



WASHINGTON STATE FOOD POLICY FORUM

2025 Report to the Legislature

OCTOBER 2025

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ACRONYMS

Acronym	Definition
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and People of Color
CCA	Climate Commitment Act
EQIP	Environmental Quality Incentives Program
ESB	Engrossed Senate Bill
FPEs	Food Policy Entities
FPLA	Farmland Protection and Land Access
FarmPAI	Farmland Protection and Affordability Investment
HB	House Bill
NRCS	Natural Resource Conservation Service
RCW	Revised Code of Washington
RCPP	Regional Conservation Partnership Program
SCC	Washington State Conservation Commission
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
SNAP-Ed	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education
TEFAP	The Emergency Food Assistance Program
UC Merced	University of California, Merced
WDFW	Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
WIC	Women, Infants, and Children
WSDA	Washington State Department of Agriculture
WSU	Washington State University



Executive Summary

The Washington State Food Policy Forum (Forum) continues to serve as a collaborative venue for advancing food system change across Washington. Established in statute in 2020, the Forum brings together diverse stakeholders from agriculture, conservation, nutrition, public health, and government to identify and address pressing food system challenges. Since 2019, the Forum has produced near-annual recommendation reports and letters to the Legislature, which it continues to expand upon.

Between November 2023 and October 2025, the Forum made substantial progress on five priority actions identified in its 2023 report, contributed to the implementation of two of its consensus recommendations, and formalized its leadership structure by appointing its first administrative chair and vice chair.

- **Increase Irrigated Agricultural Lands:** Reached consensus on three policy recommendations to improve water access and management; convened learning sessions with farmers and experts; transmitted recommendations to legislative committees; a legislator expressed interest in a 2026 committee meeting.
- **Advance Agriculture's Participation in the Climate Commitment Act:** Submitted a letter to legislative leadership highlighting unimplemented fuel tax exemptions; helped prompt short-term financial relief and 2025 legislation clarifying exemption access.
- **Identify Mechanisms for Diversifying Voices in the Forum:** Launched Diversifying Voices Team; developed guidance for small team composition and engagement; published member biographies; positioned team as a technical support resource for equity-related decisions.
- **Local Food Policy Entity Engagement:** Supported UW-led study on local food policy entities (FPE); hosted statewide webinar with 14 FPEs; added FPEs to Forum communications; created and circulated a statewide FPE roster.
- **Washington Food System Snapshot:** While not formally advanced due to capacity constraints, the snapshot concept informed the Forum's planning process and "State of the State" presentations, reinforcing its value as a strategic framing tool.
- **Labeling and Promotion Program:** Forum served as advisory body for WSDA's location-based promotion program; hosted input sessions; submitted a letter of support for implementation funding. The program is not funded in the 2025–27 biennial budget.
- **Urban Agriculture Research:** Forum named in HB 1552 directing the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) to lead a study; Forum members participated in focused discussions; insights informed the final report, which aligned with Forum priorities on land, water, and market access.

The Forum launched a multi-phase planning process in April 2025 to identify timely and actionable priorities to pursue in the 2025–27 biennium. Five small teams, organized around the Forum’s food system lens, identified the following priorities for the Forum:

- **Impacts of Climate Change:** *Water Supply for Agriculture and Food Production and Climate Resilience for Agriculture and Food Production*
- **Agricultural Land Protection and Availability and Next Generation Farming:** *Succession Planning and Incentives*
- **Alleviating Barriers to Small and Mid-Scale Farm Viability and Market Access:** *Technical Assistance and Capacity Building*
- **Regional Food Infrastructure and Institutional Procurement for Economic Development:** *Public-Private Partnership Models for Infrastructure Finance and Strategic Infrastructure Planning and Coordination*
- **Food Insecurity:** *Food System Coordination for Food Security and Eligibility and Access for Food Assistance Programs*

These teams emphasized the interconnected nature of food system challenges and the need for coordinated, systems-based solutions by identifying priorities that build on existing recommendations and reflect the Forum’s evolving understanding of Washington’s food system landscape.

Its 2025 report offers a comprehensive overview of recent accomplishments and newly confirmed priorities for the future.



Introduction

This report outlines the Washington State Food Policy Forum's efforts and impact in advancing food system change across the state from November 2023 through October 2025. It is presented in two sections: the first summarizes key progress and accomplishments over the past two years. The second highlights priority topics the Forum has determined are important and opportune for the Forum's work in the 2025-27 biennium.

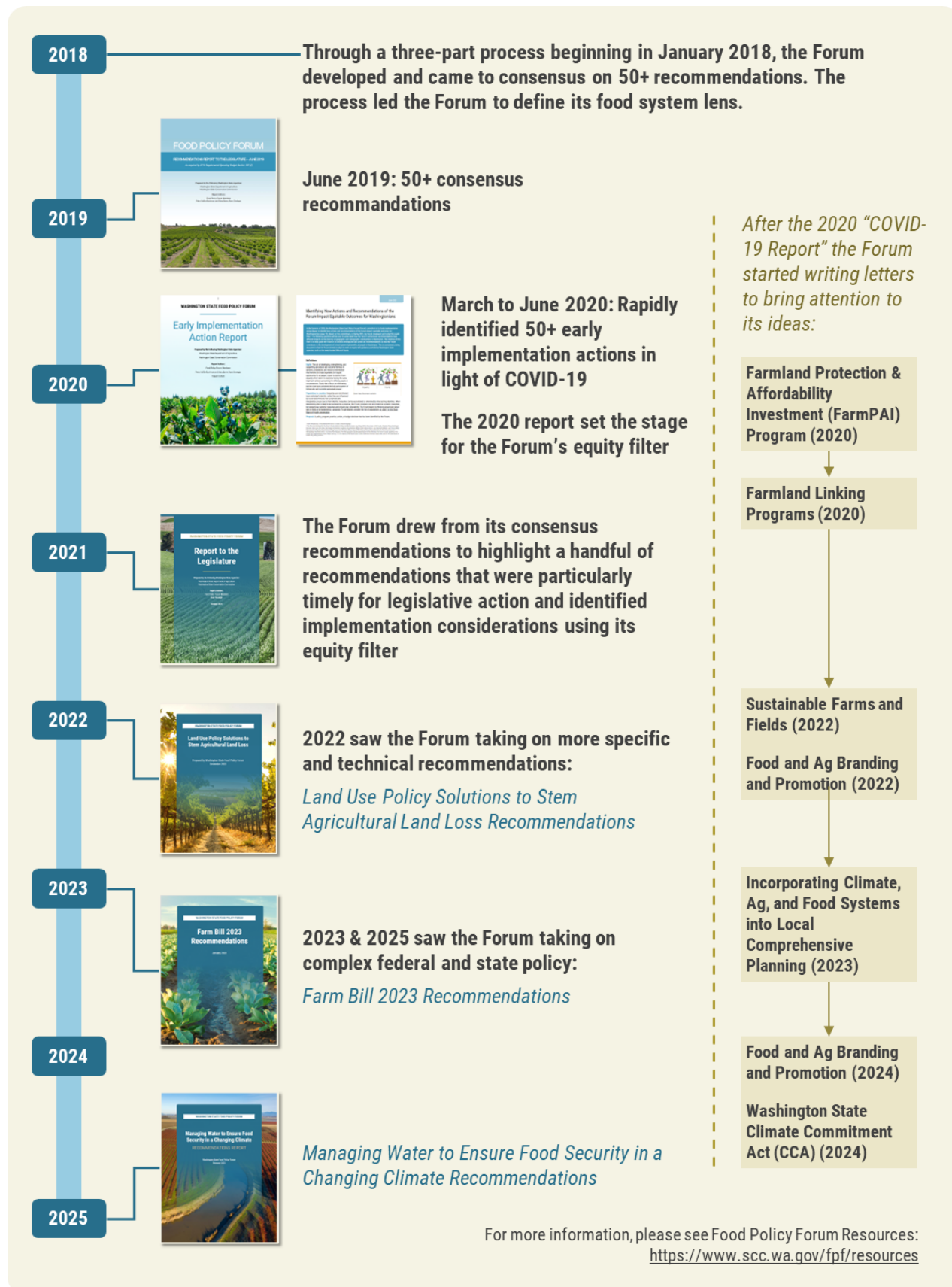
Per statute, the Forum is required to submit a report to the Legislature every odd-numbered year. This 2025 report fulfills that requirement.

The Washington State Food Policy Forum (Forum) is a public-private partnership established in statute in 2020 (RCW 89.50), following its initial creation through a 2016 budget proviso. The Forum brings together a diverse group of stakeholders from across Washington's food system, including agriculture, conservation, nutrition, and food security, to collaboratively identify and advance solutions that strengthen the state's food system. Its statutory goals include increasing the availability of Washington-grown foods, reducing food insecurity, improving coordination among food policy entities, and supporting the viability of small and mid-scale agriculture. In addition to these goals, Forum members have prioritized equity and the resilience of the food system in the face of climate change as cross-cutting themes in their work.

