



Food System Committee Report

June 23, 2026

Whatcom County Council

Rhys-Thorvald Hansen, Committee Co-Chair



WHATCOM COUNTY
HEALTH AND
COMMUNITY
SERVICES



Illustration courtesy of Whatcom Food Network

Statewide Food Security Plan



EHSB 2238 “The legislature intends to provide for the development of a strategy for statewide food security in order to end hunger, reduce diet-related health disparities, and increase agricultural viability and supply chain resilience.”

The Statewide Food Security Plan will focus on assessment through the lens of

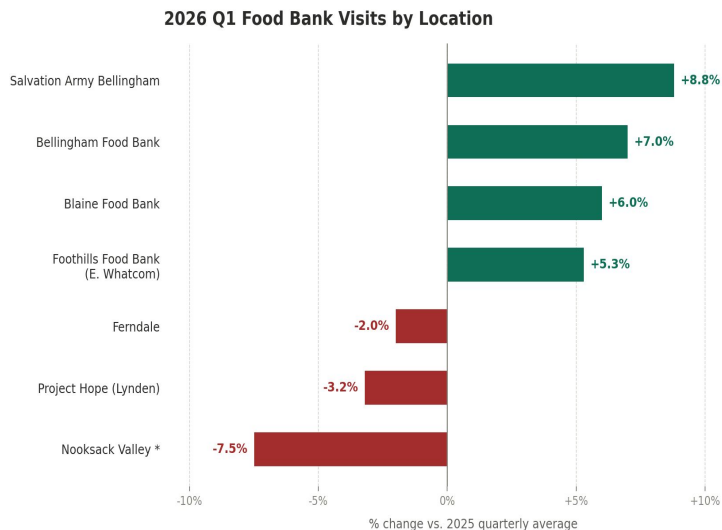
- Supply Chain Resilience
- Agricultural Viability
- Food Access

Will be presented to Legislative Committees in 2027

Whatcom County Food System Committee celebrates this collaborative effort to to pass this legislation and collect data. Many of these challenges can only be solved when local, regional and state efforts are aligned.

Sector Highlight: Food Access

The Food Access Gap Continues to Widen:



* Decrease in Nooksack Valley likely reflects reduced access due to federal immigration enforcement, not reduced need.

- Whatcom County distributed 13.2 million pounds of food in 2025- the highest volume on record, across 350,000 visits
- Cuts to The Emergency Food Assistance Program and the Local Food Purchase Assistance in Spring 2025 cost local hunger relief organizations \$850k
- Changes to SNAP, WIC, and FMNP eligibility are projected to significantly increase food insecurity among the ~31,000 Whatcom County Residents that rely on these programs
- Nationally, about one third of working-age adults living with children are [reporting food insecurity](#)
- [Click here to read the full sector report](#)

Sector Highlight: Agriculture



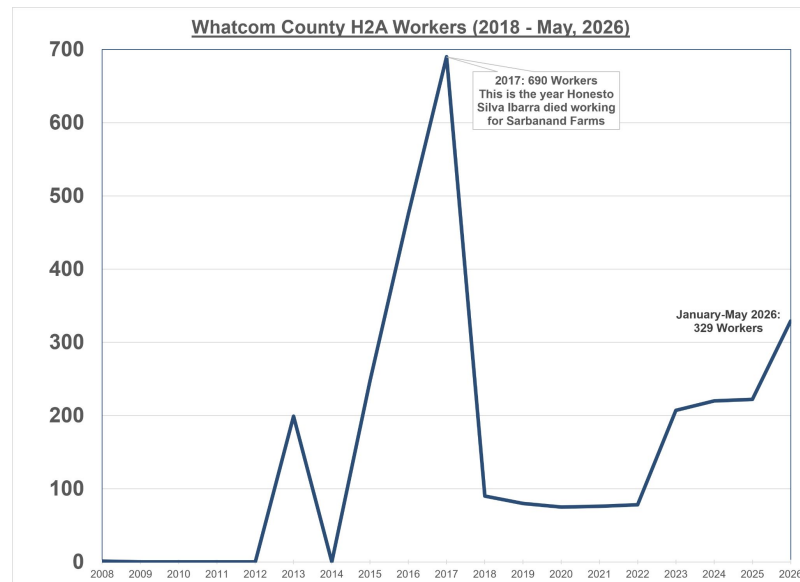
Illustration courtesy of Whatcom Food Network

- Washington State Farmers were [ranked last in the nation](#) for take home pay in 2024
- Agricultural production alone contributes 12.9 billion to Washington State economy
- [WSDA Report Washington Agriculture at a Crossroads](#) highlights key continuing challenges
 - rising input costs
 - labor and workforce concerns
 - trade challenges
 - increase land costs and development pressure
 - growing urban-rural divide
 - changing climate conditions
 - declines in research funding
 - infrastructure challenges
- More farmers in Whatcom are turning to H2-A visa labor in an effort to control costs, but the ripples are felt throughout the food system and our communities

**Ag Viability Collapse Reflects a Darker Reality;
Food Chain Viability Collapse:**

Sector Highlight: Labor

- State law requires that farms hire local workers, but data from ASWS and ESD suggests that compliance is low, and enforcement nonexistent. Only 11 local workers were hired in 2025 to offset more than 35,000 H2A visa contract requests.
- Local farmworkers in Whatcom County are being displaced from farmworker housing to make way for incoming H2A visa workers. Many of these families are now homeless.
- Local food banks are subsidizing the H2A visa program and the farmers who hire them in the form of weekly food boxes to H2A farmworkers
- There are currently 7 farms in Whatcom County with active H2A contracts, totalling 329 workers
- [Click here to see the full Sector Report on H2A visas in Whatcom County](#)



