

Food Policy Forum Meeting Summary

WASHINGTON STATE
FOOD POLICY FORUM

Thursday, December 4, 2025 • 1:00–4:00 PM

Key Takeaways

- Participants discussed the policy and funding landscape heading into the 2026 legislative session, including updates from Forum members on proposals and state agency decision package requests relevant to the Forum's work.
- Participants engaged in end-of-year reflection and networking, celebrating Washington food system accomplishments and building cross-sector connections.
- Participants joined breakout group discussions oriented around the Forum's five topical teams to hear updates on each team's thinking around ideas for action to advance the Forum's 2025-27 priorities.

Welcome & Opening Remarks

Chris Elder, King County Natural Resources and Parks (KCNRP), Forum Administrative Chair, opened the meeting by welcoming Forum members and acknowledging recent progress, including submission of the October [2025 Report to the Legislature](#). Petra Vallila-Buchman, Ross Strategic facilitator, provided an overview of the meeting agenda and objectives.

Policy and Funding Landscape: 2026 Outlook

Laura Raymond, WA State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), framed this session as a chance to share updates before the legislative session, build shared awareness, and anticipate changes that may influence the Forum's work. This annual practice helps the Forum stay aligned with evolving priorities. Forum members representing state agencies shared proposals of relevance to the Forum's goals:

- **Leanne Eko, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)**, shared [OSPI's Budget Request](#) for state funding for districts to support administration of the Summer EBT program, unlocking a 1:1 federal match, ensuring equitable access, maximizing federal funds, and minimizing administrative burden.
- **Dani Madrone, WA State Conservation Commission (SCC)**, outlined three priorities SCC is putting forward: forest health management and wildfire preparedness; a conservation technical assistance program; and a one-time funding request for business and technology transformation (modernized IT system) intended to support partners.
- **Katie Rains, WA State Dept. of Agriculture (WSDA)**, described five decision package requests: Japanese beetle eradication, cannabis program maintenance for human health, invasive moth response, food safety rapid response, and a capital request to replace an aging facility at Washington State University-Prosser related to tree fruit certification.

- **Brice Montgomery, WA Dept. of Social and Health Services (DSHS)**, highlighted several requests including expansion of the Tribal SNAP Eligibility Determination Project, continued administration of Summer EBT through 2028, implementation of the National Accuracy Clearinghouse (NAC) to improve SNAP integrity, and several funding requests tied to changes created by H.R.1 (“One Big Beautiful Bill Act”) related to low-income home energy assistance program (LIHEAP) payments, SNAP administrative costs, work requirements eligibility, SNAP error rate requirements, and the transition of ~30,000 federally-funded SNAP recipients (mainly immigrants, refugees, and asylees) to the state-funded Food Assistance Program (FAP).
- **Kyle Unland, WA State Dept. of Health (DOH)**, noted that DOH has eleven requests moving forward, including one food-related item about the increase of licensing and certification fees for shellfish.
- **Chad Kruger, Washington State University Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources (WSU-CSANR)**, shared their request for maintenance of existing appropriations, noting that their ag-related research and extension enterprise tends to get hit the hardest when there are cutbacks.

All decision package requests are available at <https://abr.ofm.wa.gov/> (select *2026 supplemental* as the budget session, then choose the agency or program of interest).

Other Forum members also shared policy and funding updates they are tracking:

- **Claire Lane, Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition**, shared that human services advocates are developing a bill related to SNAP and FAP. The effort includes clarifying vague language in federal law on work requirement exemptions for individuals physically or mentally unfit for work (to help them stay on SNAP using federal benefits), expanding eligibility for the state-funded food stamp program to include populations recently disqualified by Congress, and creating a funding mechanism to help fund administrative costs and other key nutrition programs, such as free school meals, the SNAP Match Program at DOH, and food banks.
- **Aaron Czyzewski, Food Lifeline**, shared that [Food Lifeline's 2026 State Advocacy Agenda](#) references Food Policy Forum recommendations, Food Donation Workgroup recommendations, bills supporting a statewide food security strategy, and tax code equity.
- **Linda Neunzig, Snohomish County**, is tracking two agritourism bills sponsored by State Representative Sam Low. One is an amendment to HB 1261 to ensure that tax relief for uses on open space only applies to agriculture infrastructure, particularly agritourism.

