Wallowa County Bounty

2015 Addendum to Wallowa County's Community Food Assessment

RARE
Resource Assistance for Rural Environments

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Northeast Oregon Economic Development District
GROWING BUSINESS :: STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES

Oregon FOOD BANK SM

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Photo Credit: Maarten Dankers

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Purpose

Since the completion of the Wallowa County Community Food Assessment (CFA) in 2012, much has been accomplished to strengthen local food production and processing, increase consumer access to local food, and to further organize efforts surrounding food systems initiatives. This report provides updated information on activities that resulted from that assessment as well as other efforts to strengthen food systems in Wallowa County.

Introduction

The Wallowa County CFA grounded community members working in food systems by assessing current conditions and defining what still needed to be done. Three goal-areas were assessed: local food production and processing, food access and consumer availability, and community food system development efforts. Twenty-one opportunities were identified within these goal-areas to describe potentially impactful strategies. This addendum is organized first by goal-area and then by opportunities that have seen progress or change since 2012.

Citizens and organizations have made impressive progress towards many of these opportunities in subsequent years and their efforts are chronicled in this report. As is the case with all planning, new opportunities have presented themselves while some of the original opportunities have not proven fruitful or have been tabled in favor of other strategies. While much remains to be done, the progress towards a more local, equitable, and vibrant food system in Wallowa County continues to move forward.

Local Food Production and Processing

Bear Creek Gardens salad mix

Many opportunities for local food producers have presented themselves since the 2012 CFA. Producers in the lower valley (Wallowa and Lostine) have further organized: the Lower Valley Farmers Market has become more established, and network of growers in the lower valley began selling to restaurants and a natural food store in 2014 as a "test run." The growers' network formalized their membership and prices in 2015. The opening of a farm-to-table restaurant in 2014 in Wallowa County has provided producers throughout the valley with opportunities to consistently direct-market their wholesale products. Because food system organizers in Wallowa County have forged relationships with key players from the Willamette Valley, local organizations have increasingly taken advantage of state-wide community food system development efforts. Finally, local organizations have continued and increased opportunities for producers to build their business planning and marketing skill-sets.

Local Food Production and Processing

2012 Agricultural Census

Large-to medium-scale commodity farmers in Wallowa County have benefited from the nation-wide increase of commodity prices in recent years. The 2012 Agricultural Census shows that the number of farms in Wallowa County grossing over $250,000 a year experienced a 216% increase from 2002 to 2012; the number of farms in the county remained relatively the same, meaning that higher commodity prices greatly increased annual gross sales of existing farms. Land purchases by second home owners, outside investors, and new retirees moving to the area have continued to inflate the price of agricultural land. The cost of land more than doubled from 2002 to 2012, while total land in farms decreased by 12.7%. This decrease in availability of land, coupled with an increase in price per acre, could certainly create a barrier to new producers. The total number of farms rose, however, by 4%, suggesting that new and existing farms are operating with less acreage. Finally, farm direct sales per capita rose 179% between 2002 and 2012, with $12.87 in farm direct sales per person in 2002, and $35.92 per person in 2012. Although this increase partially speaks to Wallowa County's low population, it certainly points to both an increase in availability of direct-marketed goods from Wallowa County producers and a surge in interest among consumers, both within and outside of the county, to buy directly from producers.

Strengthen collaboration among producers

Producer networks

In 2011, June Colony started June's Local Market Producer Network LLC. Colony attempted to bring producers from Wallowa and Lostine together to pool their produce for sale to restaurants and small grocery stores. June charged a small brokerage fee and found that producers sought to go around the network and sell directly to buyers in order to avoid the fee. The lack of loyalty made Colony feel that the project wasn't worth her time, and the Producer Network dissolved in 2012.

When the Lostine Tavern opened in 2014, a new market for a producers' network presented itself. The Minam River Lodge, a wilderness lodge that flies in groceries for its backcountry restaurant, was also sourcing locally. Deb Reth, a small-scale vegetable producer in Wallowa, began supplying both businesses and soon realized that she needed help from other producers to provide the quantity and variety of produce that the chefs were ordering. Reth and the other growers learned that selling directly to restaurants provided a much more reliable market than selling through the farmers market. "You can spend all of this time picking for the farmers market, and at the end you can still have most of it left over. That gets really discouraging. But when you harvest for a restaurant, you know exactly what they want and that they'll order every week" says Reth.

