

THROUGH OUR 10-YEAR PLAN FOR AN
EQUITABLE & SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEM

WHATCOM BUILDS A TABLE
WHERE EVERYONE EATS

Food System Committee Report

June 24, 2025

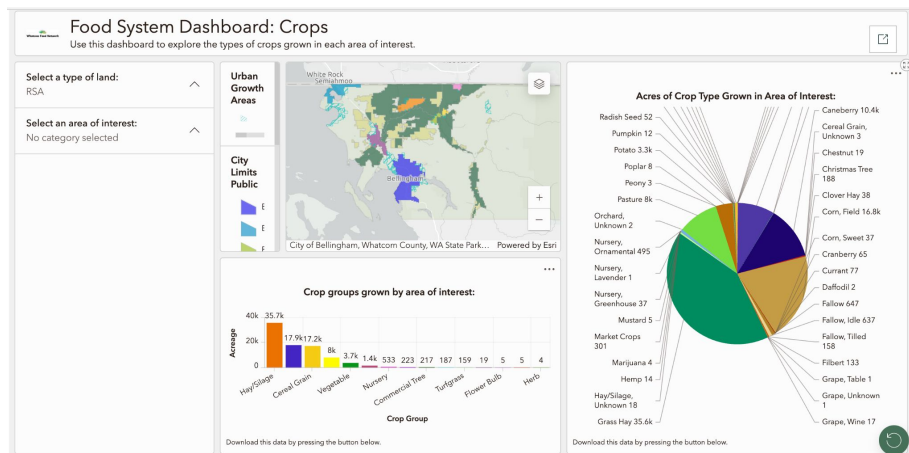
Whatcom County Council

Rhys-Thorvald Hansen, Committee Chair



Whatcom County
HEALTH
Department

Implementation Highlight: Food System Dashboard



The Dashboard is broken in 5 interactive modules:

- **Land:** prime soils, conservation land and enrolled open space agriculture properties
- **Water:** fish passage barriers by subbasin
- **Crops:** types of crops grown in each area
- **Human Food Web:** production facilities and farmworker housing
- **Access:** community health and food access by school district

1.3.6 Fund and support the Food System Committee in the creation and maintenance of a food system information dashboard, building on the Washington State Health Disparities map, co-created with input from essential food systems workers across sectors that reflect the diversity of our communities

Implementation Partner Highlight: Twin Sisters Mobile Market



Photo courtesy of Twin Sisters Mobile Market.

Collaborative Partnerships to keep our neighbors fed:

- Collaborated with Sen. Sharon Shewmake's office to pass legislation that will allow mobile farmers markets across WA state to accept WIC and Farmers Market Nutrition Program payments
- Partnered with Nooksack Indian Tribe to launch a new mobile market location at the Nooksack Tribal Health Clinic; and launched "Nooksack Fresh," a new voucher program that allowed 80 tribal families and elders to receive a voucher card worth \$550 to spend at TSM during the 2025 market season.

4.3.2 Ensure consistent funding for and increase the number of farmers markets and food outlets that accept nutrition incentive programs for SNAP recipients

4.3.3 Work with WIC to expand its services to stores and markets in underserved areas (i.e., the foothills region)



Illustration courtesy of Whatcom Food Network

Since January 2025 our local food system is experiencing:

- Devastating cuts to federal food bank funding
- Projected reductions to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) funding will increase burden on local food banks
- SNAP-Ed may be fully eliminated, after 30 years in Whatcom County
- Federally-funded grants programs supporting new and beginning farmers, local research, and food systems infrastructure development are freezing funds or have ceased to exist
- Increase in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) activity impacting local and regional farmworkers and their families

Local organizations are reporting that local philanthropic fund investment is declining too

Sector Highlight: Food Access

What those working to keep our communities fed want you to know:

“April 2025 saw our highest client count ever. Not only are we losing federal support, but we are also seeing increased need for our services. This is the case for food banks countywide. Although the support we have thus far is deeply appreciated, it’s not enough.”

“Everyday the number of people who are food and/or housing insecure is rising and if the current federal budget passes, this number will rise catastrophically beyond the capacity of every organization to meet the needs of the community. Every organization I know is already over extended.”

“The uncertainty is challenging, not knowing what to expect month to month in terms of incoming food, will SNAP be cut and bring more people to the food bank, we continue to do our best but know we are not fully meeting the needs of those in our communities. Some are visiting multiple food banks which is an inefficient use of their time but necessary to feed their families.”

