

August 6 Food Policy Forum: Input Gathering Activity to Inform WSDA's Ag Viability Report Phase 2 Work

Focus opportunity areas:

Regulatory recalibration	Pro-active policymaking
Research, technology, & science	Farmer success & retention

Reflection questions for each topic:

1. Where have you seen something actually work for small and mid-scale farm viability, whether that came from funding, technical assistance, a partnership, a program, or a policy change?
2. What factors related to the small and mid-scale farming sector are important for WSDA, policymakers, or implementing practitioners to understand about “what works”?

Today's Focus: Small to mid-scale ag

Sample characteristics that differentiate this sector:

- Highly Diversified – across sector and within individual operations in terms of production and marketing
- Focused on “more direct” marketing in local and regional markets with differentiated products
- Complex production and sales operations, e.g. row crops and livestock, manufacture value added products, agritourism



Focus Opportunity Areas for Today's Session



Farmer Retention and Success

Supportive technical assistance, funding, farmland access, lowering barriers to entry.



Regulatory Recalibration

Research, programs, and incentives to support farmers and mitigate compliance burden.



Proactive Policy-Making

E.g., Food systems strategy, State Farm Bill, funding for climate change mitigation and adaptation.



Research, Technology and Science

Support systems for agricultural industry.

Topic 1: Regulatory Recalibration

QUESTION 1: Where have you seen something actually work for small and mid-scale farm viability re: **Regulatory Recalibration**, whether that came from funding, technical assistance, a partnership, a program, or a policy change?

Technical Assistance provided by USDA

On-farm poultry processing permits Ditto

Pierce County regulatory support (Dean) - investing in dedicated support person to assist farmers w/ permitting

Cottage Food permit

Farm infrastructure taxed at "highest and best use" commercial rates (property tax)

NGO/State governments supporting County governments/ag advisory committees in developing code change - ex. Slaughter houses, solar development, right to farm ordinance

It is much easier to ID what didn't work :/
Challenges often occur at the county level - health district or DCD. Commerce or WSDA could assist with TA in addition to WSDA or CDs

TA and Cost-share Provided by Conservation Districts

On farm ponds - regulations make it almost impossible to obtain permit to develop on farm ponds

Agriculture Exempt wells, allowed for diversified crop options, keeping the land in production and not houses

Allowing meat sales at farmers markets

Educating County Health Departments about safe ways to sell leafy greens at farmers markets

FSMA training

Iterative grant requirements and application processes to make it easier and more beneficial for small farmers. For example Compost Reimbursement Grant changes between the two years

Reimbursable grants are inaccessible to many small farms due to lack of capital - bridge loans would help

Partnership between programs that serve the same clients- reduce time burden + improve outcomes

Conservation District technical assistance and farms plans help new farmers familiarize themselves with region opportunities and combat environmental issues

LFPA grant funding Ditto!!!

WSU Extension helps growers understand existing regulatory requirements. Food Safety is a good example, WSDA helped too.

Many state agencies tell you what you must do, but don't explain their terminology. Navigation of regs is critical, but services like OIRA are under-resourced and relatively unknown.

Providing overhead / administrative support for multiple small producers (co-op model without req for it to be run by the members)

WA DOH Food Safety Advisory Council input into the review of the WA State Retail Food Code

Organic Certification Cost Share programs

WSU/PSA workshops on FSMA / produce safety

QUESTION 1: Where have you seen something actually work for small and mid-scale farm viability re: **Regulatory Recalibration**, whether that came from funding, technical assistance, a partnership, a program, or a policy change?

Pierce County is updating agritourism regulations in partnership with their Ag Advisory Commission to ensure farmer buy-in

Colorado recently passed ag OT at 50 hrs instead of 40 - policy change

Washington State Farm-to-School and Local Procurement (Strong partnership model)

Snohomish Co Ag Tech program - helping farms experiment with innovation risk-free

Maple syrup processing facilities and the ability to sell.