Reth considered the 2014 season the network's "test-run" and formalized the network with the

Local Food Production and Processing

help of a RARE Americorps member in 2015. Interested producers decided that a broker would charge a commission to contact the restaurants each week and then work with growers to fill the orders. Reth knew that produce would have to arrive clean, with consistent presentation, so that chefs could learn to trust that produce would be of high quality. She created a detailed list of how each kind of produce should be prepped for delivery and updated her price list to ensure that growers would receive the best possible prices, giving them incentive to stay a part of the network rather than branching off on their own. Currently, 5 producers have signed the broker/grower agreement and paid a $10 administrative fee to participate. Reth hopes that more will get involved when they see what a great opportunity it is.

> "When you harvest for a restaurant, you know exactly what they want and that they'll order every week" - Deb Reth

For the restaurants, having the producers organized is key for local sourcing to be successful. Lynne Curry, head chef and co-owner of the Lostine Tavern, says that she couldn't do it without Reth:"I already buy from a dozen other vendors a week, and when produce growers were coming to me individually, it was completely unmanageable."

Because the group uses the Lower Valley Farmers Market building to aggregate produce, the group will pay a 10% commission to LVFM on all sales. The relationship between the growers' network and the farmers market is symbiotic: the commission will help provide financial sustainability for LVFM, while the network benefits from having a central drop-off point with coolers, freezers, and a basement well suited for dry-storage.

The beauty of the growers' network is that it allows small scale gardeners to sell their produce for a good wholesale price without having to fill large orders on their own. Reth has involved many growers from her community who have always gardened—they can produce high-quality fruits and vegetables on the land they already own without much additional investment in equipment. This reduces overhead costs. On their own, each gardener wouldn't produce enough to sell to a restaurant like the LT, but pooled together, they produce sufficient quantity. "I wanted people to know that they can make some money growing produce like they always have,"

Peggy Goebel

Local Food Production and Processing

says Reth. One of the main growers for the network, Peggy Goebel, has been gardening her entire life. Now in her 80's, her only wish is that she had room to grow *more*. "It's been nice to get money for my produce; it feels good to be rewarded for your hard work," says Goebel. In a town like Wallowa, with a high percentage of unemployment, any additional income can go a long way, and Reth envisions her town's economic revitalization through local food.

Wallowa County Brand

The Rural Development Assistance Team originally conceived of the Wallowa County brand in 2007 to project a desired image of the County, and of locally made products, to both residents and visitors. Although the group had a logo designed and put considerable effort into outreach to get businesses to use the brand, almost no businesses were interested. The original conception of the brand stood for general values such as "Products and services home grown with pride" and "Our genuine rural community." Wallowa County's Food Council felt that specific criteria should be established for food and farm businesses for the brand to effectively market Wallowa County food products. A project to define brand criteria for food/farm businesses was prioritized in the Food Council's strategic plan and included in the work plan for a RARE Americorps member. Although several community members, food producers, and restaurants owners were willing to form a committee to begin defining brand standards, further research into the branding process showed that the project would require a more considerable investment of time. Beyond enlisting producer and business owner support, the brand would also need to be marketed sufficiently so that potential customers would know the significance of the logo. The committee wasn't ready to invest additional time and resources and the project was discontinued.

Lostine Tavern

If an authentic taste of Wallowa County is what you're after, the Lostine Tavern is the place to get it. Built in 1902 to house a pharmacy and doctors' office, the Tavern became a town staple in 1940 when it was converted into a pub, serving as the social hub for Lostine residents and anyone passing through. After the tavern was closed in 2013, locals Lynne Curry, Peter Ferré, and Lisa Armstrong-Roepke partnered up to renovate the centenarian building into a farm-to-table restaurant. To raise funds for the renovation, the group launched a campaign on ChangeFunder, a crowd-sourcing website. "Our aim is to cultivate a local food system… and become, once again, the vital gathering place for the entire community." Townspeople were eager to infuse vitality back into their town and preserve the cultural heritage of the historic tavern. 250 people donated to the project, and the campaign raised over $30,000. "The core support for our ChangeFunder was highly local, and it's the same now that the restaurant is open. When you look around any given night at the faces of customers, it's local, local, local," says Lynne Curry.