Discussion: Efforts related to House Bill 1987 on developing a statewide food security strategy

Petra Vallila-Buchman invited several Forum members who have been involved in State Representative Kristine Reeves’ statewide food security strategy efforts to share more information about [HB 1987](#) and the December 5 committee work session held by the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee ([TVW link](#)). These work sessions convene stakeholders and experts ahead of the legislative session to discuss issues likely to surface during session.

- **Claire Lane, Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition**, shared that Rep. Reeves, the relatively new chair of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, is leading a statewide effort to connect the agriculture sector with hunger relief initiatives to tackle food security broadly. HB 1987 would appoint WSDA to lead a statewide food security strategy in coordination with state agencies such as DSHS, OSPI, DOH, and others. Rep. Reeves has also tasked advocates and stakeholders to work on additional bills and work groups such as farm-to-food banks, farm-to-school, among others.

- **Jon DeVaney, Washington State Tree Fruit Association**, noted that Rep. Reeves aims to broaden the food security conversation by educating urban legislators about agricultural production and engaging diverse stakeholders to develop common recommendations. The long-term goal is to create a comprehensive package of measures, similar to a “state farm bill,” that supports production agriculture and related sectors.
- **Dani Madrone, SCC**, informed the Forum that she, alongside Chris Elder, KCNRP, will represent the Food Policy Forum at the December 5 work session. She noted that Rep. Reeves expressed interest in understanding the Forum’s existing consensus recommendations to reduce redundancies and educate the committee on the Forum’s past and future work.
- **Katie Rains, WSDA**, explained that this effort aims to formalize coordination among state agencies on food security and strengthen leadership by WSDA. This work builds on recent cross-agency collaboration, such as addressing SNAP gaps, and reflects the growing need for integrated strategies. The bill emphasizes monitoring food system performance, supporting both producers’ viability and access for vulnerable consumers, while leveraging lessons from recent investments in local food systems and emergency response. Ultimately, it calls for breaking down agency and legislative silos to ensure Washington’s long-term food security.
- **Laura Raymond, WSDA**, highlighted the Forum’s presence at the December 5 work session as the first formal opportunity to connect with this food security initiative. She emphasized the valuable contribution that the Forum’s body of work over the past seven years can play in Rep. Reeves’ food security strategy.

End-of-Year Celebration and Cross-Sector Network Building

Petra Vallila-Buchman, Ross Strategic facilitator, invited participants to reflect on a moment or aspect of their work from 2025 that created the greatest positive impact on their community. Participants added their food system accomplishments and highlights to a shared Padlet board here: [2025 WA Food System and Food Policy Forum Highlights](#)

Participants also joined cross-sector breakout rooms for a light network building activity, sharing on their favorite memories from visiting a Washington farm, farmer's market, or local food business.

Update on Topical Teams Process

The Forum’s five topical teams for the 2025-27 biennium are rooted in the Forum’s five food system components (see Figure 1 below) and were identified during a multi-phase work planning process from April through October 2025. Each team met in November to begin refining ideas for action and next steps to advance the 2025-27 priorities outlined in the [Forum’s 2025 Report to the Legislature](#). Team rosters and priority topics are available in Appendix A and B, respectively.

During the November topical team kick-off meetings, teams began discussing what it means to advance each of these topical priorities, what more information is needed, and whether, how, and when to implement or amplify existing recommendations. Discussions are still taking shape.

Petra Vallila-Buchman, Ross Strategic facilitator, emphasized that teams are at different stages. Some are ready to move quickly on one or more proposed ideas, while others need more time to clarify and prioritize before advancing. She noted that this variation is expected and appropriate, given the Forum’s two-year work planning cycle. Some teams may put forward an idea for more formal discussion soon, while others are still identifying their first steps or exploring the Forum’s potential role.