Snohomish County Ag tech lending library

Agritourism guidance from Commerce

WSDA Infrastructure Grant application is simplified / doesn't require traditional grant language

Changing policy (2008 bill) that allows schools to take higher bids if purchasing from WA producers helped create steady market channel for farmers

Good Food Procurement Policy in NY State

VSP



QUESTION 2: What **factors** related to the small and mid-scale farming sector are important for WSDA, policymakers, or implementing practitioners to understand about “what works”?

The creativity and grit of small and mid-scale farmers + food entrepreneurs are major assets to our state.

TA was effective because it was easily accessible by small producers, limited hurdles to access

“Cost” of regulatory burden (in terms of time required) is unique for small farms b/c they don't have dedicated staff to do paperwork

They are putting out “fires” (sometimes literally) and have to prioritize action in the moment. It can make it very difficult to comply with new regs

Many fall on a borderline of being exempt or covered by certain regulations and that status may change year to year so HOW to comply can be very difficult to understand

Having access to statewide Farm Finder map at a low cost and technical assistance where needed.

Language access, and tech are also factors. The best models for small producers involve direct in-person training offered in language of choice.

TA removed barriers to permitting through engineering support and cost-share allowed for implementation

How to put burden on regulatory agencies to understand ag, rather than put burden on ag to understand regulation?

Access to capital is very limited

Time needed and timing - what time of year things are needed

Assistance with financing land and infrastructure so as not to incur unmanageable long-term debt

Direct support for nonprofits that work one-on-one with producers to educate re policy and ensure/support compliance

There has been some success with part time CFO services. Perhaps part time compliance services would be beneficial.

Ditto on the limited capacity for paperwork and complicated record-keeping. Also diverse farms may have more record-keeping.

Shared regional aggregation, cold storage infrastructure

Information management demands vs reality actual practices

Small farmers don't have “office staff” to handle regulations, etc. They wear all the hats

These producers tend to be generalists versus specialists: in other words they often have to implement their business model, A- Z alone.

The growers who most need assistance don't know where to find it, and sometime that they need to look for it. OUTREACH!!

Farmers want to learn from each other. Peer to peer opportunities are key.

Food hubs

Awareness of limited literacy

Info in plain language and thoughtful translation of required/used jargon

QUESTION 2: What **factors** related to the small and mid-scale farming sector are important for WSDA, policymakers, or implementing practitioners to understand about “what works”?

increase the availability of regional-scale ag-related infrastructure (including processing, storage, aggregation, and distribution)

Having easy access to TA regarding production and financial management problems

Many challenges/opportunities for Washington ag are shared with the seafood sector. Opportunity for crossover/ collaboration

Markets are not available for all the food produced regionally - how to get more markets to buy more regional foodstuffs - more sales needed

They need to know where to go to get the info for funding, grants and loans. So many different organizations they don't know are out there.

Access to a variety of markets

Gran programs for equipment and resources

Second providing direct support to non-profits providing services to farmers

Identifying institutional sales opportunities that are “hard to reach” and require large investment

Flexibility with grants once awarded

Orienting grants and funding programs towards businesses

High cost of construction really limits this sector's growth potential

Topic 2: Pro-Active Policymaking

QUESTION 1: Where have you seen something actually work for small and mid-scale farm viability re: **Pro-Active Policymaking**, whether that came from funding, technical assistance, a partnership, a program, or a policy change?

Local Food System Infrastructure Grant

Incentives that encourage public procurement from WA and that allow for flexibility to accommodate different scales of procurement/production

Having support networks in place to answer processing questions (.e. The Green Book and WSDA Regional Markets Program)

State and local investments in ag conservation easements thru WWRP, FPLA, Conservation Futures, REET

Funding robust agricultural extension resources for sustainable agriculture at the local level.

Exempt High tunnels for land use and property tax purposes

Precision AG/carbon reduction grants.

Regional-scale ag-related infrastructure (including processing, storage, aggregation, and distribution)

Farm to Food Pantry / Commodity Donation Programs at WSDA

Compost reimbursement grant (RIP)

Sale tax exemption for equipment purchases at a farm auction.