Community support has also been instrumental in supplying ingredients: "So many people called and offered their products when we opened. People have been so forthcoming. That alone doesn't build the supply chain, but having a central, visible place where food is bought and sold brings people out into a new marketplace," says Curry.

Many restaurants across the country jumped on the farm-to-table bandwagon by adding in a few local ingredients to their preexisting menu. In contrast, it is obvious that the LT's menu (*cont. on next page)*

is built around what is available locally, with three monthly specials that reflect shifts in the growing season and a base menu that highlights local ranchers and farmers. Even desserts are based in local produce: their decadent chocolate beet cake gets its quirky main ingredient from Patrick Theil of Prairie Creek Farms for a large part of the year.

Supplying a restaurant with local ingredients throughout the year takes planning. Several farmers keep storage crops such as beets, potatoes, and carrots in cold-storage for weekly deliveries to the LT, and the kitchen freezes local fruit to use throughout the winter in their hand-pies. Curry says that they used just about every beet and potato in the county last winter, and keeping the french fries and beet cake local all year will require increased production on the part of their farmers.

But such hefty demand creates opportunities. The lower valley growers' network receives a good portion of its orders from the Lostine Tavern. "It's the next phase for farmers, and we're so thankful that chefs are willing to do the extra leg-work to source locally," says Deb Reth, broker for the network. Because the LT consistently orders in bulk, and Curry is willing to design monthly specials depending on seasonal availability, it has provided the stimulus and motivation for small producers to organize and pool their goods. As the LT's reputation grows both within the county and throughout Oregon, their ability to support small producers and encourage the growth of a local supply chain should multiply.

Producer engagement with food systems development organizations

Oregon Harvest for Schools Portal

Ecotrust of Portland is currently applying for a USDA Farm to School Support Services grant to expand their Oregon Harvest for Schools Portal, a portion of FoodHub that lists producers that are willing to supply school districts. Ecotrust hopes to expand the portal beyond fruits and vegetables to include "center of the plate" food: meat and grains. Northeast Oregon Economic Development District works in Baker, Union, and Wallowa counties and has invested considerably in food systems. If the grant is awarded, Ecotrust asked NEOEDD to help conduct outreach to producers in Baker, Union, and Wallowa counties to assess their interest in working with schools and their ability to be included on the portal.

Local Food Production and Processing

Development of commercial shared-use kitchen facilities

A 2011 Commercial Shared-Use kitchen study examined kitchens in Wallowa County for their potential to meet the needs of commercial food businesses. Three kitchens were identified as available for shared use by licensed food businesses. The best candidate, the old hospital kitchen at Building Health Families (BHF), would need to develop kitchen rules, decide on a fee appropriate to cover costs, and install storage space for users to lock up their personal equipment and ingredients. As of 2015, BHF has no plans to go forward with these steps.

Joseph United Methodist Church, the fiscal sponsor of the Magic Garden, a community garden to school project, plans to construct a building adjacent to the church, with a commercial kitchen that could serve both community groups and small businesses. The kitchen would include equipment identified as most important by the food businesses surveyed for the study. Locked storage space for personal equipment and ingredients will be constructed in the existing church building's basement. Although the Church hasn't identified the usage fee, it is expected to be less than current commercial kitchen rental rates in the area. The kitchen will also be a prime place for Magic Garden volunteers to preserve fresh produce and to teach cooking classes for children and the general public. Magic Garden leader Robin Martin hopes to bring Share Our Strength's Cooking Matters curriculum to Wallowa County when the kitchen is finished. Because much of the work of putting on a cooking class is assembling equipment and ingredients and hauling them to the location, Martin believes that having a central space where things can be stored will make classes much easier to host. The Church hopes to break ground on the new building in late 2015.