“Food banks just lost significant funding from the federal government and if food stamps are cut it will be devastating.”

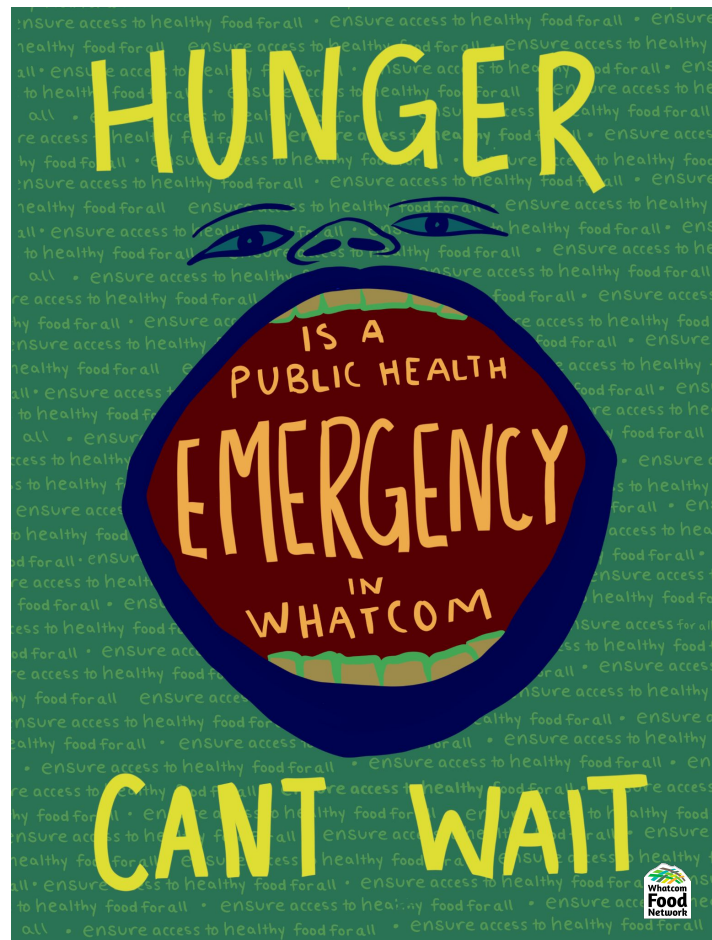


Illustration courtesy of Whatcom Food Network

Sector Highlight: Labor



La Marcha Campesina photo courtesy of Community to Community Development. Photo by Sattva Photo

- Food System Committee is the only County Advisory Committee with representation from labor groups, critical opportunity for partnership in economic development
- Local government needs to work with Whatcom County's farmworker led organizations to monitor the H-2A Visa program
- There is also the need to partner with unions and organizations led by and for food systems workers to invest in workforce development activities already in progress (Food System Plan actions 3.3.1 and 3.3.2)
- Please read detailed report attached in supplemental materials

The Food System Plan is in danger



- **Committee Vacancies include:**
 - Local Sales Farming
 - Processing and Distribution
 - Fishing
 - Export Sales Farmer rep has not attended in over 12 months
- **Inadequate Staffing:** 5 hours per month is not enough for basic administrative functioning to comply with Open Public Meetings Act, yet alone committee work
- **Federal Funding:** Federal implementation grants have funding freezes, or have disappeared completely

Our requests to County Council

- The 10 Year Food System Plan was designed for exactly these challenges: **We ask the County Council to direct the Health Department to re-invest in the Food System Committee and our capacity to serve our purpose:** implementing provide oversight for, and regularly update a county-wide food system plan to strengthen our local and regional food system.
- We must ensure people are fed above all else: **We ask the County Council to make a commitment to ongoing funding of the Food Bank Network and food access organizations working in urban and rural settings.**
- The County Comprehensive Plan update sets our priorities for the next decade. **We ask the County Council to integrate the 10-Year Food System Plan and the Food System Committee recommendations into the 2025 Comprehensive Plan** Chapter 7 (Economics), Chapter 8 (Land Use), and Chapter 12 (Climate)

WE CANNOT
CREATE
EFFECTIVE
POLICY

WE HAVE A
TOOL FOR
SYSTEMS CHANGE

INVEST IN
IMPLEMENTING
THE 10-YEAR
FOOD SYSTEM
PLAN

BY THE
SLICE



Illustration courtesy of Whatcom Food Network