

Food Policy Forum Meeting Summary

WASHINGTON STATE
FOOD POLICY FORUM

Thursday, August 6, 2026 • 1:00–4:00 PM

Key Takeaways

- The Forum continues to advance work across its priority areas, with current efforts focused on agricultural succession planning, water supply and climate resilience, food security, agricultural viability, and legislative engagement.
- Participants discussed wildfire impacts on agricultural communities and the need to explore ways that the state could improve disaster recovery, preparedness, and resilience.
- Participants provided input on successful approaches and key factors supporting small and mid-scale farm viability to inform Phase 2 of WSDA's Agricultural Viability Report.
- Participants received updates on the State Food Security Strategy and emerging legislative priorities including a State Farm Bill, Farm to School, Farm to Food Bank, and other initiatives.

Welcome & Opening Remarks

Petra Vallila-Buchman, Ross Strategic facilitator, welcomed participants and conducted roll call. Jon DeVaney, WA State Tree Fruit Association (WSTFA) and Forum Chair, provided an overview of the agenda and thanked participants for making time to attend the meeting despite many competing demands, including harvest demands and wildfire impacts. He noted that balancing competing priorities is a central theme of the Forum's work, as members coordinate across multiple initiatives and adapt their efforts to a changing policy landscape. Petra added that the agenda reflects the work of all five Forum working teams and emphasized that the discussions and guest presentations will help inform and advance the Forum's priority areas.

Agricultural Land Protection & Next Generation Farming Team Spotlight

Addie Candib, American Farmland Trust (AFT), and Caleb Gwerder, WA State Farm Bureau, previewed an upcoming learning session on agricultural succession planning during the October 1, 2026, Forum meeting. The session will feature an overview of succession planning and why it's important, a producer panel to ground the discussion in the lived experiences of farmers and ranchers, discussions of existing transition services in Washington, and successful models from other states. The goal is to help Forum members understand why intergenerational farm transfer is essential to the future of the state's food system, recognize the diverse transition needs of different types of producers, identify existing resources and service gaps, and explore policy options for future action. The group also emphasized applying an equity lens by considering the needs of producers across Washington state including beginning farmers, individuals from overburdened communities, long-time farm employees, and others seeking access to land, capital, markets, and succession resources to ensure opportunities are broadly accessible and effective.

Discussion

Addie Candib, AFT, invited participants to share questions they would like producers to address during the learning session. The questions generated are listed below:

- Consider framing questions to explore important succession-planning challenges without requiring participants to disclose sensitive personal or financial details such as financing farm transitions, managing equity and retirement needs, and formalizing family business roles and agreements to support successful generational transfers.
- What if you don't have any family members who are interested in taking on the business?
- What works well and what doesn't work well in your experience?
- What have you found to be supportive as you navigate the transition (e.g., resources, tools, people, programs) and what about that support was so helpful?
- Were there other succession planning approaches you considered? If so, what factors led you to choose a different path?
- Who have you consulted for advice (e.g., legal, financial, etc.)?
- What suggestions do you have to motivate/inspire/incentivize the next generation of farmers/producers, even if it is not your own family members?
- Any suggestions on how the planning process for farm transition can be addressed to increase the potential for success?
- What qualities make a successful "next generation" for a farm family or otherwise?
- What type of professional and financial expectations for satisfaction should one have taking over?
- What are qualities in a group or individual that would make farming not viable?
- What type of obstacles and repetition are endemic to farming that need to really be highlighted to the successors?
- Have conservation easements or the sale of development rights been considered as a financing tool to support farm succession, and if so, what role did they play in the process?