Meat processing

Poultry processing

Mary Hawkins of Hawkins Sister Ranch, a chicken producer located in Wallowa, is developing an on-site poultry processing facility. Over the years, small poultry producers have expressed interest in organizing their shared equipment into a mobile poultry processing unit, but the project lacked leadership and hasn't moved forward. Hawkins previously took her birds to Reinford's Custom Cuts in Cove, but that facility is moving out of the area. Hawkins plans to operate her facility as Small Enterprise Exempt, an exemption for producers who sell fewer than 20,000 birds, market their product wholesale, and own the birds they are processing. The Hawkins Sister Ranch facility will be inspected by Oregon Department of Agriculture and will process other producers' poultry for a fee (buying the live birds and then selling them back to producers with an added fee per bird). The exemption also allows poultry to be sold by the cut, although it can't be resold as a value-added packaged product.

Stafford's Custom Meats

After becoming a USDA-inspected meat processing facility in 2012, Stafford's Custom Meats in Elgin, Oregon (44 miles from Enterprise) closed in 2014. Stafford's was sold and reopened late 2014 and resumed USDA-inspection. Having a USDA-inspected processing facility available nearby (the next closest facility is 260 miles away) provides

meat producers the opportunity to market individual cuts of meat and to sell to wholesale buyers. However, many direct-marketing meat producers still opt for custom-exempt processing, selling shares of live animals by the whole, half, and quarter. Custom-exempt processing is offered by several meat processors in and adjacent to Wallowa County. Stafford's plans to offer USDA processing about once a month and can process USDA more often if producers have more than 10 head of cattle.

Business planning and product marketing education

NEOEDD

Northeast Oregon Economic Development District (NEOEDD) is a public organization whose mission is to provide resources and facilitate quality decision making for the benefit of entrepreneurs, businesses, and communities in northeast Oregon. Their regularly held Business Foundations Workshop is a free 6-week workshop series to help entrepreneurs and small-business owners build the basis for a successful enterprise. Other periodic workshops, such as Social Media and Build Your Own Website, provide marketing education. NEOEDD also administers Individual Development Accounts for Baker, Union, and Wallowa Counties, a savings program in which low-moderate income participants write a business plan, complete business education and financial literacy training, and save money for their business in a special account that is matched $3 for every $1 saved. NEOEDD is also providing education for local businesses and investors interested in funding local businesses. All of these services are open to farmers, ranchers, and other food producers.

Women in Agriculture Conference

Northeast Oregon Economic Development District partnered with Washington State University Extension to host a satellite site for the 2015 Women in Agriculture Conference. The La Grande site had 21 participants. Ranchers, mixed-vegetable farmers, and other women engaged in food systems work gathered to network and learn about marketing. Emily Asmus of Welcome Table Farms in Walla Walla gave the keynote, explaining in detail her marketing strategy and providing a copy of her business plan for all participants. Erica Mills, of Claxon Marketing, gave a 4-hour marketing workshop guiding participants through a 3-step marketing method and helping them create a marketing action plan. Participants had ample time throughout the day to meet other producers, voice their challenges, tell their stories, and get advice from their fellows about everything from newsletters to CSAs. WSU offered a follow-up workshop with Erica Mills in June 2015, available as a live webinar to conference participants.

A group introduces themselves at the Women in Agriculture Conference

Ralph Anderson

Whenever you have a conversation with Ralph Anderson, he's very likely to insert something about whatever wild food he's recently foraged. "I've been foraging since I was this high," he reports, holding his hand three feet off the ground. "I started in my grandpa's garden, and I'm still learning." Ralph came to Wallowa County in the 70's to work for the US Forest Service as a wildlife biologist. He got involved with The Wallowa Band Nez Perce Trail Interpretive Center, a non-profit known locally as the Nez Perce Homeland Project, which aims "to provide a place for the regular return of the descendants to the Wallowa Valley." The homeland project owns a 320 acre parcel in Wallowa partially meant to preserve and rejuvenate the growth of first foods, or the wild staples that the Nez Perce depended on. Ralph forages seasonally on the homeland project's grounds, as well as in his own backyard and on private lands (with permission, of course). Throughout the year he'll harvest biscuit-root and blue camas bulbs, roots that can be eaten fresh, cooked like potatoes, or dried and ground into a flour for use throughout winter; big-head clover blossoms; serviceberries, huckleberries, nettles, miner's lettuce, and chokecherries. He also forages "naturalized exotic invasives" such as Echinacea, goat weed, and dandelions. Ralph learned how to forage and process many of these foods by talking to locals living in the woods who had been foraging for decades. "Foraging for wild foods is about reclaiming old or lost or unknown food traditions appropriate to the place you live," says Ralph, pointing out that ethno-botany, the study of how cultures use the plants and fungi of their homeland, often takes place informally when someone seeks out an old-timer to learn from. (*cont. on next page)*