Funding for water efficient technology infrastructure and implementation

WSDA F2FP program

Federal Local Food for Schools and LFPA

Values based purchasing by food banks

USDA Urban Ag programming

Fuel tax "reimbursement" from DOL and the ease of application (oops duplicate!)

On-farm ponds - making permits easier

WSDA Farm to School Program

Original fuel credit application process - especially for small acreage farms

Leg. response to Food Policy Forum Rec's related to COVID-19 emergency

NRCS and Conservation District funding and technical assistance

Strong relationship between local farms and local food banks

SCC's Sustainable Farms and Fields Programs other others provide integral support and technical assistance and funding.

QUESTION 1: Where have you seen something actually work for small and mid-scale farm viability re: **Pro-Active Policymaking**, whether that came from funding, technical assistance, a partnership, a program, or a policy change?

Reducing licensing fees and paperwork burdens.

Infrastructure grants and Soil Health Initiative funding

A policy change that is working for farmers with forests on their land (or at least has the potential to), is the newly reduced food safety regulatory burden for maple syrup processing

Reducing licensing fees and paperwork burdens.	Infrastructure grants and Soil Health Initiative funding	A policy change that is working for farmers with forests on their land (or at least has the potential to), is the newly reduced food safety regulatory burden for maple syrup processing			

QUESTION 2: What **factors** related to the small and mid-scale farming sector are important for WSDA, policymakers, or implementing practitioners to understand about “what works”?

Narratives about how bad it is out there are pervasive and powerful - we need to lift up stories of what's working and where farmers are thriving

Stop letting political affiliation get in the way of good policy that protects food systems

Farmers are subject matter experts with lived experience that should be trusted in policy development

Federal impacts on labor dynamics in the region

We need to invest in helping farmers become comfortable doing advocacy for themselves

This sector doesn't have a single voice or advocate

Many do not have formal education or high level of proficiency in “office” type tasks / admin

Farming is a culture, let's treat it as such

Understanding the unique challenges for BIPOC farmers and minority-owned farms

Funding of innovative programs and practices.

CCA funding to scale sourcing of surplus WA produce, protein, grain

Third party buyers and coops frequently have standards and rules already in place for food safety, regulation then becomes redundant, late and burdensome.

This sector represents the vast majority of farmers in our state- they matter to our whole ag sector and public connection to food.

differing scales of agriculture contribute to the viability of the whole industry in ways that are not always reflected by straight sales \$

Understand the diversity of business models within ag and the different experiences with policies

Considering all aspects of the business (incl processing, transport, mktg), not just production

Having enough time to educate decision makers/advocates about what works

Considering the entire state and all of its unique regions (not just where pop centers are)

The more complex the grant application, the more likely only those who don't need the grant will get it because they can afford a grant writer.

Time matters. Growers have narrow windows of action, and if you don't get an answer until later you miss the opportunity.

Lack of infrastructure and support services (ag lenders, insurance providers, large animal veterinarians, agronomy services) are an issue for Western WA

Need to help understanding legislative process and help investing time to follow up

Being able to overcome stereotypes based on personal experience alone

This sector does not have natural associations to provide a place for discussion and agreement on a policy response..

Topic 3: Research, Technology, and Science

QUESTION 1: Where have you seen something actually work for small and mid-scale farm viability re: **Research, Technology, and Science**, whether that came from funding, technical assistance, a partnership, a program, or a policy change?

WSU and IU research on virtual collars for grazing, both to prevent sacrifice areas and reduce fuel loads on private and public lands.

Strong local agricultural extension programs that serve diverse farmers across the state +1

Lending library like in Snohomish Co so folks can try before they buy

Robust compensation for producers participating in on-farm trials

Partnering with commodity groups in the PNW to jointly fund research projects that benefit all three states

Dry Farming
Collective research and education addressing climate change

Peer to peer education supported by extension researchers or other "experts" like WSU/Tilth Farm Walks

Western SARE programming and grants

Pilot projects like use of recycled water in King Co - help build buy-in

Soil test funding and interpretation support from CDs

Seaweed as fertilizer trials

Research and extension programs specific to small producers (plant breeding, processing, organic,...)