Impacts of Climate Change Team Spotlight: Ongoing Water & Climate Conversations

Piper Casey, Ross Strategic, provided an overview of the Impacts of Climate Change Team's priority work, which focuses on water supply for agriculture and food production. Team members highlighted recent activities and discussions. Chad Kruger, WSU Office of Research, provided a brief overview of the [Draft Columbia River Basin 2026 Long-term Water Supply and Demand Forecast](#) which includes new analysis of groundwater, drought, temporary worker housing, and water conservation, and noted the team plans to explore findings in greater depth. Jon DeVaney, WSTFA, shared about the [Washington's Water Future initiative](#) led by Ecology and highlighted it as an important opportunity to share how the Forum's water/climate recommendations can support this work. Richard Conlin, Conlin Partnership, described the purpose and intent of [this letter](#) to Governor Ferguson expressing appreciation for launching the initiative and highlighting existing work the Forum has developed that aligns its goals. Chris Voigt, WA State Potato Commission, highlighted recent and upcoming agricultural educational tours designed to connect policymakers with issues related to water, food production, food security, and climate resilience. He noted that one of the tours (September 10th in Skagit Valley) will include a presentation from WSU Extension about their farmer suicide prevention program. He acknowledged that fires, floods, and economic loss disasters take a toll on farmers' mental health.

Discussion – Impacts of Wildfires

Addie Candib, AFT, acknowledged the impacts of ongoing wildfires on farmers, ranchers, and farm workers, emphasizing the economic, physical, and mental health challenges facing agricultural communities and the importance of sharing resources to support resilience and recovery.

Forum members discussed opportunities for the Forum to further assess constraints facing the agricultural community and identify ways the state can better support disaster recovery. Participants noted that regulatory requirements, permitting processes, and site-specific inspections delay or prevent recovery efforts. Potential opportunities include streamlining permitting, providing exemptions, and more efficient approaches to clearing lots.

Additional topics raised included insurance limitations, ongoing mortgage obligations, the difficulty of rebuilding infrastructure, and poor air quality affecting farmers markets during peak harvest season, as market closures and reduced customer attendance impact farm income. Addie shared that AFT has been developing wildfire preparedness and resilience workshops specifically for agricultural producers, with the [next workshop](#) scheduled for September 12.

One participant provided an update on wildfire response efforts in Spokane and other affected communities, highlighting ongoing needs for financial contributions, shelf-stable food, and coordinated recovery support, and noting that long-term recovery efforts will continue well beyond the immediate response period. A Forum member shared information about disaster assistance available to affected residents (food, cash, and medical benefits) as well as extended SNAP replacement benefits for food spoilage. Another member shared that the WA State Farm Bureau is compiling a comprehensive list of local, state, and federal resources to share with producers. Participants shared information about organizations and resources supporting wildfire disaster recovery in the Zoom chat (see the list of resources in **Appendix A**).

WSDA's Ag Viability Phase 2 Report & Input Gathering Activity

Laura Raymond and Madison Roy, WA State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), provided an update on Phase 2 of WSDA's agricultural viability work. Building on the Phase 1 report, previous stakeholder engagement, and ongoing research, WSDA is identifying opportunities to positively influence agricultural viability across Washington. Emerging opportunity areas for the report include regulatory recalibration, proactive policymaking, market access, farmer retention and success, education and workforce, and research, technology, and science.

Through a [Google Slides sticky note activity](#), WSDA sought input on opportunities specifically focused on small and mid-scale farms, which are often highly diversified, market through local and regional channels, manage complex production and sales operations, and face unique opportunities and challenges compared to larger commodity producers.

All participants were invited to provide input across four opportunity areas (regulatory recalibration, proactive policymaking, farmer retention and success, and research, technology, and science), reflecting on:

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"?

The WSDA team will synthesize input from this activity to help inform the Phase 2 report. The full list of input provided is available in **Appendix B**.

Discussion

Participants emphasized the importance of understanding not only which programs and investments appear to be working, but also how their long-term impacts can be evaluated and measured. They highlighted the critical role that technical assistance, outreach, and administrative support play in helping small and mid-scale producers access programs and navigate regulations. Participants also reflected on the challenge of moving beyond identifying successful approaches toward building support and coalitions around effective tools and practices to help advance policy and legislative change.