The Forum's statute outlines a set of broad goals, rather than assigning a specific issue or timeline. This makes the Forum unique. The Forum relies on the collective knowledge and experience of its members and the experts it engages to identify which issues to focus on. Because the Forum is not assigned a fixed issue or timeline, its processes play a central role in shaping its work. The Forum's impact stems from how it builds shared understanding, identifies timely opportunities, and reaches consensus across a diverse membership. For this reason, this report includes descriptions of both what the Forum accomplished and how it approached its work — offering insight into the collaborative methods that underpin its recommendations and actions. The Forum is jointly convened and staffed by the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) and the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA). It is guided by a Charter that reinforces its statutory obligations and outlines its managing principles, including a commitment to developing a shared understanding of a problem before pursuing solutions, a focus on common ground, and responsiveness to emerging opportunities. Forum membership is intentionally cross-sectoral and geographically diverse, including representatives from agriculture, public health, food access, conservation, research, and local and state government.

Since its inception, the Forum has evolved into a collaborative venue for addressing complex food system challenges. Drawing on the experience and perspectives of its members, who span the political spectrum and represent nearly every sector of the food system, the Forum has produced near-annual recommendation reports since 2019 (see **Figure 1: Forum Comprehensive Food System Recommendations Reports and Letters 2019-2025**). These reports are shared with the legislature and the broader food system community to inform policy and practice. The Forum also plays a convening role by bringing together stakeholders to share knowledge, elevate emerging issues, and inform policy development. (See **Appendix A: Forum Membership**)

Figure 1. Forum Comprehensive Food System Recommendations Reports and Letters 2019-2025

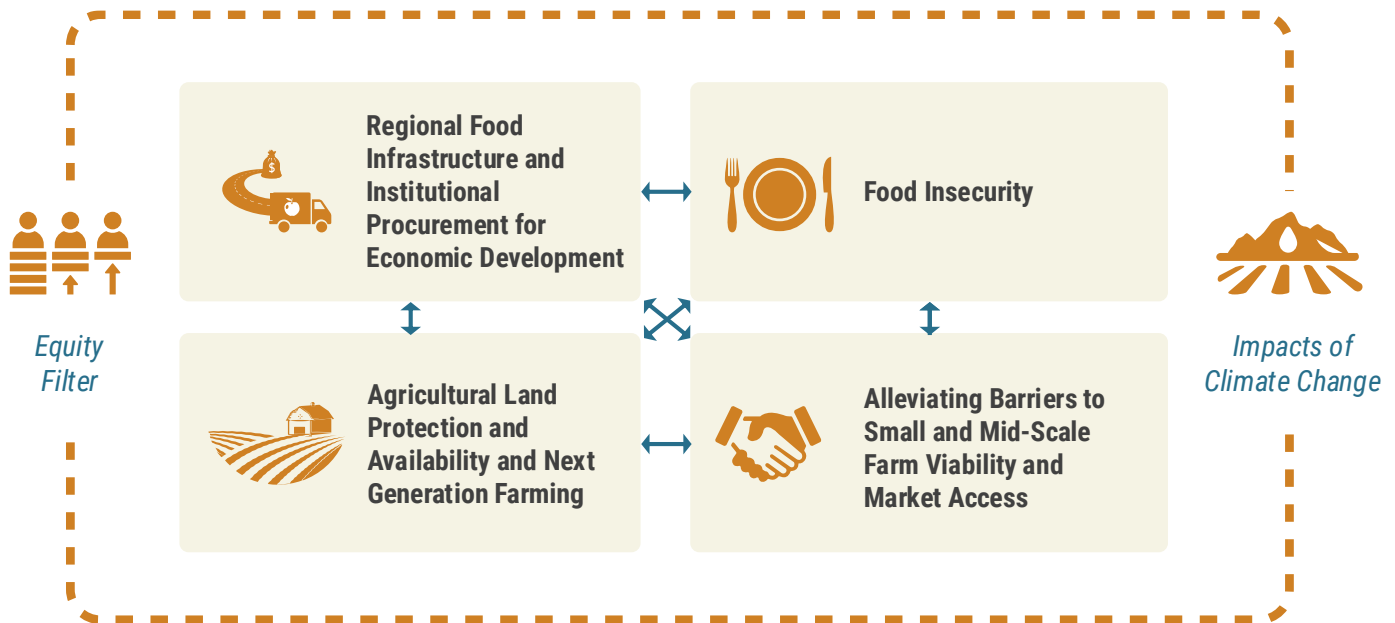


The Forum approaches food system issues holistically, guided by a systems-based lens (see **Figure 2: The Forum’s Food System Lens**). Recognizing the deeply interconnected nature of food system challenges, the greatest most effective progress comes from advancing multiple, coordinated changes in tandem—driving systems change that benefits all Washingtonians.

Resources

For more information, see Food Policy Forum Resources at <https://www.scc.wa.gov/fpf/resources>.

Figure 2: The Forum’s Food Systems Lens



Progress and Impact: November 2023–October 2025

Over the past two years, the Forum has made significant progress on identifying consensus actions and recommendations on complex and potentially contentious issues, including fuel tax exemptions under the Climate Commitment Act (CCA) and policy opportunities at the intersection of climate, water, and food production.

Through a planning process between January–June 2023, the Forum identified six priority action topics (see box at right “2023–2025 Priority Actions”), as outlined in the [2023 Report to the Legislature](#). The 2023 report provided a brief update on one completed action: sending a letter to the Department of Commerce supporting updates to county climate planning guidance. This 2025 report details progress on the remaining five priorities, all of which have since been carried forward and completed, except for the food system snapshot, which was paused due to capacity constraints but remains a guiding concept.

To raise awareness about two agricultural fuel exemptions embedded in the CCA that had not been fully implemented, the Forum reached consensus and [submitted a letter to legislative committee leadership](#). In parallel, the Irrigated Agricultural Lands Small Team spent several months building a shared understanding of the challenges at the climate–water–food nexus and [reached consensus on three policy recommendations](#). The Forum’s willingness to explore areas of tension, such as climate policy and water governance, reflects a growing readiness

to navigate difficult conversations and a deepening ambition to address structural challenges within Washington’s food system.

The Forum also played a formal role in implementing two initiatives sparked by its own recommendations: a research study on urban agriculture and the creation of a state branding and promotional program for Washington-grown food and agricultural products. These efforts illustrate how the Forum’s recommendations are shaping policy and how it remains actively engaged as implementation progresses.

In June 2024, the Forum held its first in-person meeting since its statutory authorization, marking the official approval of its inaugural administrative chair and vice chair. While in-person meetings occurred during the earlier budget proviso period, this was the first event designed exclusively for in-person participation. The day featured a site visit to the Yakama Nation Produce Farm, a gallery walk highlighting Forum progress, and small group discussions aimed at deepening impact. Members appreciated the face-to-face format, noting it fostered richer dialogue, renewed energy, and a stronger sense of shared purpose. Conversations surfaced ideas to amplify the Forum’s work, broaden representation, and strengthen implementation and policy engagement.

2023-2025 Priority Actions

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

Looking Ahead

Most recently, the Forum completed a multi-phase work planning process that included a series of “State of the State” presentations—the first since 2020. These helped identify the next set of priority topics for action and provided a broad overview of Washington’s food system. The Forum grounded its approach in a clear understanding that, since its first comprehensive recommendations report in 2019, the food system has undergone significant disruptions due to the pandemic—disruptions that continue to have lasting effects. At the same time, new economic and policy shifts have created a different context for food system issues and the Forum’s work. In response, the Forum revisited its previous recommendations to assess their continued relevance and determine where renewed or adaptive action is needed. This retrospective approach ensured that new priorities build on existing consensus while remaining responsive to current conditions.

The Diversifying Voices Team, launched to support the priority to identify mechanisms for diversifying voices in the Forum, is positioning itself as a technical assistance resource for other small teams launching this fall. Their goal is to help determine how and when to engage additional voices. By embedding these practices into everyday Forum activities, the team aims to build an informal support system that helps small teams navigate equity-related decisions and engagement.