H2A appears to offer solutions, but the impacts are absorbed elsewhere in the food system

The illusion of community partnership has become an obstacle to accomplishing the goals of the Food System Committee

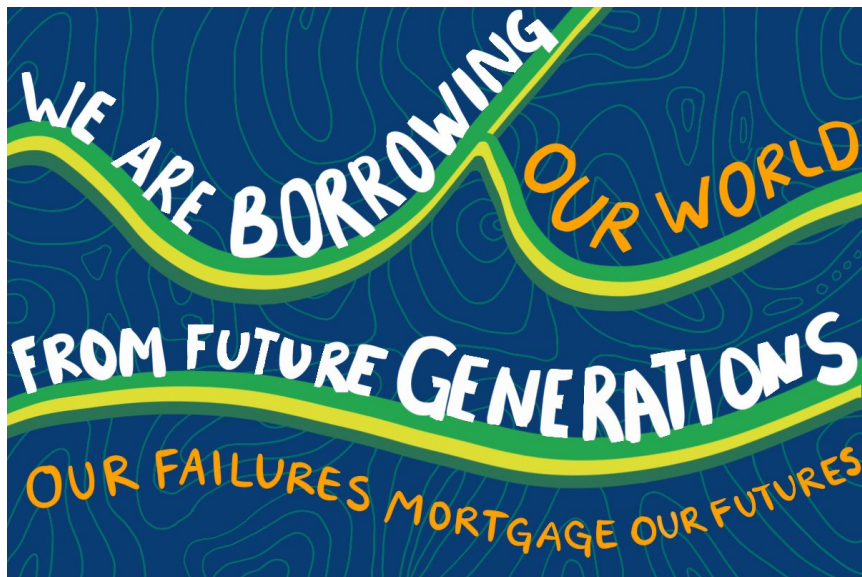


Illustration courtesy of Whatcom Food Network

Our committee structure and responsibilities were designed with the assumption of Health Department and Whatcom County support, and function sub-optimally in the absence of that support

- Our communities are committed to the goals of the food system plan, but look to the Food System Committee for leadership and capacity that we do not have.
- Our local food system is in poly crisis; felt most acutely by food access organizations, agricultural producers and related supply chain, and the local farm workforce.
- Solutions that help support all three are possible, but cannot succeed in isolation

Community Commitment to the Food System Plan

- [Whatcom County residents have not given up on the Food System Plan](#), and we ask the Health Department and County Executive to not give up on us
- Efforts to save money now by reducing support for the plan will cost more in the long run as we fail to address challenges upstream
- Conducting a Community Food Assessment will give Whatcom County the data needed to make strategic decisions that have a long-term impact



COMMUNITY DECLARATION OF OUR COMMITMENT TO THE 10-YEAR FOOD SYSTEM PLAN

WHEREAS, our ecosystem and food systems are interdependent; and collaboration, reciprocity and trust will build regenerative communities for healthy foods, people, and planet.

WHEREAS, there is pervasive food insecurity in Whatcom County despite enough land and labor to grow enough food to feed us all.

WHEREAS, we see the need to ensure all agricultural land in whatcom county shall remain zoned as such indefinitely.

WHEREAS, there is more than enough wealth to provide equitable access to healthy, affordable, culturally appropriate foods.

WHEREAS, there are many small neighborhoods and pockets of Whatcom County where people do not have easy, reliable and affordable access to groceries without a personal vehicle or accessible bus stop.

WHEREAS, many community members do not feel safe going out in public and accessing food

WHEREAS, one in five residents of Whatcom County face food insecurity

WHEREAS, the workers powering our food systems face economic insecurity and human rights violations

WHEREAS, farmworker labor is essential to a healthy food system, and farmworkers deserve the same rights as all workers for safe working conditions and the right to organize

WHEREAS, Whatcom County's population is growing, and we need to balance affordable farmland, household economic stability, and equitable access to locally produced foods

THEREFORE, NOW SHALL IT BE RESOLVED, that we the members of Whatcom Food Network affirm our commitment to implementing the goals, objectives, and actions of the 10 year food system plan for an equitable and resilient food system in Whatcom County.

March 12, 2026

Whatcom Needs a Community Food Assessment



Systemic analysis will provide a roadmap to solutions that lift all boats

- A Community Food Assessment collects data across sectors, with key informant interviews, focus groups, and is grounded in the realities people across the food system are navigating
- This wholistic approach allows the researchers to identify opportunities to make policy changes that benefit multiple sectors and communities
- The last Community Food Assessment data was collected before Covid-19 (published in 2021) and reflects a radically different food system than we are currently navigating
- Efforts by the Whatcom Food Network to fundraise for this through private foundations have been challenged by funder beliefs that this is a government responsibility

Committee Recommendations to Support the Local Food System

- Funding the Food System Committee and our work toward implementation will save money in the long term, and build community resilience.
 - A update to the 2021 Community Food Assessment will empower the county and community organizations in taking strategic, collaborative action
- Continue funding the Whatcom County Food Bank Network.
 - Expand and stabilize SNAP-accepting venues and nutrition incentive programs, and support WIC and SFMNP retailer expansion in underserved areas
 - Assess food bank infrastructure capacity in anticipation of rising demand
- Until the next budget cycle, consider other opportunities to demonstrate support and collaboration. Partnership is possible even when funding falls short.

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