Ralph is passionate about wild foods and preserving knowledge about them because they are so incredibly nutritious: "Wild foods are more nutrient-packed than anything you can buy in the store, and the price is right," he says. Wild foods are also much more sustainable than industrially produced food, if harvested correctly: they don't require packaging and shipment, habitat and diversity are preserved, and uncultivated lands produce added value.

Ralph sells some of what he forages at the Lower Valley Farmers Market in Wallowa and submitted a list to the lower valley growers' network so that participating chefs could order wild foods alongside their cultivated produce needs. "Wild foods require innovative cooks that are willing to try things that aren't traditional anymore. Or desperate cooks that are willing to try anything rather than starve, if you're into apocalypse theories," he adds with a chuckle. The Lostine Tavern ordered nettles, service berries, and chokecherries from Ralph during their first year, and the Minam River Lodge has inquired for certain things as well. It can be challenging to supply the necessary quantity when conservation of wild sources is a top-priority. In addition to selling what he forages, Ralph is very interested in helping the homeland project educate the public about wild foods. This kind of education requires an emphasis on conservation: people must be taught how to harvest wild foods without depleting the supply. People like Ralph who have learned about traditional foods of this area are valuable sources of information for anyone who wants to spice up their diet with nutritious, free, and delicious wild foods.

Conclusion

Opportunities for producers to direct market their goods continue to expand as consumers seek out more local food. Organization certainly aids producers in marketing; however, aggregating produce like the lower valley growers network requires a great deal of work on the part of one person. The network's success in the future will depend on having a broker willing to take on the extra work. Marketing opportunities like Ecotrust's Oregon Harvest for Schools portal could further help producers market their goods, although this would require interest on the part of the schools to undergo the extra labor of buying and preparing raw ingredients. Farm to table restaurants, as well as other institutional buyers of local food, will be an important stimulus in the future for small producers to organize and aggregate their goods.

A new report from Ecotrust, "Oregon Food Infrastructure Gap Analysis," found that large-scale food buyers are increasingly promoting differentiated food products (such as "local" or "natural") and that "anticipated scarcity of long-term supply is motivating [large scale buyers] to seek long-term contracts, or even purchase land directly, in order to secure supply" (Ecotrust).* Larger buyers coopting the local food supply chain may affect small- and medium-scale producers in ways that are presently difficult to predict.

*Ecotrust. *Oregon Food Infrastructure Gap Analysis.* Executive Summary. Portland, 2015.

Food Access and Consumer Availability

Apple cider pressing party

Since the Wallowa County Community Food Assessment was written, several local food organizations have increased their programming, organizations that were new at the time have become established, and more connections between organizations have been forged. The Magic Garden, a volunteer food production and gardening education program, reaches more students than ever before. The Magic Garden offered several cooking classes in 2014-2015 while Slow Food Wallowas has decreased the number of cooking demonstrations that they offer. Joseph Charter School's garden, originally managed by the Magic Garden, has more involvement by faculty and students and was expanded by the school with grant money. Lower Valley Farmers Market has begun to accept SNAP benefits and both farmers market associations have teamed up to offer a SNAP Match program. Health care organizations have also increased their involvement in food systems by using various means to encourage patients to consume more local produce.