2023–2025 Forum Activity Captured in This Report

2023–2025 Milestones	2025 Newly Launched Work
 Increase Irrigated Agricultural Lands	 Impacts of Climate Change <i>Water Supply for Agriculture and Food Production and Climate Resilience for Agriculture and Food Production</i>
 Advance Agriculture’s Participation in the Climate Commitment Act	 Agricultural Land Protection and Availability and Next Generation Farming <i>Succession Planning and Incentives</i>
 Identify Mechanisms for Diversifying Voices in the Forum	 Alleviating Barriers to Small and Mid-Scale Farm Viability and Market Access <i>Technical Assistance and Capacity Building</i>
 Local Food Policy Entity Engagement	 Regional Food Infrastructure and Institutional Procurement for Economic Development <i>Public-Private Partnership Models for Infrastructure Finance and Strategic Infrastructure Planning and Coordination</i>
 Washington Food System Snapshot	 Food Insecurity <i>Food System Coordination for Food Security and Eligibility and Access for Food Assistance Programs</i>
 Progress on Existing Forum Recommendations <i>Labeling and Promotion Program</i> <i>Urban Agriculture Research</i>	
 Administrative Updates <i>Administrative Chair and Vice Chair</i>	

Activities and Progress of the Food Policy Forum

From November 2023 to October 2025, the Food Policy Forum took up key policy issues, including fuel tax exemptions under the Climate Commitment Act and strategies for managing water to ensure food security in a changing climate. It also helped inform projects stemming from its recommendations, such as advancing urban agriculture and developing a state brand program to increase the visibility of local products. During this period, the Forum formalized its leadership structure required in statute by confirming an administrative chair and vice chair, convened its first in-person meeting, and completed a multi-phase planning process to guide future priorities. Looking ahead, a team of Forum members will support small working groups in embedding equity considerations and inclusive stakeholder engagement into the Forum's ongoing work.

Advancing Priority Actions Identified in Early 2023

During its January–June 2023 planning process, the Forum identified six priority action topics, which were introduced in the [Forum's 2023 Report to the Legislature](#). That report noted the completion of one priority action: reaching consensus on a [letter to the Department of Commerce](#) supporting updates to county guidance to help local governments meet new climate planning requirements in their comprehensive plans. Further engagement may be necessary to steward and support implementation of this action. As that action has already been reported and no further updates are available, it is not repeated here. The 2023 report also previewed work toward developing a comprehensive Washington Food System Snapshot, including production of a [draft list of resources](#) describing key aspects of Washington's food system landscape. While the Forum did not formally pursue the snapshot priority due to capacity constraints, the concept continues to inform Forum planning and discussions.

This 2025 report focuses on the remaining five priorities which were still in progress at the time of the 2023 report. Four have since been carried forward and completed, and the fifth—the food system snapshot—remains a guiding thread.



Increase Irrigated Agricultural Lands

In 2023, the Forum identified the need to address water availability for agriculture as a priority area of work because of its importance for food production. This decision built on a 2019 consensus recommendation to work with stakeholders to project future agricultural water needs and reduce water use conflicts. The Forum convened the Irrigated Agricultural Lands Small Team to explore the intersection of climate change, water, and food production.

The team began by applying the Forum's equity filter to the issue. The process informed the team's decision to invite farmers to one of its learning sessions. To build shared understanding, the team hosted two Forum-facing learning sessions in early 2024:

Session 1: Water Supply & Demand – The Science (Feb 2024)

Featured insights from:

- Derek Sandison (WSDA) and Chad Kruger (Washington State University, WSU) on how farmers currently access water.
- Nick Bond (Washington State Climatologist) on climate projections for precipitation and temperature.
- Tom Tebb (Washington State Office of Columbia River), Patrice Barrentine (King County Agriculture Program), and Jenna Friebe (Drainage & Irrigation Districts Consortium) on regional water supply management across eastern and western Washington.

Session 2: Water Supply & Demand – Farm Viability (Apr 2024)

Focused on the economic and operational impacts of water availability on farms, with contributions from:

- Mike Brady (Washington State University) and Josué Medellín-Azuara (UC Merced) on water's influence on food prices and farm viability.
- Harold Crose (Columbia Basin Conservation District) on irrigation practices.
- A panel of farmers from across the state, including Dickson Njeri (Wakulima USA), Scott Revell (Roza Irrigation District), Brad Bailie (Lenwood Farms), and Jay Gordon (Gordon Farms). Bryant Her (Washington Hmong Farmers Cooperative) was invited but unable to attend.

The small team drew from what it learned during the learning sessions to develop the context section of the recommendations report. It invested significant time in building a shared understanding of the broader context surrounding water and food production in Washington. This framing helped Forum members engage with the issue holistically and informed the development of recommendations that are both strategic and actionable.

The April 4, 2024 session brought new voices into the room and shifted the tone of the conversation. Hearing directly from farmers added depth and clarity, helping Forum members connect policy discussions to lived experience. Their stories highlighted the diversity of water-related challenges and underscored the value of practical, place-based expertise in shaping policy.

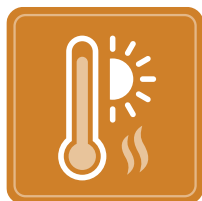
In February 2025, the Forum reached consensus on the final version of a recommendations report, titled Managing Water to Ensure Food Security in a Changing Climate. The report was shared with relevant legislative committees. It outlines three recommendations:

1. Develop a strategy and set of policies to ensure water availability for Western Washington food production. Establish an Office for Western Washington water to coordinate efforts. Use the same managing principles, funding, and statutory authority that underpin the success of the Office of Columbia River to “aggressively pursue new water supply for instream and out-of-stream uses” in Western WA.
2. Request that the Office of Columbia River collaborate with a newly established “Office for Western Washington Water” to conduct a comprehensive study.
3. Create new executive staff position within WSDA: Senior Food Water Policy Advisor with liaison responsibility to the Department of Ecology, Washington State Conservation Commission, Washington Department of Natural Resources, WDFW for fisheries, and other agencies.

In preparing to present the final recommendations, small team members took a new approach by reflecting on and responding to a set of guiding questions. These questions helped clarify the rationale, urgency, and anticipated impact of each recommendation. Team members considered why Washington is well positioned to

offset food production displaced from regions more adversely impacted by climate change, why Western Washington needs a distinct approach to water management, and how each recommendation benefits the state. They also explored potential reasons for resistance and what might be lost by not acting. This structured reflection helped sharpen the messaging and ensured that the recommendations were grounded in both practical realities and strategic foresight. It was the first time the Forum used this kind of preparatory process, and it added clarity and cohesion to the final presentation.

The Forum transmitted the consensus report to the House and Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committees and the Joint Committee on Drought in early 2025. A member of the legislature has since expressed interest in hosting a committee meeting in 2026 to discuss the recommendations further.



Advance Agriculture’s Participation in the Climate Commitment Act

The Food Policy Forum prioritized “Advancing Agriculture’s Participation in the Climate Commitment Act” as a priority topic in 2023. Although the priority action small team was initially focused on increasing agriculture’s participation in the Climate Commitment Act (CCA); namely to pursue opportunities for the sector to benefit from CCA-generated funds, the team instead focused its attention on the timely issue of fuel tax exemptions for agriculture.

In February 2024, the Forum submitted [a letter](#) to legislative committee leadership to draw attention to two agricultural fuel exemptions included in the Climate Commitment Act: one for on-farm fuel use and another for transportation of agricultural products. These exemptions had not been fully implemented. The Forum did not take a position on the merits of the Act or propose specific solutions. Instead, it highlighted the economic harm resulting from inconsistent application of the exemptions, particularly for small and mid-scale producers, and requested legislative attention to ensure the original intent of the Act—to protect agriculture from undue burden—is fully realized.

Following transmittal of the letter, the Legislature took up the issue with a short-term solution during the 2024 session, providing financial assistance to farmers who had purchased fuel without the exemption. Then, during the busy 2025 session, passed legislation clarifying the exemption and how to access suppliers providing exempt fuels.

The Forum's efforts helped bring attention to the issue, and that attention resulted in meaningful legislative response.



Identify Mechanisms for Diversifying Voices in the Forum

The Diversifying Voices Team was convened to build on a multi-year conversation about the need and opportunity to bring new voices into Forum discussions and decision-making. The team plays a key role in advancing equity and inclusion by identifying and advancing strategies to broaden engagement across Forum activities.

In 2024, the team focused on exploring strategies to engage a wide range of community perspectives including Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities and small and mid-scale farmers, generating ideas such as hosting a speaker series and listening sessions. These efforts prompted deeper reflection on how, when, and at what level it would be most valuable and productive to engage new voices. More recently, the team analyzed the Forum's distribution list and attendance data, which confirmed that participation remains concentrated within a relatively narrow group. This reinforced the need for more intentional outreach and inclusive practices. Additionally, to support transparency and more clearly communicate who serves on the Forum, their roles within the food system, and the constituencies they represent, the Forum published [member biographies](#) on its website. This resource is intended to inform both the legislature and the broader community about the diversity of expertise and perspectives contributing to Forum discussions.

Looking ahead, the Diversifying Voices Team is positioning itself as a technical assistance resource for Forum small teams. Their proposed approach includes providing guidance on small team composition, starting with core experts, expanding to cross-sector Forum members, and identifying targeted non-members who can shape and validate the work throughout the process. The team will also support consistent use of tools like the [Forum's Equity Filter](#) and help teams determine how and when to engage additional voices. By operationalizing these practices, the team aims to embed diversifying voices into everyday Forum activities. Over time, they will serve as an informal support system, available to assist small teams with equity-related decisions and engagement as their work evolves.