WSU food processing technical assistance connected to WSDA clients.

On-farm and participatory research (WSU Soils, BioAg, etc.)

Farmer led research - research grants

Soil moisture meters and soil mapping through the Snohomish County ag tech program *

Specialty Crop Block Grant Program for funding research projects

WSU Soils research on cover cropping, multi-species integration and no-till

CD equipment rental programs

WSU/WSDA food safety tech assistance and training

Workshops and webinars offered by the WSU Regional Small Farms Program

Peer to Peer learning opportunities

Focused training on key issues, sprayer calibration training partnership between WSU Extension and WSDA

More research on effective organic practices

QUESTION 2: What **factors** related to the small and mid-scale farming sector are important for WSDA, policymakers, or implementing practitioners to understand about “what works”?

Give this ag sector a chance to be first responders to new technology and research initiatives: they often do not have time to advocate for themselves but at the same time, often have experience as well as interest to try new things.

WSU Extensions need continued funding to be able to grow these partnerships for innovation

Allowing farmers to provide feedback on results, practicality, cost, etc.

Where we are asking farmers to try new practices, technology, we need to figure out how to mitigate their risk of production losses (provide a \$ backstop)

WSU Extension support is critical to the success of small farms - they have lost 36% of their employees due to budget cuts

Farmers generally not willing to switch production systems to accommodate new technology (e.g. agrivoltaics) we have to make tech work for existing crop systems

Purpose is to solve grounded issue, not just get a peer reviewed publication

technology “solutions” need to be scale-appropriate and cost-effective

Practices and technologies need to be cost-shared/cost incentivized for folks to afford to adopt them

Many if not most small farms utilize organic practices. Training on organic practices, research into organic systems

funding technical assistance partnerships that are long-term, on-going.

Answers questions that are unique to this sector. Research is not always (or even often) transferable from large-scale production to small-scale production

There is a great deal of tech out there for large scale agriculture (GIS, GPS, Precision Ag) but not much for small acreage farms

Ensure programs are accessible, in plain language, and not too “academic” for farmers to find it practical

Have a farmer-trusted partner. Associations, WSU, can help validate where something is tech assistance and not a hidden audit.

Rental programs allow farms to use technology without having to purchase the technology

Include recommendations. If you're afraid to say “do this” and just present research data, the point gets lost.

Topic 4: Farmer Success & Retention

QUESTION 1: Where have you seen something actually work for small and mid-scale farm viability re: **Farmer Success & Retention**, whether that came from funding, technical assistance, a partnership, a program, or a policy change?

Mentorship
supporting new
farmers

If farmers feel like
they are in
community with
other farmers they
are more likely to
keep farming +1

Dedicated coaching,
partnership, and
accountability through
the succession
planning process

Grants to address
financial barriers to
growth

Mental health
supports - free
therapy vouchers,
community spaces

Farm incubators

L&I Farm Intern
Program

EQIP cost-sharing
for conservation
practices

EQIP cost-sharing
for hoop houses

Farm start up
funding that helps
finance the basics

Specific technical
assistance and
programs like Ag of
the Middle

Having an
advocate
As well as a
supportive farm
community

1:1 support from
farmers market
org/staff with
immediate needs +
direct sales opps

Avenues for
non-familial to take
over farming
operations when
farmer retires.

ATF Farm
Navigators
supported by
USDA Funding

WSDA Handbook
for Small and Direct
Marketing Farms +

Washington
Farmland Trust
work to enable
farmland access

Programs that
provide
wrap-around
support to access
land, capital, AND
Markets

Cross promotion +
marketing of
products /
producers among
farmers mkt
shoppers

Grants (e.g. Local
Food Infrastructure)
that help businesses
finance growth in
ways that benefit the
system and other
businesses as well

Relationships +
networks
developed in
farmers market that
help with practical
issues

Cities investing in
farmers market
infrastructure

Buyer Produceri

YouTube is a great
resource for small
farming information
and education

QUESTION 1: Where have you seen something actually work for small and mid-scale farm viability re: **Farmer Success & Retention**, whether that came from funding, technical assistance, a partnership, a program, or a policy change?

