Group 4**, reported by Stephanie Watson, Spokane Food Policy Council, emphasized the importance of post-harvest infrastructure and value chain coordination. The group discussed the

economic implications of port activity and inflation on food pricing and noted support for more cross-sector collaboration. Food hubs were cited as a successful model, and the group stressed the importance of showcasing what's working to build broader support.

Across all groups, food security emerged as a unifying theme, along with the need for a more integrated, systems-based approach to understanding the food system. Participants also discussed the importance of supporting all scales of agriculture and the potential for a more compelling framework than the food systems lens, perhaps revisiting and depicting the Forum's goals as described in statute.

FORUM-WIDE DISCUSSION: SHAPING THE FORUM'S DIRECTION

In preparation for the Forum's October report to the Legislature, participants expressed interest in moving beyond a traditional report format to instead frame the document as a set of legislative and policy priorities. Claire Lane, WA State Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition, proposed organizing existing recommendations by readiness and urgency and suggested forming topic-specific teams to triage and advance them.

Diane Dempster, Clark County Food System Council, and others emphasized the importance of addressing not only legislative audiences but also broader food system stakeholders, including businesses and community organizations.

Senator Rebecca Saldaña and other participants stressed the importance of actionable, visual, and tangible outputs. Senator Saldaña encouraged the Forum to highlight successful local investments and strategies, particularly those that emerged during COVID-19.

The group also discussed reframing the idea of a "State Farm Bill" into a more inclusive and strategic framework, such as a Food Security Plan or Food System Resiliency Plan. There was broad agreement that the Forum should leverage its existing work, particularly the 2019 and 2020 recommendations reports, while also identifying new opportunities for impact.

NEXT STEPS AND ADJOURN

Petra Vallila-Buchman concluded the meeting by thanking participants for their time and outlined next steps. The facilitation team will synthesize input from the meeting, clarify the purpose and scope of the October deliverable, and explore how to structure small group work to support both legislative and broader food system goals. The next Forum meeting, on June 5, will be a key milestone in this process.