Local Food Policy Entity Engagement

One of the Forum's core goals, as outlined in statute and reflected in its [Charter](#), is to *identify ways to improve coordination and communication among city, county, regional, and state food policy entities, as well as between these entities and state agencies*. To advance this goal, the Forum supported a 2024 report by the University of Washington, [Learning About and Connecting Food Policy Entities in Washington: An Effort of the Washington State Conservation](#)

[Commission, Washington State Department of Agriculture, and Washington Food Policy Forum](#), which assessed the scope and needs of local food policy entities (FPEs) across Washington.

Study participants expressed a strong desire for more coordination and knowledge-sharing, both among FPEs and with the Forum. The report recommended a statewide convening or other mechanisms to strengthen connections and improve alignment across food policy efforts in Washington. In response, Forum coordinators added FPEs to the Forum's listserv to enhance engagement through meeting invitations, access to supplemental materials, and updates on future convenings.

At the February 6 Forum meeting, researchers Jennifer Otten and Marie Spiker from the University of Washington presented findings from their study. Forum members discussed the importance of local FPE experience in shaping state-level policy and considered a one-time effort to gather input and establish communication channels.

Following this discussion, the Forum hosted a statewide webinar on May 28, 2025, that brought together eighteen representatives from fourteen Washington-based FPEs. The convening aimed to foster collaboration and build stronger connections across the state's food systems landscape. Participants engaged in structured networking sessions that encouraged peer learning and informal relationship-building, exploring shared challenges and opportunities for collaboration. The webinar also featured a showcase of local FPEs, including the Spokane Food Policy Council, King County's Food Systems Advisory Council, and the Whatcom Food Network and Whatcom County Food System Committee.

Additionally, the Forum developed and circulated a roster of eighteen [Washington State FPEs](#) to support ongoing connection and knowledge-sharing.



Washington Food System Snapshot

The Forum recognizes growing interest, including among legislators, in developing a comprehensive understanding of Washington's food system. While it did not formally advance the food system snapshot priority due to limited resources and capacity constraints, the Forum's process and 2025-2027 planning reflects its continued interest in this line of work.

The Forum's approach to identifying recommendations has often begun with taking stock of the landscape and articulating key dimensions of the problems it sees warranting attention—an approach evident in the 2019 comprehensive report and the 2020 COVID response report. This continued in 2025 with the "State of the State" presentations, which offered a landscape view of Washington's food system and informed the Forum's multi-phase planning process. Continuing to acknowledge this need and integrating its intent into planning demonstrates the Forum's responsiveness and strategic awareness, even when formal action is not yet feasible.

Progress on Existing Forum Recommendations

This section highlights recent developments on two efforts rooted in Forum recommendations: the Labeling and Promotion Program and the Urban Agriculture Research study. These issues did not have dedicated Forum small working teams. In both cases, the Forum contributed to implementation through formal engagement.

State Labeling and Promotion Program Update

In 2019, the Forum recommended creating a Washington state brand program to make local products—and specific producers and farms—more visible and easier to identify and track through existing supply chains. In November 2022, the Forum submitted a letter of support for the WSDA decision package that ultimately led to passage of ESB 5341, now codified in RCW 15.155, directing WSDA to create a location-based promotion program for Washington food and agricultural products. The bill directed WSDA to establish an advisory committee to guide program development. Given the stakeholder perspectives on the Forum and its history of engagement around the topic of

establishing a location-based promotion program for Washington state, WSDA engaged the Forum to serve as the advisory committee and provide input on the scope and nature of the program.

In March 2024, the Forum held two opt-in sessions for members to share input on new aspects of the proposed program, including brand values and representation, membership structure, requirements, monitoring, and outreach. Forum input was captured in the June 2024 legislative report, [*A Location-Based Promotion Program for Washington Food and Agricultural Products*](#).

At the October 2024 Forum meeting, participants discussed WSDA's 2025–2027 decision package, which called for additional funding to support program implementation. To demonstrate support for the decision package, Forum members developed a [*letter of support*](#) that was sent to Governor Inslee in November 2024. State funding for the program was not included in the 2025-2027 operating budget due to significant budget shortfall.

Urban Agriculture Research Update

In advance of the 2023 legislative session, the Food Policy Forum published the [*Land Use Policy Solutions to Stem Agricultural Land Loss*](#) report, which included Recommendation 11 on 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.” In 2023, HB 1552 responded to this recommendation by directing SCC to lead the study and explicitly naming the Food Policy Forum as a collaborating entity. In fall 2024, the consultant conducting the study engaged the Forum and convened focused discussions with ten Forum members to explore specific state-level policy and funding opportunities. During the August 2024 Forum meeting, the consultant facilitated a session using four guiding questions: What are the multiple benefits of urban and peri-urban agriculture? What does it look like across Washington, and what pilot projects or success stories exist? What key challenges limit its potential? And what are the pathways to mitigate these challenges? These discussions helped surface practitioner insights and policy ideas to inform the study's findings and recommendations, see [*HB 1552 Urban Agriculture Report*](#). Several barriers and opportunities identified in the report, including access to land and water and market entry, also align with topics of interest currently under consideration by the Forum.

Administrative Updates

Administrative Chair and Vice Chair

For the first time since the Forum's establishment, leadership roles were formalized through the appointment of an administrative chair and vice chair, marking a key milestone in the Forum's development. As outlined in the Forum's statute: “A majority of the participating members appointed by the directors must appoint an administrative chair for the Forum.”

At the June 2024 Forum meeting, the Forum voted to confirm a series of appointments for administrative chair and vice chair for the period of June 2024 through June 2026. The administrative chair serves a 12-month term alongside a vice chair, who may transition to administrative chair at the end of the term.

From June 2024 to June 2025:

- Addie Candib, American Farmland Trust, served as the Forum’s inaugural administrative chair.
- Chris Elder, Whatcom County Public Works, served as the first vice chair.

In June 2025, leadership transitioned smoothly:

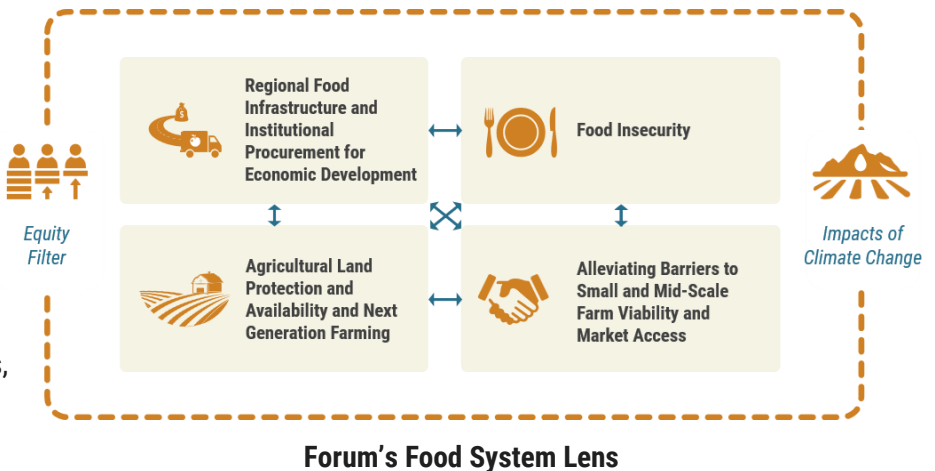
- Chris Elder, now with King County Department of Natural Resources & Parks, stepped into the role of administrative chair.
- Jon DeVaney, Washington State Tree Fruit Association, transitioned to vice chair.

The administrative chair and vice chair carry out various key roles. They serve as liaisons between convening agencies coordinating staff and Forum membership, help shape Forum meeting agendas, support annual administrative priorities such as diversifying voices and engaging local food policy councils, and represent the Forum’s goals and consensus recommendations in external settings as appropriate.

2025-27 Forum Priorities

To guide its next phase of work, the Forum launched a multi-phase planning process to identify and prioritize food system topics for focused action in the 2025-27 biennium. This process included a member survey, opt-in calls, small team meetings, and Forum-wide discussions. Five small teams were formed, one for each of the Forum’s food system components, to revisit key areas of Washington’s food system, assess current conditions, reflect on past recommendations, and surface timely opportunities for action.

Each team explored the specific challenges, gaps, and opportunities within their focus area and began outlining ideas for how the Forum—or other partners—might advance existing recommendations through targeted efforts. Ideas generated during the planning process largely aligned with existing areas of consensus, reinforcing the relevance of the five food system components that make up the Forum’s food system lens, originally outlined in its [2019 recommendations report](#). This highlighted both continuity and the urgent need for action in a rapidly shifting environment.