Food Access and Consumer Availability

Create opportunities for food literacy/education

Upon seeing educational posters detailing how to store fall crops, a farmer at the market said "This is Wallowa County—everyone already knows how to do this." A County Commissioner echoed the sentiment when she said "we've always stored potatoes, cabbage, carrots, and beets over the winter. I get a kick out of people who think that composting is new—my grandparents and parents always buried their food scraps and used that soil in the garden." Wallowa County has a long tradition of gardening and food preservation methods such as canning, dehydrating, and using root cellars and basements to store crops over the winter. People also trade and barter for game and other meat, garden produce, preserved foods, honey and gathered wild foods. For some residents, these skills have been passed down for generations and represent a tradition of self-sufficiency. These practices allow people to have a high-quality diet at less cost.

However, this knowledge hasn't always been passed down to the younger generation. Further, newcomers to the county often don't have these skills. Cooking education and food preservation education continue to be an appropriate and important component of food systems development in Wallowa County. The director of the regional food bank, Community Connection, says that she has noticed a pronounced shift in the past 20 years to a "boxed food culture" where younger families are much more likely to choose prepackaged convenience food instead of ingredients for scratch cooking. Further, the pervasive belief that young children hate vegetables keeps many parents, and day-care providers, from even trying to consistently prepare and serve vegetables to children. A growing farm-to-preschool and farm-to-school movement within the County is beginning to change this belief and hopefully will contribute to a widespread change in the food practices of many young families in the area.

Cooking classes

Several organizations have held cooking and food preservation classes open to the general public or to a more specific sub-group, with mixed results. A class for Head Start and other preschool parents about water-bath canning applesauce only garnered a single attendant, although several families signed up for it. OSU Extension has offered classes about cooking on a budget and taught cooking classes to WIC families and Head Start families. All classes have had inconsistent attendance, and the considerable energy needed to plan even a one-night class leads to disappointment if no one shows up. Parents with young children appear to have limited time for, or simply are not interested in, food literacy and education.

The Magic Garden offered 3 classes taught by skilled community members. The classes taught a wide variety of cooking and preservation skills using fresh and stored garden produce: canning, zucchini bread, pesto, beet hummus, and lacto-fermented sauerkraut. The classes were advertised to the public and every child in Joseph Charter School took a flier home. Attendance ranged from 6-9 people in each class and the classes received rave reviews. A man at one class said "I haven't eaten

soup in years because canned soup has too much salt for the diet my doctor prescribed. Now I feel like I can make my own." Other participants said that they had always been afraid to try canning and that the classes made them confidant to start. However, the classes take a lot of time, energy, and funding to put on, and the Magic Garden is looking for alternative ways of providing food literacy education.

Cooking Matters and other premade food literacy curriculum

Cooking Matters at the Store tours were given in 2013 and 2014. The tours provide tips and tricks for buying healthy food on a budget, and tour participants receive a reusable shopping bag, a booklet with tips and recipes, and a $10 store gift card. The gift card is for the $10 challenge, which asks participants to buy ingredients from all 5 food groups to prepare a meal for their family with $10 or less. Recruiting for the tours the second year was challenging, as the small pool of interested adults had already gone on a tour the first year. However, when the tours were scheduled with high school classes in Joseph and Wallowa, and the teacher was willing to dedicate a follow-up session or a homework assignment to reinforce the lessons from the tour, the tours were well-received and it was much easier to recruit participants. For example, Family and Consumer Science (home-ec) classes at Joseph Charter School did the $10 challenge in groups of 4 after their tour and then had to cook their meal the following class period.

The use of pre-made curriculums, such as Share Our Strength's full Cooking Matters cooking class curriculum, would help food educators save time planning. However, Cooking Matters has been offered to Head Start parents before, and no one signed up. Robin Martin of the Magic Garden is interested in teaching Seed to Supper (a program from Oregon Food Bank that teaches participants to grow a garden and then cook what they harvest)