State Food Security Strategy Implementation

Haley Morris, Ross Strategic, provided context on the Food Insecurity Team's role in supporting WSDA's development of the Statewide Food Security Strategy, and noted that "members of the Food Policy Forum" are named in the statute as a partner that WSDA must engage in developing the strategy. The team has been working with WSDA to determine how the Forum can best contribute to the process. Katie Rains, WSDA, shared that the Statewide Food Security Strategy, established through House Bill 2238, is intended to create a long-term framework for collaboration among state agencies and stakeholders to address food insecurity experienced during everyday conditions and emergencies, improve food system resilience, monitor system performance, and make more effective use of limited resources. Katie outlined the strategy development timeline and four-phase engagement process which includes encouraging broad stakeholder participation, food system mapping, data and research analysis, and the integration of existing knowledge to inform the strategy. Katie noted the importance of centering on perspectives of people with lived experience of food insecurity, BIPOC communities, producers, and small farmers, and noted that the Food Insecurity Team will be applying the Forum's equity filter to the strategy development process at its team meeting in September. Katie also invited folks to participate in the first of a series of Food System Mapping Partnership Meetings on August 25 (see details [here](#)). Meetings will continue through May 2027.

Discussion

One member asked how stakeholders will be engaged in the development of the proposed hunger safety-net dashboard. Katie shared that stakeholders identified in the strategy's community engagement and consultation process will have multiple opportunities to review and provide feedback on the dashboard's design, proposed data sets, and presentation approach through an iterative process, while also recognizing agency capacity and funding limitations. Another participant inquired about whether data will be collected on the number of people experiencing food insecurity by county. A Forum member shared that the Department of Health and Social Services tracks the number of people who are receiving food benefits by county in this [Briefing Book SFY 2025 Basic Food](#) (page 21).

State Farm Bill & Farm to School Planning

Representative Kristine Reeves, WA State Legislature, provided an overview of how food systems issues intersect with multiple legislative committees and policy areas, emphasizing that food security extends across the entire food system, from production and processing to distribution, access, assistance, and food waste. She reviewed recent legislative efforts, highlighted progress on initiatives such as the Food Security Strategy and funding protections and noted that several proposals may return in future sessions.

Looking ahead to 2027, Rep. Reeves shared several emerging legislative priorities under consideration, including a State Farm Bill, Farm to Schools and Farm to Food Banks initiatives, a new Farm to Hospitals proposal, grocery access and incentive policies, and SNAP-related issues. She emphasized the importance of connecting food security policies to the full food supply chain.

Discussion

One Forum member asked how the Forum can more effectively elevate its recommendations and support emerging legislative efforts. Rep. Reeves acknowledged that, while the Forum has been successful in developing recommendations, it does not fit neatly within the typical pathways through which policy proposals advance in the legislature, such as agency requests, advocacy organizations, or legislative champions. She identified this as a key challenge and opportunity for strengthening connections between the Forum's work and legislative processes. Participants also discussed agritourism opportunities and ways to incorporate the Forum's climate and water-related recommendations into future legislative efforts. They highlighted the importance of framing environmental and climate issues in ways that support agricultural and economic viability.

Closing Reflections & Next Steps

Petra noted that the next full Forum meeting is scheduled for **October 1, 2026**. Melissa Spear, Tilth Alliance and Forum Vice Chair, provided closing remarks and acknowledged the sense of urgency and anxiety many participants and communities are experiencing as wildfires and poor air quality continue to affect Washington. She expressed appreciation for strong participation and engagement throughout the meeting, noting that it reflects a shared commitment to addressing food system challenges and showcases the value of the Forum as a diverse coalition. Melissa also emphasized the importance of continuing the conversation about how to move the Forum's recommendations from development to implementation.

Appendix A. Wildfire Response and Recovery Resources

The following list reflects resources shared by participants in the Zoom chat. It is not intended to be a comprehensive inventory of all available resources or information.