The following snapshots summarize each team’s current thinking and emerging priorities. A full description of the planning process is available in **Appendix C: Process to Develop Priorities**. Each snapshot includes:

- A brief description of the problem or challenge the team discussed.
- One or two priority topics identified as timely and actionable.
- A short list of ideas for advancing existing recommendations or Forum statutory goals—these are exploratory and not yet formal recommendations. In some cases, the Forum may pursue these actions directly; in others, it may recommend that another entity do so.

These ideas are listed under the heading “Ideas to Advance Existing Recommendations” to reflect their in-progress status. Over the coming months, each team will continue refining its approach, which may lead to new recommendations, pending further discussion and consensus. This work may include convening stakeholders,

facilitating learning sessions, analyzing existing data and documenting findings, proposing new policy or program investments, and amplifying or updating existing recommendations with current context.

Five small teams, organized around the Forum's food system lens, identified the following priorities for the Forum:

- **Impacts of Climate Change:** *Water Supply for Agriculture and Food Production and Climate Resilience for Agriculture and Food Production*
- **Agricultural Land Protection and Availability and Next Generation Farming:** *Succession Planning and Incentives*
- **Alleviating Barriers to Small and Mid-Scale Farm Viability and Market Access:** *Technical Assistance and Capacity Building*
- **Regional Food Infrastructure and Institutional Procurement for Economic Development:** *Public-Private Partnership Models for Infrastructure Finance and Strategic Infrastructure Planning and Coordination*
- **Food Insecurity:** *Food System Coordination for Food Security and Eligibility and Access for Food Assistance Programs*

The topics identified below are interconnected and interdependent and must be addressed in tandem to achieve meaningful, lasting change. For example, land access and succession planning are essential for farm viability, but without regional infrastructure, such as processing facilities or aggregators, new and transitioning farmers may struggle to bring products to market, limiting the impact of land access investments. Likewise, producers cannot fully leverage infrastructure investments without coordinated, scale-appropriate technical assistance and capacity building to support business development, regulatory navigation, and operational readiness.

Impacts of Climate Change



The Impacts of Climate Change Team discussed critical challenges related to declining water availability for agriculture and food production, and insufficient capacity and funding to support climate resilience. Hotter, drier summers, reduced snowpack, and shifts in seasonal stream flows are threatening agricultural viability, food security, and water management. These changes are affecting crop viability, livestock health, pest pressures, and the stability of farm businesses.

Farmers are actively seeking actionable guidance on how to respond, with some adapting in real time by investing in shade cloth, irrigation system installation and efficiency improvements, and crop diversification. However, access to consistent funding, technical assistance, and research tailored to Washington's diverse agricultural systems remains limited. Current research offers limited proven adaptation strategies that meet the specific needs of Washington's diverse farms. Agricultural extension services are under-resourced, and technical assistance programs are fragmented and inconsistently funded. The [*Climate Resilience Plan for Washington Agriculture*](#) outlines 27 actions to address climate impacts, yet WSDA received less than 0.5% of [*Climate Commitment Act \(CCA\)*](#) funds despite agriculture's vulnerability to climate impacts. This funding shortfall led to the elimination of key programs despite strong stakeholder support and readiness to implement the plan.

On October 2, 2025, the Food Policy Forum determined to first focus on the following two topics, as identified by the Impacts of Climate Change Team, recognizing them as timely areas for further exploration and potential action over the coming year.

Water Supply for Agriculture and Food Production

Water availability has been a long-standing concern and remains a high-priority topic for the Forum, especially as drought conditions intensify. Forum members emphasized that water supply strategies and storage infrastructure should continue to be a focal point for planning and investment. There is a recognition of the success of strategic investment and planning through Ecology's Office of Columbia River in Eastern Washington, and the Forum sees an opportunity to build on this model and adapt proven approaches to also meet emerging needs in Western Washington. Existing strategies need to be refined to reflect regional differences and support long-term planning to ensure water availability for crops, livestock, and communities statewide. Additionally, water conservation and efficiency measures remain crucial strategies for farmers in managing water supply for food production. The complexity, scale, and urgency of these issues require coordinated, actionable paths forward. Building on recent work to understand the intersections of climate, water, and food, the Forum is now positioned to explore tangible solutions. With climate impacts accelerating and water needs growing, the Forum sees a clear need to maintain momentum and move from understanding to action.

Ideas to Advance Existing Recommendations

- Advance the Forum's *Managing Water to Ensure Food Security in a Changing Climate Recommendations*.
 - Coordinate efforts on long-term water availability for food production across Washington, with targeted strategies for Western Washington, where no equivalent framework exists to the Office of Columbia River.
 - Propose and prepare a policy work session focused on agricultural water supply.
 - Engage the Joint Legislative Task Force on Drought and other key stakeholders (e.g., farmers, Tribes, environmental groups, local governments) to ensure regional specificity and inclusivity.
- Identify and articulate agriculture's role in water supply solutions through practices that increase soil health and improve resource efficiency such as use of cover crops and compost, reduced tillage, precision agriculture, agroforestry, pasture management, and other adaptive approaches.

Connection to Existing Recommendations

This priority topic builds on previously established areas of consensus:

- **2019 Impacts of Climate Change Recommendation 1:** *Work with policymakers, university researchers, tribes, and agencies to project future agricultural water availability needs across the state and identify strategies to reduce water use conflicts.*
 - **Recommendation 1A:** *Develop a strategy and set of policies to ensure water availability for Western Washington food production.*
- **2025 Managing Water to Ensure Food Security in a Changing Climate Recommendation 1:** *Develop a strategy and set of policies to ensure water availability for Western Washington food production. Establish an Office for Western Washington water to coordinate efforts. Use the same managing principles, funding, and statutory authority that underpin the success of the Office of Columbia River to "aggressively pursue new water supply for instream and out-of-stream uses" in Western WA.*

Climate Resilience for Agriculture and Food Production

Producers of all sizes across the state are facing increasingly complex climate-related challenges. Climate resilience is essential to sustaining long-term agricultural viability and food security, yet support systems remain fragmented and underfunded. The Forum recognizes an opportunity to close these gaps and explore practical, inclusive strategies that reflect Washington's agricultural diversity and will help producers adapt and thrive.

Ideas to Advance Existing Recommendations

- Strengthen agency and partner capacity to implement climate-smart agriculture, aligned with Washington's Climate Resilience Plan for Agriculture.
- Explore a wider variety of mechanisms for the distribution of climate resilience funding considering channels including commodity commissions, universities, conservation districts, state agencies (e.g., SCC,

Commerce), and nonprofit organizations to improve equity, broader applicability, and flexibility across cropping systems and regions. Re-engage agency partners to help structure and administer funding.

- Address eligibility criteria for incentive programs that may be excluding early adopters of climate-smart practices.
- Convene philanthropic and private-sector partners (e.g., foundations, climate-focused organizations, and venture capitalists) to explore new funding streams, partnerships, and investment models in climate adaptation for agriculture.

Connection to Existing Recommendations

This priority topic builds on previously established areas of consensus:

- **2019 Impacts of Climate Change Recommendation 2:** *Promote research and programmatic investments in agricultural viability, resiliency, and market development.*
- **2019 Impacts of Climate Change Recommendation 3:** *Ensure agricultural adaptation resources are well coordinated, funded, and staffed to support farmers in making informed business decisions in a changing climate.*

Other Topics & Areas of Opportunity Discussed

In addition to the topics above, the Forum also discussed an interest in exploring:

- **Strategies to Elevate Climate Change as a Food Systems Issue:** The Forum views climate change as a food systems issue that affects not only agricultural production, but also food access, affordability, public health, and economic resilience. Climate resilience and agricultural viability are closely tied to food security, workforce stability, rural economies, and environmental health, reinforcing the urgency and interconnectedness of Forum's priorities. Using this framing can help unify stakeholders across sectors, attract funding, and elevate agriculture's role in climate resilience and water solutions. The Forum is interested in exploring strategies to elevate this framing and help others adopt it. Opportunities for action include developing strategic messaging to help decision-makers and partners view climate change through a food systems lens, engaging in learning and dialogue with stakeholders to explore how this lens can be applied across contexts, and convening collaborative sessions to build shared understanding and capacity among Forum members and partners.
- **Forest Management and Water Supply:** Forum members discussed the role of forest health and upper watershed management in improving water retention, streamflow stability, and climate resilience. Research shows that practices such as forest thinning and small-scale gap cuts can enhance snowpack retention, reduce runoff impacts, and protect irrigation infrastructure from wildfire-related damage. The Forum identified this as an important area for further exploration given its potential to increase water availability for agriculture.