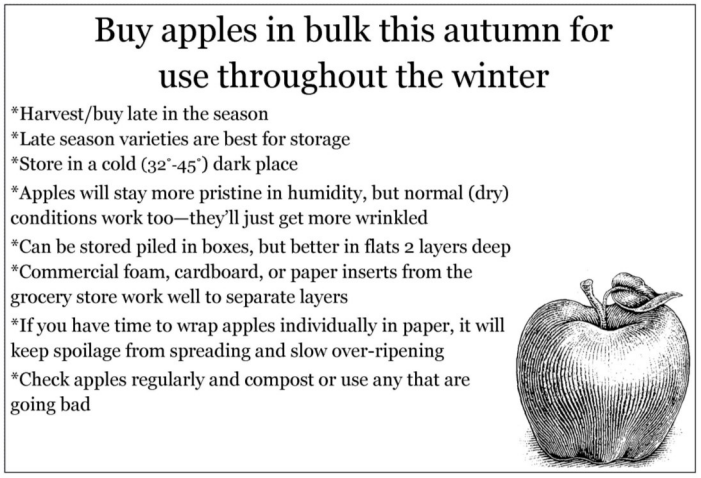
Soup and Such winter cooking class

once a commercial kitchen is available. She'd also like to teach Cooking Matters for children during summer. A similar cooking day-camp during summer and winter breaks for Kindergarten through 4th graders was offered through OSU Extension on three different occasions with great success. They had to offer the camp three times in one summer in order to accommodate all of the interested kids. Programs like this offer fun, supervised activities for kids while parents work, which make them easier to fit into a hectic family schedule.

As of June 2015, a grant was submitted to fund Cooking Matters for Families courses in Enterprise and Joseph. In this six-week cooking course, school-age children (ages 6 to 12) and their parents learn about healthy eating as a family and the importance of working together to plan and prepare healthy meals on a budget. If funding is received, Building Healthy Families will offer the Enterprise course directly following their afterschool program so that it's easy for parents picking up their kids to stay for the class. They'll also offer incentives, in the form of crock-pots or grocery store gift cards, if families complete 5 of the 6 classes, as well as childcare for kids too young to participate.

Other means of sharing food literacy

Because getting people to classes has proven difficult, it could make sense to target existing events and do quick demonstrations or information sharing with the people there. For example, posters and handouts that provide simplified information on keeping storage crops in cool places in and on using a food dehydrator were distributed throughout the fall and accompanied with a demonstration booth at the final farmers market. Another efficiency measure would be to work directly with social services agencies to engage their clientele; however, as described above, even direct-service agencies can't guarantee turn-out at events. One nonprofit, Building Healthy Families, has had luck hosting booths at the farmers market and inviting their families. They provide children's activities at various markets throughout the summer, including planting seeds, a seed naming game, smoothie making, and a farmers market scavenger hunt.



Complete Health Improvement Plan

In 2014, Wallowa Memorial Hospital began offering CHIP (Complete Health Improvement Plan), a lifestyle program that emphasizes a plant-based diet, moderate exercise, water consumption, personal socialization, and stress management. The hospital received a grant from Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization to offer the program at a reduced registration fee ($99 instead of $450) to three cohorts of 50 people; participants have ranged in age from 30 to 70, but the average is 50-60. The hospital reports that "[CHIP] is a scientifically proven approach to improve overall health and wellness and can prevent or reverse chronic

diseases." CHIP is meant to change people's lifestyles and emphasizes plant-based food prepared "as-grown," and participants are encouraged to avoid processed foods, added sugars, and high amounts of salt. Two-three times a week for 8 weeks, participants gather to share a meal, see a cooking demonstration, and hear a guest speak on a topic about healthy living. Participants also have blood tests conducted several times during the program to evaluate key indicators such as cholesterol and blood sugar. The results are impressive, with most participants experiencing pronounced drops in weight (on average 7 pounds per person), bad LDL cholesterol, blood pressure, and triglycerides. The hospital is applying for another grant but plans to provide the program twice more at the lower price regardless of funding. It is unknown how many people will have access to the program in the future if the Hospital has to charge full price. CHIP is helping create a culture of thoughtful, healthful eating in Wallowa County.

Informal food education and literacy

As mentioned above, there are many residents in Wallowa County who still practice traditional food preservation and preparation. Further, there are private community parties and events that inadvertently provide opportunities to learn these skills. Group apple pressing happens throughout late fall across the county. One particularly large cider pressing party involves people of all ages who can bring apples, learn how to use a traditional apple press, and take a free jug of cider from the communal vat. Events like these encourage people to glean excess apples and celebrate the bounty of fall as a community.