Agency resources

- USDA - [Disaster Assistance for Agricultural Producers in Washington Impacted by Drought and Wildfire](#)
- WSDA – [2026 Wildfire Recovery Resources](#) oriented to agricultural producers
- Commerce - [Washington Wildfire Emergency: Support and Resources](#)

Spokane-specific resources

- [Spokane Regional Long Term Recovery Group](#)
- [Wildfire Response - Innovia Foundation](#)
- [Spokane Wildfire Employee Resource Guide - Google Docs](#)
- Spokane CD Post-Fire Assistance Request Form - [Post Fire Technical Assistance Request](#)
- [Community Leaders Announce Disaster Assistance Center and Resource Website for Fire Victims](#)
- [Washington VOAD](#) – Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster

Regional resources

- [Cedar Fund](#) of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation
- Okanogan CD Post-Fire Recovery Form - [Post-Wildfire Intake Form](#)
- Cascade Community Markets in Leavenworth: <https://www.cascademarkets.org/>

Other resources

- American Farmland Trust - Upcoming workshop (September 12, 2026): [Fire Resilience Workshop: Prescribed Burning and Grazing \(Cheney, WA\)](#)
- The L.I.G.H.T. Foundation (<https://thepnwlf.org/>) is developing a free, publicly available [Post-Wildfire Native Plant Restoration Directory](#) to provide native plant information and resources to Tribal Nation citizens and community members (free resource to all communities)
 - If you are an individual, business, nonprofit, or entity that works in the areas of native plant seed saving, plant propagation, habitat restoration, landscape design, permaculture, land stewardship, conservation, or associated funding, education or training - [fill out this form](#) to be added to the Directory.

Appendix B. Ag Viability Input Activity Results

The following section includes the complete results from the Google Slides sticky note input activity. The slides are also available [here](#).

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?*

- WSU/PSA workshops on FSMA / produce safety
- NGO/State governments supporting County governments/ag advisory committees in developing code change - ex. Slaughterhouses, solar development, right to farm ordinance
- Educating County Health Departments about safe ways to sell leafy greens at farmers markets
- LFPA grant funding +1

- Farm infrastructure taxed at “highest and best use” commercial rates (property tax)
- WA DOH Food Safety Advisory Council input into the review of the WA State Retail Food Code
- Partnership between programs that serve the same clients- reduce time burden + improve outcomes
- Agriculture exempt wells, allowed for diversified crop options, keeping the land in production and not houses
- Cottage Food permit
- Organic Certification Cost Share programs
- Conservation District technical assistance and farms plans help new farmers familiarize themselves with region opportunities and combat environmental issues
- Allowing meat sales at farmers markets
- Reimbursable grants are inaccessible to many small farms due to lack of capital - bridge loans would help
- 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)
- FSMA training
- Pierce County regulatory support (Dean) - investing in dedicated support person to assist farmers w/ permitting
- On farm ponds - regulations make it almost impossible to obtain permits to develop on farm ponds
- 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
- TA and cost-share provided by Conservation Districts
- On-farm poultry processing permits
- Technical Assistance provided by USDA
- Challenges often occur at the county level - health district or DCD. Commerce or WSDA could assist with TA in addition to WSDA or CDs
- Snohomish County Ag tech lending library
- Maple syrup processing facilities and the ability to sell.
- Good Food Procurement Policy in NY State
- Snohomish Co Ag Tech program - helping farms experiment with innovation risk-free
- VSP
- Washington State Farm-to-School and Local Procurement (Strong partnership model)
- Changing policy (2008 bill) that allows schools to take higher bids if purchasing from WA producers helped create steady market channel for farmers
- WSDA Infrastructure Grant application is simplified / doesn’t require traditional grant language
- Colorado recently passed ag OT at 50 hrs. instead of 40 - policy change
- Pierce County is updating agritourism regulations in partnership with their Ag Advisory Commission to ensure farmer buy-in
- Agritourism guidance from Commerce