Forum's Food System Lens

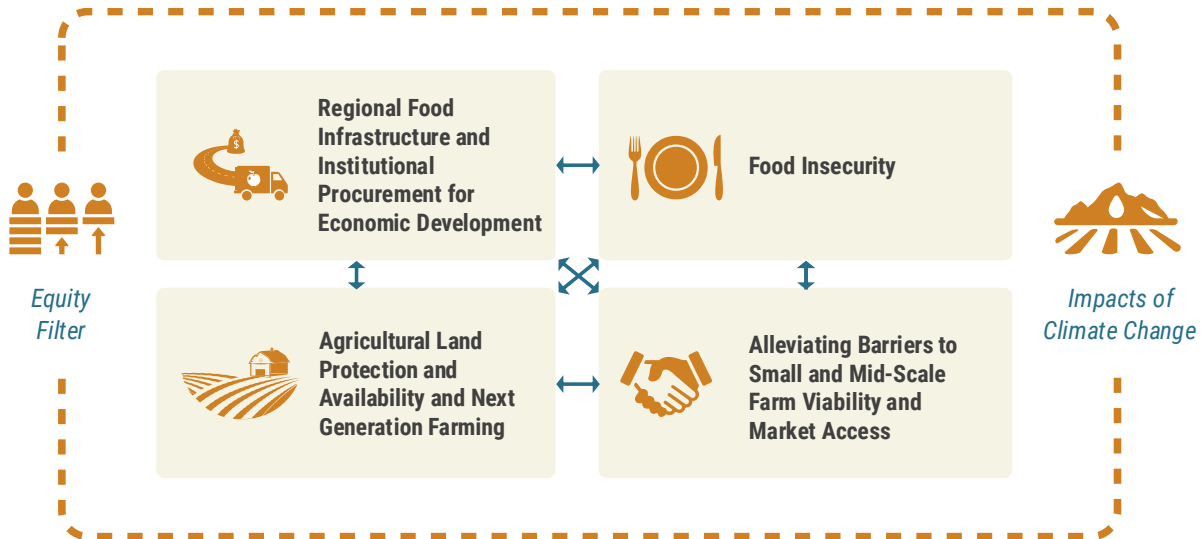


Figure 1. Forum's Food System Lens

Topical Teams Working Sessions and Report-Outs

Participants joined one of the five topical team breakout rooms to discuss where the team is currently based on recent discussions. The purpose of the breakout session was to bring everyone up to speed on the priority topics, ideas for action, and the direction each team is heading.

Following the breakout discussions, a representative from each team shared a summary of the team's current direction. This was framed as an opportunity for members and non-members alike to hear updates, ask questions, and offer reflections. Breakout group report-outs, along with full group discussions that followed, are summarized in the sections below.

Food Insecurity Team

This team's focus has been on food system coordination for food insecurity. Discussions have emphasized the Forum's unique position in leveraging public-private partnerships, identifying gaps in coordination, and impact within the hunger safety net, and defining the team's responsibility in elevating timely legislative priorities that broadly support food security and collaboration. During the breakout session, participants discussed:

- Drafting and disseminating a letter in support of HB 1987 that names consensus recommendations pertaining to different aspects of food security. It was noted that state agencies must abstain from signing on without direction from the Governor's office, though they can help coordinate internally and provide information. Additionally, members noted the importance of clarifying what the process and engagement would look like if HB 1987 passes, and what conversations will be needed to shape implementation.
- The group also reflected on the Forum's broader role of convening, connecting, and communicating to promote different aspects of the hunger safety net and cross-sector collaboration. Participants raised the idea of inventorying networks and convenings already happening at local and regional levels to strengthen alignment.

Discussion

Recognizing uncertainty, Forum members noted that while the team has identified actions, they must remain well-positioned to be reactive to legislative developments. There was interest in moving forward with a Forum letter regarding HB 1987. Participants identified opportunities to engage with local food policy councils, building on earlier Forum efforts to foster those relationships, and to invite others to weigh in because HB 1987 is about the whole food system, not just food insecurity. More discussion and strategy decisions are needed about the content and framing of the letter.