Agricultural Land Protection and Availability and Next Generation Farming



The Agricultural Land Protection and Availability and Next Generation Farming Team discussed the conditions in Washington that are accelerating farmland loss and inhibiting the ability of the next generation to enter farming. Their conversation surfaced several dimensions with potential to ease these pressures—from development and rising costs to an aging farming population. Voluntary farmland protection programs, such as the Farmland Protection and Land Access (FPLA) program and the Farm Protection and Affordability Investment (FarmPAI) initiative, in addition to the numerous local government and land trust farmland preservation programs, contribute to the preservation of farmland across the state. Regulatory tools, including local land use planning and the designation of agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance, play a critical role in farmland retention. Land linking remains an underutilized strategy with promise to support generational transitions in land ownership. Additionally, incentive-based models, such as tax relief, agricultural conservation easements, and other mechanisms, could encourage landowners to transition farmland to the next generation.

On October 2, 2025, the Food Policy Forum determined to first focus on the following topic, as identified by the Agricultural Land Protection and Availability and Next Generation Farming Team, recognizing the topic as a timely area for further exploration and potential action over the coming year.

Succession Planning and Incentives

Supporting funding for land access, voluntary conservation easements, transition-related technical assistance, and incentives remain critical as farms face increasing pressure from consolidation, aging ownership, and the need for hands-on succession planning. Exploring diverse farm transition models, including employee ownership, and related tax incentives offers a promising pathway to preserve institutional knowledge, maintain local economic vitality, and create viable succession options for keeping farmland in agricultural production.

Ideas to Advance Existing Recommendations

- Elevate existing recommendations on funding for land access/transition programs, funding for voluntary conservation easements, and developing incentives for transition.
- Explore employee-owned farm transition models and explore tax incentives or policy tools to support locally rooted farmland transition and promote succession planning resources.

Connection to Existing Recommendations

This priority topic builds on previously established areas of consensus:

- **2019 Agricultural Land Protection and Availability and Next Generation Farming Recommendation 1:** *Support funding for tools to protect agricultural land from conversion to other uses and assist farmers in transferring and accessing land, including:*

- **Recommendation 1A:** *Ensure robust state and local funding for voluntary agricultural conservation easements. Under this tool, a landowner voluntarily sells development rights to a qualified easement holder; the land is kept in agricultural production, the landowner receives compensation, and the land can be more accessible to a new farm buyer because the development rights have already been sold.*
- **2019 Agricultural Land Protection and Availability and Next Generation Farming Recommendation 2:** *Incentivize landowners to sell, rent or lease to beginning farmers, while encouraging producers to take on land-based projects.*

Other Topics & Areas of Opportunity Discussed

In addition to the topic above, the Forum also discussed an interest in learning more about the following two topics:

Voluntary Land Conservation:

- Convene a Forum-hosted dialogue with local governments to explore how development rights markets can be shared between counties. Due to the complex nature of Transfer of Development Rights policies, the Forum will need to understand how best to frame such a convening.
- Leverage existing federal and state conservation programs (e.g., NRCS RCPP, EQIP, and other landscape level conservation programs) to support voluntary farmland conservation and preservation. To understand to what extent the conservation programs can be leveraged, the Forum will need to conduct research and consult associated contacts for each of these programs.

Renewable Energy Siting Impacts on Agriculture:

- Compile research by drawing on similar models from other states to better understand the potential to implement renewable mitigation fees to support agriculture, or other similar policies that help address conflicts between renewable energy siting and agriculture as one opportunity for action to support this topic.
- The Forum also suggested convening a Forum learning session about renewable energy siting on agricultural land to illuminate complexities and potential policy solutions.

Additionally, the Forum continues to discuss how agricultural zoning and farmland conservation goals can assist with preserving agricultural viability by ensuring that farming activities remain permitted on lands not explicitly zoned for agriculture to maximize the availability of land for food production amid evolving land use regulations.

Alleviating Barriers to Small and Mid-Scale Farm Viability and Market Access



The Alleviating Barriers to Small and Mid-Scale Farm Viability and Market Access Team discussed the evolving and increasingly complex challenges facing small and mid-scale farms in Washington. These farms make up the majority of the state's farms and span a wide range of sizes, production methods, business models, and market channels. Analysis of data from the 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture shows that 63% of Washington's approximately 32,000 farms are small to mid-scale farms reporting annual sales between \$1,000 and \$1 million. They account for just under 14% of the total market value of agricultural products sold.

Diversity is a defining characteristic of this sector: some farms focus intensively on a few crops with a single buyer, while others engage in diversified production and business models oriented to selling across multiple market channels. They may sell directly to customers via farmers markets or CSAs or sell through shorter local value chains in which food hubs or local distributors provide the aggregation and distribution needed to access local wholesale customers such as restaurants, grocers, and public institutional buyers like schools, or food assistance programs. Farmers are also at different career stages, from those just starting farming businesses to those scaling up or managing mature mid-sized businesses. These farms face a convergence of pressures including rising input costs, limited access to capital, aging farmer demographics, and increasingly complex regulatory and uncertain market environments. Many also struggle with challenges common to small businesses, including health care costs, labor shortages, and affordable housing. Refugee and immigrant farmers, as well as farmers of color, often face additional systemic barriers to viability.

While public investment in programs and initiatives that support agriculture continues, small and mid-scale farms often face barriers to accessing or benefitting from programs. Barriers can be due to restrictive eligibility criteria, reimbursement-based grant structures, limited administrative capacity, or simply that programs are designed to serve commodity producers or larger-scale operations. These farms, and the small and mid-scale enterprises they rely on such as processors, aggregators, and distributors, require scale-appropriate technical assistance and infrastructure, but current support systems are under-resourced, fragmented, lack coordination, or serve beginning farmers and fall short of providing expert-level guidance.

On October 2, 2025, the Food Policy Forum determined to first focus on the following topic, as identified by the Alleviating Barriers to Small and Mid-Scale Farm Viability and Market Access Team, recognizing the topic as a timely area for further exploration and potential action over the coming year.

Technical Assistance and Capacity Building

In many cases, traditional technical assistance—whether provided by conservation districts, extension services, nonprofit organizations, or government programs—is not comprehensive enough to meet the complexity of support required by today's maturing small and mid-scale farms – and the small and mid-scale enterprises they rely on, such as processors, aggregators, and distributors. Needs vary widely: beginning farmers may need foundational business and production guidance; while scaling and mid-sized farm businesses require capital access, regulatory navigation, and strategic planning support.

Ideas to Advance Existing Recommendations

- Improve coordination among technical assistance providers.
- Develop tailored support for farms at various stages of business development and scales, including beginning farmers, established producers seeking to refine their business operations for sustained viability, and farms transitioning to new market channels or business models.
- Address gaps in support for maturing and mid-scale farms that require advanced guidance and often fall outside both the scope of beginning farmer programs and programs oriented to farms producing for commodity marketplaces.
- Develop programs that support collaborative producer models, including shared infrastructure, as well as alternative business structures and emerging market arrangements, often around value-chain relationships.
- Create pathways to connect farms with experienced consultants and reduce cost barriers.
- Use recent and forthcoming studies to identify gaps and align technical assistance efforts.

Connection to Existing Recommendations

This priority topic builds on previously established areas of consensus:

- **2019 Alleviating Barriers to Small & Mid-Scale Farmers Accessing Markets, Including Institutional Purchasing Recommendation 1**: *Offer technical assistance and market-readiness support to farmers, co-ops, and distributors so they can meet market needs.*
- **2020 Early Action Implementation Report Challenge 1, Opportunity 2**: *Offer growers and agricultural enterprises market cultivation assistance, business support services, and technical assistance to serve viable markets.*

Other Topics and Areas of Opportunity Discussed

In addition to the priority topic above, the Forum expressed interest in further exploring two additional areas:

- **Public Funding for Small and Mid-Scale Farms**: Small and mid-scale farms often face barriers to accessing public programs due to restrictive eligibility criteria, reimbursement-based grant structures, and limited administrative capacity. The Forum is interested in understanding how public agricultural investments are currently distributed and exploring mechanisms such as small farm-first procurement policies to better serve these producers.
- **Small and Mid-Scale Farm Viability**: The Forum noted the value of recent and forthcoming studies, including the WSU-WSDA Agricultural Viability Study, the American Farmland Trust Puget Sound Agricultural Viability Survey, Department of Commerce Climate Report, and Washington State Farmers Market Association Farmers Market Survey, to inform its work. There is interest in identifying common themes and actionable recommendations across these studies through careful synthesis and analysis.

Regional Food Infrastructure and Institutional Procurement for Economic Development



The Regional Food Infrastructure and Institutional Procurement for Economic Development Team discussed the persistent gaps in right-scaled, regional food system infrastructure and coordination that continue to limit the viability of small and mid-sized farms and the broader food economy. Small to mid-scale producers often lack on-farm infrastructure such as produce wash/pack stations and do not have access to facilities for minimal processing needed to meet institutional and wholesale market requirements. There are inadequate right-scaled processing facilities, including co-manufacturing, to facilitate stepwise scaling of farm and food enterprises which can stifle business growth and create bottlenecks in the value chain that moves products from farms to local markets. Even where infrastructure exists, there is a shortage of skilled operators and facility managers with the technical and business expertise to run viable food processing or co-manufacturing enterprises. Financing regional infrastructure presents unique challenges, as it far exceeds amounts reasonable for an individual small enterprise to support. This is reflected in the popularity of Local Food System Infrastructure grant, administered by WSDA with funds appropriated by the legislature, which supports improvements in infrastructure for local food supply chains and market access. Each round of applications has consistently totaled over ten times the amount of the available funds.