*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”?*

- Info in plain language and thoughtful translation of required/used jargon
- Having access to statewide Farm Finder map at a low cost and technical assistance where needed.
- Assistance with financing land and infrastructure so as not to incur unmanageable long-term debt
- Small farmers don't have “office staff” to handle regulations, etc. They wear all the hats
- 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
- Food hubs
- Shared regional aggregation, cold storage infrastructure
- Access to capital is very limited
- 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
- Awareness of limited literacy
- Information management demands vs reality actual practices
- Time needed and timing - what time of year things are needed
- Ditto on the limited capacity for paperwork and complicated record-keeping. Also, diverse farms may have more record-keeping.
- 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.
- Direct support for nonprofits that work one-on-one with producers to educate re policy and ensure/support compliance
- “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
- How to put burden on regulatory agencies to understand ag, rather than put burden on ag to understand regulation?
- There has been some success with part time CFO services. Perhaps part-time compliance services would be beneficial.
- TA removed barriers to permitting through engineering support and cost-share allowed for implementation
- TA was effective because it was easily accessible by small producers, limited hurdles to access
- The creativity and grit of small and mid-scale farmers + food entrepreneurs are major assets to our state.
- Language access, and tech are also factors. The best models for small producers involve direct in-person training offered in language of choice.
- Access to a variety of markets
- High cost of construction really limits this sector's growth potential
- 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.
- Flexibility with grants once awarded
- Markets are not available for all the food produced regionally - how to get more markets to buy more regional foodstuffs - more sales needed

- Orienting grants and funding programs towards businesses
- Many challenges/opportunities for Washington ag are shared with the seafood sector. Opportunity for crossover/ collaboration
- Identifying institutional sales opportunities that are “hard to reach” and require large investment
- Second providing direct support to non-profits providing services to farmers
- Having easy access to TA regarding production and financial management problems
- increase the availability of regional-scale ag-related infrastructure (including processing, storage, aggregation, and distribution)
- Grant programs for equipment and resources

Pro-active policy making

*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?*

- SCC’s Sustainable Farms and Fields Programs other others provide integral support and technical assistance and funding.
- Exempt High tunnels for land use and property tax purposes
- Funding for water efficient technology infrastructure and implementation
- On-farm ponds - making permits easier
- Funding robust agricultural extension resources for sustainable agriculture at the local level.
- NRCS and Conservation District funding and technical assistance
- USDA Urban Ag programming
- Compost reimbursement grant (RIP)
- State and local investments in ag conservation easements thru WWRP, FPLA, Conservation Futures, REET
- Strong relationship between local farms and local food banks
- Fuel tax “reimbursement” from DOL and the ease of application (oops duplicate!)
- Sale tax exemption for equipment purchases at a farm auction.
- Values based purchasing by food banks
- 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
- WSDA F2FP program
- Having support networks in place to answer processing questions (e.g., The Green Book and WSDA Regional Markets Program)
- Farm to Food Pantry / Commodity Donation Programs at WSDA
- Federal Local Food for Schools and LFPA
- Regional-scale ag-related infrastructure (including processing, storage, aggregation, and distribution)
- Incentives that encourage public procurement from WA and that allow for flexibility to accommodate different scales of procurement/production
- Local Food System Infrastructure Grant
- Precision AG/carbon reduction grants.

- 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
- Infrastructure grants and Soil Health Initiative funding
- Reducing licensing fees and paperwork burdens.

*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”?*

- This sector does not have natural associations to provide a place for discussion and agreement on a policy response.
- This sector doesn't have a single voice or advocate
- Third party buyers and coops frequently have standards and rules already in place for food safety, regulation then becomes redundant, late and burdensome.
- Considering the entire state and all its unique regions (not just where pop centers are)
- We need to invest in helping farmers become comfortable doing advocacy for themselves
- Need to help understanding legislative process and help investing time to follow up
- Considering all aspects of the business (incl processing, transport, marketing), not just production
- Funding of innovative programs and practices.
- Federal impacts on labor dynamics in the region
- Being able to overcome stereotypes based on personal experience alone
- Having enough time to educate decision makers/advocates about what works
- CCA funding to scale sourcing of surplus WA produce, protein, grain
- Understand the diversity of business models within ag and the different experiences with policies
- 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
- This sector represents the vast majority of farmers in our state - they matter to our whole ag sector and public connection to food.
- Farmers are subject matter experts with lived experience that should be trusted in policy development
- Understanding the unique challenges for BIPOC farmers and minority-owned farms
- differing scales of agriculture contribute to the viability of the whole industry in ways that are not always reflected by straight sales \$
- Farming is a culture, let's treat it as such
- Stop letting political affiliation get in the way of good policy that protects food systems
- 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
- Many do not have formal education or high level of proficiency in “office” type tasks / admin