Impacts of Climate Change Team

This team is focused on amplifying the Forum's *Managing Water to Ensure Food Security in a Changing Climate Recommendations Report* (water recommendations). Members have discussed the need for education and awareness at the legislature to raise the profile of climate, water, and food security issues. One proposed action is to translate the water recommendations into talking points that Forum members and partner organizations can use in legislative outreach. During the breakout session, participants discussed:

- Actions that do not require significant budget implications, given the fiscal challenges in the upcoming legislative session. Rather than making a specific ask associated with the Forum's water recommendations, the group agreed there is value in elevating the recommendations and beginning a planning process to determine who will lead and participate in the effort.
- A new idea: asking the legislature to direct the Department of Ecology (Ecology), in collaboration with WSDA and SCC, to develop a decision package around the Forum's water recommendations. This approach would move the issue from the program level to the agency level, provide a clearer sense of costs and viability for water and agricultural production, and build legislative understanding and engagement. In a time of budget scarcity, this could serve as a strategic step in positioning the Forum's recommendations for longer-term action.

Discussion

One participant inquired whether Ecology responded to the Forum's water recommendations. A Forum member clarified that no formal request was made to Ecology's Water Resources Program. Members considered whether the upcoming legislative session and potential "state farm bill" could provide an opportunity to elevate the water recommendations. They also raised concerns about the limited window for influence, as legislative work sessions are already underway and session begins January 12, 2026.

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

This team has been focusing on technical assistance (TA) and capacity building. Ideas have surfaced around synthesizing and communicating gaps in TA and understanding from current TA providers what they need to advance greater impact. The team has also flagged urgent farm viability issues, such as impacts of cuts to federal and state programs, and have started considering ways the Forum can amplify or mitigate challenges. During the breakout session, participants recognized:

- The current proposed ideas for action around technical assistance and capacity building remain broad and high-level. They acknowledged critical gaps in the types and levels of support available to producers at different stages of business development but emphasized the challenge of defining a targeted action in a diffuse landscape of service providers.
- Near-term farm viability issues are pressing, yet the Forum's role may be less about solving these challenges directly and more about informing, flagging, and amplifying existing efforts. One

potential role is to call attention to gaps left by federal cutbacks and connect them to local impacts, possibly tying into broader legislative conversations such as Rep. Reeves' statewide food security efforts or a "state farm bill."

- Longer-term ideas include mapping technical assistance providers and identifying systemic gaps, building on baseline work already underway (such as efforts funded through the Regional Food Business Center program before it was cut). The team is still working toward clarifying the most effective role the Forum can play.

Discussion

One Forum member stressed the importance of ensuring BIPOC and minority-owned farmers' perspectives are represented in these discussions, especially around opportunities to tie into Rep. Reeves' statewide food security efforts.

Regional Food Infrastructure and Institutional Procurement for Economic Development Team

This team has been exploring public-private partnerships to support food system financing and development. Ports have emerged as a key example, given their role in economic development and agriculture. During the breakout session, participants discussed:

- Next steps for documenting and analyzing examples of ports supporting food system development, including compiling a list of projects, examining what worked and what did not, and developing guiding questions for future conversations with ports.
- Framing food system infrastructure as "critical infrastructure," similar to energy and transportation. There is an opportunity to broaden the scope of funders beyond food system investors to include more traditional infrastructure investors.

Agricultural Land Protection and Availability and Next Generation Farming Team

This team has been exploring the topic of succession planning and incentives, focusing on tax incentives beyond conservation easements and examining successful transition models from other states. During the breakout session, participants discussed:

- Defining meaningful engagement in research and identifying who has the capacity to conduct it.
- Conducting an inventory of existing information to support succession planning. This includes educating the team about the gap between what is needed and what is already available.
- Clarifying the target audience for disseminating research findings.

Closing Reflections and Next Steps

Petra Vallila-Buchman, Ross Strategic facilitator, reflected that several topical teams discussed inventorying, collating, and outreach as practical next steps. While the Forum has not routinely taken on this role, it aligns with past practices and is an approach that reflects both budget constraints and a desire to build on existing information rather than reinvent the wheel.

Petra also provided **next steps**: The same topical teams will reconvene in January to continue these conversations and begin applying the [Forum's Equity Filter](#) to their proposed actions to ensure diverse voices are represented as work advances. The Diversifying Voices team plans to meet quarterly in 2026, and the next full Forum meeting is scheduled for **February 5, 2025**.

Forum Administrative Chair, Chris Elder, KCNRP, expressed gratitude to the Ross team for their guidance and to Forum members for their clarity and confidence in tackling complex food system issues. He reflected on the eight years of collective work, welcomed the addition of new voices, and emphasized the importance of continued progress toward the Forum's goals and priorities. Chris shared his excitement about Rep. Reeves' statewide food security initiative and noted the unprecedented level of legislative engagement. Chris closed the meeting by thanking participants and expressed that he looks forward to re-engaging in 2026.