Food system infrastructure serves broader community and economic resilience goals beyond individual enterprise profitability, like investments in energy or transportation infrastructure. Larger projects often require investment that exceeds available public funding alone and depend on private capital that is patient and supportive of system-wide benefits as a return on investment. Forum members identified ways in which shifts in private and public funding landscape for food and agriculture shape the economic context for this sector, contributing to opportunities for growth and investment, or contraction. One example of this is the ways in which public procurement programs with a focus on local foods have improved access and sales opportunities for small and mid-scale farms and spurred accelerated investments in local food system infrastructure. Forum members emphasized that the challenge is no longer identifying needs—decades of surveys have consistently surfaced the same gaps in infrastructure and supply chain links—but rather coordinating strategic action and leveraging existing knowledge. Coordination is essential to avoid duplicative investments and ensure infrastructure projects are complementary across regions.

On October 2, 2025, the Food Policy Forum determined to first focus on the following two topics, as identified by the Regional Food Infrastructure and Institutional Procurement for Economic Development Team, recognizing them as timely areas for further exploration and potential action over the coming year.

Public-Private Partnership Models for Infrastructure Finance

The scale of investment needed for mid-scale facilities often exceeds available public funding. Successful models for public-private investment in regional facilities exist—the Port of Skagit County and Tenino Agriculture Innovation Park are two examples—but the many efforts across the state need systematization and broader application. The Forum can help document and analyze these models, explore strategies to de-risk private investment, and identify

financing pathways used in other sectors that consist of essential public infrastructure, like energy and transportation, that could be adapted for food system infrastructure.

Ideas to Advance Existing Recommendations

- Document and analyze successful partnership models to identify replicable elements (e.g., Port of Skagit County, Tenino Agriculture Innovation Park, Port of Chehalis Grain Infrastructure, Blue Mountain Station).
- Explore state-wide strategies to de-risk private investment, such as market feasibility analysis for new facilities, first loss coverage or revenue guarantee mechanisms.
- Identify existing public financing pathways used for energy and transportation infrastructure that could apply to food system projects.
- Connect potential investors with viable projects through structured networking and partnership facilitation.

Connection to Existing Recommendations

This priority topic builds on a previously established area of consensus:

- **2019 Infrastructure and Rural Economic Development Recommendation 2:** *Identify funding and financing mechanisms for capital investment in regional food system infrastructure that is needed for rural food and ag entrepreneurship-based economic development.*

Strategic Infrastructure Planning and Coordination

Forum members emphasized that the challenge is no longer identifying infrastructure needs—decades of assessments have consistently surfaced the same gaps—but rather coordinating strategic action. Producers lack access to basic facilities like wash/pack stations and small-scale processing, and Washington has fewer mid-scale co-manufacturers than neighboring states. Even where infrastructure exists, there are shortages of skilled operators and viable business models. The Forum can help synthesize existing knowledge, facilitate statewide coordination, and support complementary regional investments.

Ideas to Advance Existing Recommendations

- Understand the landscape of existing assets and gaps to inform coordinated regional infrastructure development, including the role of shared-use infrastructure (e.g., food hubs, commercial kitchens, co-packing facilities) in regional planning efforts.
- Conduct systematic mapping of existing infrastructure investments and successful public-private partnership models across the state.
- Perform landscape analysis (SWOT-style) of current food system infrastructure assets, recent losses, and their impact on regional capacity.
- Facilitate communication among statewide stakeholders engaged in planning and development of regional infrastructure, including shared-use infrastructure, to ensure complementary rather than competitive development.

- Consider how workforce development fits in with the Forum’s definition of infrastructure.

Connection to Existing Recommendations

This priority topic builds on a previously established area of consensus:

- **2019 Infrastructure and Rural Economic Development Recommendation 3:** *Build statewide capacity to coordinate and share information among local projects so that we can build complementary regional systems that connect and work as one whole statewide system.*

Other Topics & Areas of Opportunity Discussed

In addition to the topics above, the Forum also discussed an interest in learning more about the following topic:

- **Workforce Development as Infrastructure:** Forum members emphasized that infrastructure investments cannot succeed without skilled operators. The distributed nature of agriculture requires coordinated workforce development that individual farms cannot provide alone. This topic focuses on building human capacity to operate and manage regional food system infrastructure. Opportunities for action include supporting career pathways from labor to management, integrating technology training to attract younger workers, and creating public-private partnerships for skills development. Since the Forum has not previously addressed this topic, members suggested hosting learning sessions to deepen understanding and explore future action.

Food Insecurity



The Food Insecurity Team discussed recent major changes to the hunger safety net at the state and federal level. Washington's food and nutrition assistance system is facing mounting challenges as pandemic-era support expires and federal funding declines, threatening food security for vulnerable residents. Hunger relief organizations are overwhelmed by sustained demand, with food pantry visits surging from 7.8 million pre-pandemic to 13 million in 2024. Cuts to key federal programs including SNAP, WIC, and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), as well as the elimination of SNAP-Ed are shifting costs to the state and straining local hunger relief programs. Additionally, state programs like the Fruit and Vegetable Incentive and Local Food for Schools also face major reductions, jeopardizing access to healthy food and support for local farmers. While pandemic-era coordination among state agencies, WSDA grantmaking, and public-private partnerships helped mobilize resources and strengthen food system capacity, sustaining this progress requires dedicated infrastructure for collaboration, data sharing, and strategic planning. Further, with federal funding now tied to maintaining a SNAP payment error rate below 6%, accurate tracking and analysis are critical to meeting HR1 requirements and preventing further cost shifts to the state.

On October 2, 2025, the Food Policy Forum determined to first focus on the following two topics, as identified by the Food Insecurity Team, recognizing them as timely areas for further exploration and potential action over the coming year.

Food System Coordination for Food Security

Washington's food system lacks a unified structure to respond to hunger and food insecurity efficiently, especially in times of crisis. Strengthening coordination through actionable mechanisms such as a statewide dashboard, clarified agency roles, and public-private partnerships will enable better resource targeting, reduce service gaps, and build a resilient infrastructure that supports both emergency response and long-term food access.

Ideas to Advance Existing Recommendations

- Create a nimble action network to convene regularly to address priority topics. Secure legislative support to formally assign and task authority and coordination roles to relevant agencies.
- Call for data standardization and use of real-time dashboards to better understand who is experiencing hunger and where, as well as understanding where anti-hunger programs are responding effectively to local communities and specific populations, enabling data-driven decision-making and targeted interventions. Map the role and responsibilities of state agencies and programs involved in the hunger safety net to increase transparency, identify gaps and improve coordination and impact.
- Leverage public-private partnerships for food systems resilience: Engage farmers, nonprofits, and private-sector partners to enhance food system capacity and emergency food access and leverage local knowledge and infrastructure.

Connection to Existing Recommendations

This priority topic builds on previously established areas of consensus:

- **2019 Food Insecurity Recommendation 2:** *Explore the use of state resources to maximize participation and access to nutrition assistance programs.*

Eligibility and Access for Food Assistance Programs

Accurate and timely eligibility determinations are essential to ensuring Washingtonians can access the food assistance programs they qualify for. As federal requirements evolve—such as the mandate to maintain a SNAP payment error rate below 6%—state systems must adapt to support compliance, reduce administrative burden, and improve user experience while also ensuring accessibility for people who are struggling. Technology solutions that support real-time verification, cross-program coordination, and responsive updates to household circumstances can help streamline access and improve program integrity.

Ideas to Advance Existing Recommendations

- Explore opportunities to modernize application and verification systems for food assistance programs, including SNAP, to improve accuracy, reduce administrative burden, and support compliance with federal standards.

Connection to Existing Recommendations

This priority topic builds on previously established areas of consensus:

- **2019 Food Insecurity Recommendation 2:** *Explore the use of state resources to maximize participation and access to nutrition assistance programs, such as:*
 - **Recommendation 2C:** *Develop a framework and state plan to ensure that Washingtonians whose eligibility for federal nutrition assistance programs may be endangered or eliminated maintain eligibility for and access to supplemental state nutrition assistance programs.*
 - **Recommendation 2D:** *Explore data share agreements and IT investments to support eligibility outreach for WIC and SNAP to ensure seamless enrollment for participants who are eligible for both programs, and to make WIC participation easier (e.g. online scheduling for appointments, online classes, etc.).*

Other Topics & Areas of Opportunity Discussed

In addition to the topic above, the Forum also discussed an interest in learning more about the following topic:

- **Surplus Food and the Hunger Safety Net:** The Forum discussed various opportunities for action for this topic including accelerating movement of surplus WA grown produce, protein, and grains to people in need in a way that supports growers economically and complies with food safety regulations. Additionally, the Forum is interested in exploring how to scale up existing programs and transportation capacities that foster and incentivize partnerships between agriculture and hunger relief networks and promote and encourage food donations across food business and retail sectors to reduce barriers to food donation.