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?*

- More research on effective organic practices
- Dry Farming Collective research and education addressing climate change
- Research and extension programs specific to small producers (plant breeding, processing, organic)
- WSU Soils research on cover cropping, multi-species integration and no-till
- Partnering with commodity groups in the PNW to jointly fund research projects that benefit all three states
- Peer to Peer learning opportunities
- Soil moisture meters and soil mapping through the Snohomish County ag tech program
- Soil test funding and interpretation support from CDs
- Robust compensation for producers participating in on-farm trials
- Focused training on key issues, sprayer calibration training partnership between WSU Extension and WSDA
- Specialty Crop Block Grant Program for funding research projects
- Seaweed as fertilizer trials
- Farmer led research - research grants
- CD equipment rental programs
- WSU/WSDA food safety tech assistance and training
- Workshops and webinars offered by the WSU Regional Small Farms Program
- WSU food processing technical assistance connected to WSDA clients.
- Lending library like in Snohomish Co so folks can try before they buy
- Pilot projects like use of recycled water in King Co - help build buy-in
- On-farm and participatory research (WSU Soils, BioAg, etc.)
- Western SARE programming and grants
- Strong local agricultural extension programs that serve diverse farmers across the state +1
- WSU and IU research on virtual collars for grazing, both to prevent sacrifice areas and reduce fuel loads on private and public lands.
- Peer to peer education supported by extension researchers or other “experts” like WSU/Tilth Farm Walks

*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”?*

- 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
- WSU Extension support is critical to the success of small farms - they have lost 36% of their employees due to budget cuts
- Ensure programs are accessible, in plain language, and not too “academic” for farmers to find it practical
- Many if not most small farms utilize organic practices. Training on organic practices, research into organic systems.

- 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)
- Include recommendations. If you're afraid to say, "do this" and just present research data, the point gets lost.
- Have a farmer-trusted partner. Associations, WSU, can help validate where something is tech assistance and not a hidden audit.
- There is a great deal of tech out there for large scale agriculture (GIS, GPS, Precision Ag) but not much for small acreage farms
- Rental programs allow farms to use technology without having to purchase the technology
- funding technical assistance partnerships that are long-term, on-going.
- Allowing farmers to provide feedback on results, practicality, cost, etc.
- Practices and technologies need to be cost-shared/cost incentivized for folks to afford to adopt them
- Answers questions that are unique to this sector. Research is not always (or even often) transferable from large-scale production to small-scale production
- technology "solutions" need to be scale-appropriate and cost-effective
- WSU Extensions need continued funding to be able to grow these partnerships for innovation
- 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.
- Purpose is to solve grounded issue, not just get a peer reviewed publication

Farmer retention and success

*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?*

- Farm incubators
- Having an advocate as well as a supportive farm community
- YouTube is a great resource for small farming information and education
- Programs that provide wrap-around support to access land, capital, AND Markets
- Mental health supports - free therapy vouchers, community spaces
- Re: Mental health for farmers - Investing in telehealth has allowed for better access to care
- Cities investing in farmers market infrastructure
- WSDA Handbook for Small and Direct Marketing Farms +1
- Farm startup funding that helps finance the basics
- Grants to address financial barriers to growth
- Buyer Producer
- Washington Farmland Trust work to enable farmland access
- Specific technical assistance and programs like Ag of the Middle
- ATF Farm Navigators supported by USDA Funding
- 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