Buyer producer networking to make new connections and learn how to sell to wholesalers

Advice and help entering new markets

Farmland preservation that helps farmland affordability for new farmers

Capital access is a critical factor, particularly during down-cycles. FSA loans, etc.

Farm internship programs

Other creative land access approaches, community land trusts, public land long term leases

Access to capital to buy farmer out

Ports investing in processing and storage infrastructure +1

Re: Mental health for farmers- Investing in telehealth has allowed for better access to care

Buy, Protect, Sell model for farmland and new farmers

Cultivating Success and Ag Vision programs to set farmers up for the next step

Health insurance discounts/group packages - seen a version of this in the marine trades - check out whatcom working waterfront

Farmers are often negatively stereotyped. We need to change the image of a farmer to scientist, climatologist, entomologist, botanist, business maven, soil scientist etc.

Health insurance is an issue - could we have a farmer insurance pool?

Value-chain coordination across sectors (i.e. schools and food assistance) that offer farms access to new and expanded local markets

Investments in healthcare and childcare for rural communities - Whatcom Health Children's Fund

Cost share programs through CDs

Engaging earned media to promote public's understanding of food, ag, farmers etc

Robust peer & cohort based business and financial planning programs like the past Ecotrust's Ag of the Middle program

USDA programs like Regional Food Business Centers focused on this sector in particular

QUESTION 2: What **factors** related to the small and mid-scale farming sector are important for WSDA, policymakers, or implementing practitioners to understand about “what works”?

Use the inherent trust that this ag sector in each other for advice: consider different peer-mentoring models.

Many farmers in this sector don't come from farming families or have deep knowledge. They are learning from scratch.

Many farmers in this sector are under insured and ill-prepared to weather crises +

Labor costs are crushing for small/medium farms ++

Need crop insurance models that support diversified producers and incentivize regen practices

Programs need to be clear about the type/scale of farmers they are trying to serve, and why

We tend to silo existing farmers from those in regional new farmer incubators: create meaningful ways for these folks to meet each other.

Many farmers in this sector do not have long-standing relationships with “traditional” ag support services so need help connecting and understanding the offerings from people who understand their business models

Traditional farm / crop insurance programs don't serve small acreage diversified farms well

Small and mid-scale farms lack equity to borrow against during crises. Taking 18 months to distribute disaster assistance is too late for small growers.

Many small farmers try to do it all themselves and get burned out

Farm programs and grants often are due in late summer due to the state fiscal cycle - and that is peak farm time

Urban and peri-urban communities need accurate information about agriculture and farming

Many lenders/business support programs are not familiar with these farm businesses and are reluctant to finance +1

+1 Access to health insurance is crucial for farmers b/c of the physical demands of farming

Access to knowledge-sharing networks

People need a break, esp during 'off season' if they have one

Migrant communities are important to small ag as well as large. We need viable options for seasonal or migrant farmworkers

Creating real pathways for beginning farmers to enter the industry. Land access, mentorship, community.

Empirical understanding of heterogeneity of “farmers” and models that can work

Recognizing the (unfunded) role of on-the-ground orgs play in making sure farmers access resources

Mitigating development pressure that render ag land inaccessible

There is a lack of infrastructure appropriately scaled for small farmers +

New models of farm and land “ownership create community - cooperative farms

QUESTION 2: What **factors** related to the small and mid-scale farming sector are important for WSDA, policymakers, or implementing practitioners to understand about “what works”?

Market certainty is needed for growers - how to provide market certainty within existing interstate commerce laws

Making it easier for small farms to access public procurement

Behavioral health crisis services are very limited in rural areas but greatly needed

Affordable housing for farm workers working on small farms is a huge issue

Programs and funding is often designed for large farms and less accessible to small farms