Appendix A: Forum Membership

Member Name	Organization
Aaron Czyzewski	Food Lifeline
Addie Candib	American Farmland Trust
Aslan Meade (Alternate: Tina Sharp)	Thurston Economic Development Council
Brian Estes	LINC Foods
Brice Montgomery	WA State Department of Social & Health Services
Brooklyn Holton	Initiative for Rural Innovation and Stewardship
Caleb Gwerder	WA Farm Bureau
Chad Kruger	Washington State University – Center for Sustaining Agriculture & Natural Resources
Chris Cary	Food Northwest
Chris Elder	King County Department of Natural Resources & Parks
Chris Voigt	WA State Potato Commission
Claire Lane	Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition
Colleen Donovan	WA State Famers Market Association
Dan Wood	WA State Dairy Federation
Derek Sandison (Alternate: Laura Raymond)	WA State Department of Agriculture
Diane Dempster	Clark County Food System Council
James Thompson (Alternate: Hilary Aten)	WA State Conservation Commission
Jamielyn Wheeler	Northwest Harvest
Jennifer Otten (Alternate: Marie Spiker)	University of Washington – Food Systems, Nutrition, and Health
Jon DeVaney	WA State Tree Fruit Association
Judy Warnick	WA State Legislature
KayDee Gilkey (Alternate: Michelle Hennings)	WA Association of Wheat Growers
Kyle Unland	WA State Department of Health
Leanne Eko	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Linda Neunzig	Snohomish County Conservation and Natural Resources
Marcia Ostrom (Alternate: Kate Smith)	Washington State University – Food Systems
Mary Dye	WA State Legislature
Mary Embleton	King Conservation District

Member Name	Organization
Melissa Spear	Tilth Alliance
Mia Gregerson	WA State Legislature
Nate Lewis	WA Farmland Trust
Patrick “PJ” Cawley	Charlie’s Produce
Richard Conlin	Conlin Columbia Partnership for Cities
Rebecca Saldaña	WA State Legislature
Tim Crosby	Thread Fund
Tom Salzer (Alternate: Heather Wendt)	WA Association of Conservation Districts

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

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

Washington State Department of Agriculture: Laura Raymond

Ross Strategic: Petra Vallila-Buchman, Piper Casey, and Haley Morris

Appendix B: Team Rosters

The following rosters reflect the five small teams organized around the food system components that make up the Forum’s food system lens (see Figure 2). Members were assigned by the Forum’s coordinating team based on their areas of expertise, with opportunities for members to request reassignment or select a preferred time if assigned more than one. Members representing the Washington State Legislature were given the opportunity to choose which team they joined. Several members contributed to multiple teams.

This structure was informed by Forum discussions emphasizing the importance of grounding each team in topical expertise during priority setting. Over time, teams may expand to include additional perspectives, such as those with lived experience, to enrich discussions and small team activities.

°Indicates member invited to join the small team but has not yet participated in discussions

*Indicates invited topical expert guest

Agricultural Land Protection and Availability and Next Generation Farming Team

Name	Organization
Addie Candib	American Farmland Trust
Caleb Gwerder	WA Farm Bureau
Chris Elder	King County Department of Natural Resources & Parks
Dan Wood	WA State Dairy Federation
Heather Wendt	WA Association of Conservation Districts
Hilary Aten	WA State Conservation Commission
Judy Warnick	WA State Legislature
KayDee Gilkey	WA Association of Wheat Growers
Mary Dye	WA State Legislature
Mary Embleton	King Conservation District
Nate Lewis	WA Farmland Trust

Alleviating Barriers to Small and Mid-Scale Farm Viability and Market Access Team

Name	Organization
Addie Candib	American Farmland Trust
Brian Estes	LINC Foods
Caleb Gwerder	WA Farm Bureau
Colleen Donovan	WA State Famers Market Association

Name	Organization
Diane Dempster	Clark County Food System Council
Jon DeVaney	WA State Tree Fruit Association
Kate Smith	Washington State University – Food Systems
Laura Raymond	WA State Department of Agriculture
Mary Embleton	King Conservation District
Melissa Spear	Tilth Alliance
Nate Lewis	WA Farmland Trust
Patrick “PJ” Cawley	Charlie’s Produce

Food Insecurity Team

Name	Organization
Aaron Czyzewski	Food Lifeline
Brice Montgomery	WA State Department of Social and Health Services
Brittany Tybo*	WA State Department of Health
Claire Lane	Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition
Dan Wood	WA State Dairy Federation
Diane Dempster	Clark County Food System Council
Jamielyn Wheeler°	Northwest Harvest
Jennifer Otten	University of Washington – Food Systems, Nutrition, and Health
Katie Rains*	WA State Department of Agriculture
Kyle Unland	WA State Department of Health
Laura Raymond	WA State Department of Agriculture
Leanne Eko	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Marie Spiker	University of Washington – Food Systems, Nutrition, and Health
Mary Dye	WA State Legislature

Impacts of Climate Change Team

Name	Organization
Caleb Gwerder	WA Farm Bureau
Chad Kruger	Washington State University – Center for Sustaining Agriculture & Natural Resources
Chris Cary°	Food Northwest

Name	Organization
Chris Elder	King County Department of Natural Resources & Parks
Chris Voigt	WA State Potato Commission
Dani Gelardi*	WA State Department of Agriculture
Jon DeVaney	WA State Tree Fruit Association
Judy Warnick	WA State Legislature
Laura Raymond	WA State Department of Agriculture
Linda Neunzig	Snohomish County Conservation and Natural Resources
Melissa Spear	Tilth Alliance
Rebecca Saldaña	WA State Legislature
Richard Conlin	Conlin Columbia Partnership for Cities

Regional Food Infrastructure and Institutional Procurement for Economic Development Team

Name	Organization
Aslan Meade	Thurston Economic Development Council
Brian Estes	LINC Foods
Chris Cary°	Food Northwest
Diane Dempster	Clark County Food System Council
Jennifer Otten	University of Washington – Food Systems, Nutrition, and Health
Jon DeVaney	WA State Tree Fruit Association
Laura Raymond	WA State Department of Agriculture
Leanne Eko	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Linda Neunzig	Snohomish County Conservation and Natural Resources
Marie Spiker	University of Washington – Food Systems, Nutrition, and Health
Mary Embleton	King Conservation District
Mia Gregerson	WA State Legislature
Patrick “PJ” Cawley	Charlie’s Produce
Rebecca Saldaña	WA State Legislature
Tim Crosby	Thread Fund

Appendix C: Process to Develop Priorities

In 2025, the Washington State Food Policy Forum launched a multi-phase work planning process to identify and prioritize food system topics for focused action over the next two years.

Phase 1: Topic Generation and Landscape Assessment

Beginning in April 2025, Forum members participated in a survey and a series of opt-in calls to surface key issues warranting attention. Members noted that the last comprehensive review of the food system landscape occurred in 2020 and emphasized the need for a fresh look. This led to the idea of “State of the State” presentations—brief, expert-informed snapshots of Washington’s food system—to help contextualize emerging priorities.

Ideas generated during the survey and opt-in calls largely aligned with existing areas of consensus, reinforcing the relevance of the five food system components that make up the Forum’s food system lens, originally outlined in the Forum’s 2019 recommendations report, see **Figure 2: The Forum’s Food Systems Lens**.

These inputs informed the May Forum meeting, where members refined and expanded the initial list of topics and emphasized the importance of grounding future actions in a shared understanding of current conditions.

Phase 2: Pressure Testing and Refinement

From July through August, five small teams—organized around the food system components—met to refine topical priorities. Members were assigned by the Forum’s convening agencies based on their areas of expertise. Teams considered urgency, opportunity, and alignment with existing recommendations. They also explored the Forum’s potential roles, recognizing that different topics—and their degree of connection to existing recommendations—would necessitate different approaches to advance each topic. [internal note: where do we clarify what it means to bring attention to or advance these topics]. The August Forum meeting featured presentations from these teams, previewing 18 topics and associated opportunities for action.

Phase 3: Confirmation and Communication

In October 2025, the Forum reconvened to confirm the one to two topics each of the five small teams will prioritize for action first.

Phase 4: Small Team Action

Following confirmation, the five small teams will reconvene to initiate their work. This may include advancing existing recommendations or developing new ones. Teams may take on a variety of roles, including:

- Convening stakeholders
- Facilitating learning sessions
- Analyzing existing data and documenting findings
- Proposing new policy or program investments
- Amplifying and reinforcing existing recommendations with updated context