- 1:1 support from farmers market org/staff with immediate needs + direct sales opportunities
- Dedicated coaching, partnership, and accountability through the succession planning process
- EQIP cost-sharing for hoop houses
- Avenues for non-familial to take over farming operations when farmer retires.
- EQIP cost-sharing for conservation practices
- If farmers feel they are in community with other farmers, they are more likely to keep farming +1
- Mentorship supporting new farmers
- L&I Farm Intern Program
- Other creative land access approaches, community land trusts, public land long term leases
- Health insurance discounts/group packages - seen a version of this in the marine trades - check out Whatcom working waterfront
- Farm internship programs
- USDA programs like Regional Food Business Centers focused on this sector in particular
- Investments in healthcare and childcare for rural communities - Whatcom Health Children's Fund
- Buy, Protect, Sell model for farmland and new farmers
- Capital access is a critical factor, particularly during down-cycles. FSA loans, etc.
- Cultivating Success and Ag Vision programs to set farmers up for the next step
- Value-chain coordination across sectors (i.e. schools and food assistance) that offer farms access to new and expanded local markets
- 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
- Farmers are often negatively stereotyped. We need to change the image of a farmer to scientist, climatologist, entomologist, botanist, business maven, soil scientist etc.
- Farmland preservation that helps farmland affordability for new farmers
- Health insurance is an issue - could we have a farmer insurance pool?
- Ports investing in processing and storage infrastructure +1
- Advice and help entering new markets
- Buyer producer networking to make new connections and learn how to sell to wholesalers
- Access to capital to buy farmer out

*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"?*

- New models of farm and land "ownership create community - cooperative farms
- Programs need to be clear about the type/scale of farmers they are trying to serve, and why
- Farm programs and grants often are due in late summer due to the state fiscal cycle - and that is peak farm time
- Migrant communities are important to small ag as well as large. We need viable options for seasonal or migrant farm workers
- Need crop insurance models that support diversified producers and incentivize regen practices
- Mitigating development pressure that render ag land inaccessible
- Access to knowledge-sharing networks

- 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.
- Labor costs are crushing for small/medium farms +2
- There is a lack of infrastructure appropriately scaled for small farmers +1
- People need a break, especially during 'off season' if they have one
- Many small farmers try to do it all themselves and get burned out
- Access to health insurance is crucial for farmers b/c of the physical demands of farming +1
- 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
- Urban and peri-urban communities need accurate information about agriculture and farming
- Many farmers in this sector are under insured and ill-prepared to weather crises +
- Traditional farm / crop insurance programs don't serve small acreage diversified farms well
- Many lenders/business support programs are not familiar with these farm businesses and are reluctant to finance +1
- 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
- Many farmers in this sector don't come from farming families or have deep knowledge. They are learning from scratch.
- Use the inherent trust that this ag sector in each other for advice: consider different peer-mentoring models.
- We tend to silo existing farmers from those in regional new farmer incubators: create meaningful ways for these folks to meet each other.
- Programs and funding is often designed for large farms and less accessible to small farms
- Affordable housing for farm workers working on small farms is a huge issue
- Behavioral health crisis services are very limited in rural areas but greatly needed
- Making it easier for small farms to access public procurement
- Market certainty is needed for growers - how to provide market certainty within existing interstate commerce laws

Appendix C. Topical Team Rosters

Below is the list of 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
- 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

- Nate Lewis, WA Farmland Trust
- Tom Salzer, WA Association of Conservation Districts

Food Insecurity Team

- Aaron Czyzewski, Food Lifeline
- Anna Nepomuceno, Northwest Harvest
- Brice Montgomery, WA Dept. of Social and Health Services
- Brittany Tybo, WA Dept. of Health
- 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
- Marie Spiker, UW Food Systems, Nutrition, and Health

Impacts of Climate Change Team

- Caleb Gwerder, WA Farm Bureau
- Chad Kruger, WSU Office of Research
- 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
- Laura Raymond, on behalf of the Director of the WA State Dept. of Agriculture
- Marcia Ostrom, WSU Food Systems Program
- Melissa Spear, Tilth Alliance
- Melissa Spear, Tilth Alliance
- P.J. Cawley, Charlie's Produce

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
- P.J. Cawley, Charlie's Produce
- Sen. Rebecca Saldaña, WA State Legislature
- Tim Crosby, Thread Fund

Appendix D. 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	• Water Supply for Agriculture and Food Production • 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	• Advanced Technical Expertise and Knowledge Transfer
Regional Food Infrastructure and Institutional Procurement for Economic Development	• Public-Private Partnership Models for Infrastructure Finance • Strategic Infrastructure Planning and Coordination
Food Insecurity	• Food System Coordination for Food Security • Eligibility and Access for Food Assistance Program