Appendix A. Topical Team Rosters

Below is a list of Forum members associated with each topical team.

Agricultural Land Protection and Availability and Next Generation Farming Team

- Addie Candib, American Farmland Trust
- Caleb Gwerder, WA Farm Bureau
- Chris Elder, King County Dept. of Natural Resources and Parks
- Dan Wood, WA State Dairy Federation
- Hilary Aten, on behalf of the Director of the WA State Conservation Commission
- Heather Wendt, WA Association of Conservation Districts
- KayDee Gilkey, WA Association of Wheat Growers
- Rep. Mary Dye, WA State Legislature
- Mary Embleton, King Conservation District
- Nate Lewis, WA Farmland Trust

Food Insecurity Team

- Aaron Czyzewski, Food Lifeline
- Anna Nepomuceno, Northwest Harvest
- Brice Montgomery, WA Dept. of Social and Health Services
- Chris Voigt, WA State Potato Commission
- Claire Lane, Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition
- Diane Dempster, Clark County Food System Council
- Jennifer Otten, UW Food Systems, Nutrition, and Health
- Katie Rains, on behalf of the Director of the WA State Dept. of Agriculture
- Kyle Unland, WA Dept. of Health
- Leanne Eko, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Impacts of Climate Change Team

- Caleb Gwerder, WA Farm Bureau
- Chad Kruger, WSU-CSANR
- Chris Voigt, WA State Potato Commission
- Chris Elder, King County Dept. of Natural Resources and Parks
- Hilary Aten, on behalf of the Director of the WA State Conservation Commission
- Jon DeVaney, WA State Tree Fruit Association
- Sen. Judy Warnick, WA State Legislature

- Laura Raymond, on behalf of the Director of the WA State Dept. of Agriculture
- Linda Neunzig, Snohomish County
- Melissa Spear, Tilth Alliance
- Sen. Rebecca Saldaña, WA State Legislature
- Richard Conlin, Conlin Columbia Partnership for Cities

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

- Addie Candib, American Farmland Trust
- Anna Nepomuceno, Northwest Harvest
- Brian Estes, LINC Foods
- Caleb Gwerder, WA Farm Bureau
- Diane Dempster, Clark County Food Systems Council
- Jon DeVaney, WA State Tree Fruit Association
- Kate Smith, WSU Food Systems Program
- Laura Raymond, on behalf of the Director of the WA State Dept. of Agriculture
- Mary Embleton, King Conservation District
- Melissa Spear, Tilth Alliance
- Nate Lewis, WA Farmland Trust

Regional Food Infrastructure and Institutional Procurement for Economic Development Team

- Aslan Meade, Thurston Economic Development Council
- Brian Estes, LINC Foods
- Jennifer Otten, UW Food Systems, Nutrition, and Health
- Laura Raymond, on behalf of the Director of the WA State Dept. of Agriculture
- Leanne Eko, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
- Linda Neunzig, Snohomish County
- Marie Spiker, UW Food Systems, Nutrition, and Health
- Mary Embleton, King Conservation District
- P.J. Cawley, Charlie's Produce
- Sen. Rebecca Saldaña, WA State Legislature
- Tim Crosby, Thread Fund

Appendix B. Forum Priorities 2025-27

Following a multi-phase planning process beginning in April 2025, the Forum established five teams to advance the following priorities for the 2025-27 biennium:

Team Name	2025-27 Topical Priorities
Impacts of Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Water Supply for Agriculture and Food Production• Climate Resilience for Agriculture and Food Production
Agricultural Land Protection and Availability and Next Generation Farming	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Succession Planning and Incentives
Alleviating Barriers to Small and Mid-Scale Farm Viability and Market Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advanced Technical Expertise and Knowledge Transfer
Regional Food Infrastructure and Institutional Procurement for Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public-Private Partnership Models for Infrastructure Finance• Strategic Infrastructure Planning and Coordination
Food Insecurity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Food System Coordination for Food Security• Eligibility and Access for Food Assistance Program