Poultry butchering is another type of informal private group activity, where families sometimes raise poultry together and then gather to process the birds and divide them up for their freezers. At one small gathering the week before Thanksgiving, a local family that raises and sells turkeys invites people buying them to come and butcher their own turkey in a group setting where novices learn from those with experience, using the informally shared community scalder and plucker. A privately owned "Pigerator" travels to different parties and gatherings where people have the opportunity to learn how to barbeque a whole pig in a giant wood-fired barbecue. The Magic Gardeners can their jams, pickles and salsas to offer for donations at the farmers market, and they welcome community volunteers to help them water-bath can to learn how. There are many people who smoke, can, ferment, and dehydrate every year, making it easy to find someone who will let you help and even loan you their equipment for use in the future.

Food Access and Consumer Availability

Informal consumer access

The Wallowa County Free Classifieds is a Facebook page started in 2013 that has exploded in popularity. The original idea was to keep money in the county by connecting local sellers with local buyers. It's become a vibrant online community forum with 3,695 likes, which is roughly half of the population of Wallowa County (although non-locals are on the page). Sales happen constantly, making the classifieds the perfect place to market any variety of goods or services. Livestock, live chickens, mushrooms, and excess garden produce have all made their way onto the page. People with abundant fruit crops have also invited gleaners to come and pick. Because it's such a well-utilized consumer resource, as well as being free, the Classifieds are a great informal way to connect backyard food producers with customers and to facilitate bartering and trading of food products.

Community and school gardens

The Magic Garden

The Magic Garden was started in 2010 by members of the Joseph United Methodist Church in partnership with Joseph Charter School. The project has donated over 10,000 pounds of produce over the past 4 seasons to schools, food banks, senior meal sites, summer meal sites for 1-18 year-olds, and a variety of other organizations. Volunteers are also welcome to take produce, making the program an

Joseph Charter School kindergartners at the Magic Garden

excellent place to learn how to garden and to receive high-quality produce for your efforts. In addition to food production, the Magic Garden aims to educate the youth of Wallowa County through hands-on learning in the garden, greenhouse, and kitchen. Their vision is to promote awareness of health, food production, and the importance of being outside while interacting with others. Five preschools from the area take fieldtrips and are led through the garden with bags to take home the produce they harvest at each station. Joseph Charter School students make seed mats every spring, take a fieldtrip to the garden to plant them, and return in the fall to harvest what they sowed. Every autumn, the salad bar at Joseph Elementary School is purportedly the place to be—the kids love choosing vegetables that they know came from the garden.

In order to fund their programming, Magic Gardeners dry herbs and can pickles, jams, and salsas from garden produce for sale by donation at the farmers market, along with some fresh produce. Aside from raising the bulk of funds for the project, the farmers market booth also allows them to spread their name and good reputation throughout the community. The donations help pay a living wage for a seasonal employee to manage the garden, coordinate volunteers, and oversee two high school interns. The interns loved their initial season at the garden so much that they begged to return in 2015.

Volunteer recruitment and retention remain a problem for the Magic Garden project. In a county of 7,000 people, the pool of available volunteers is already small. Add to that a long line-up of summer events designed to draw tourists to the region that require large cadres of volunteers, and you get an exhausted volunteer pool by late summer and fall, when the garden project needs the most labor to weed and harvest.

During the 2014 season, the Magic Garden hired a volunteer coordinator for community outreach to draw more volunteers in. The results were disappointing, as very few new volunteers came to weekly work-days, and none became regular volunteers. Current volunteers are encouraged to make personal invitations to friends and acquaintances, as this has proven the most effective recruitment strategy. Yet the project has sustained itself with its core group of 8 volunteers, and there is hope that more volunteers will slowly join the project through word-of-mouth and reputation. In the meantime, the kids of Wallowa County continue to devour their "magic" vegetables.

Joseph Charter School 3rd graders at the Magic Garden

Joseph Charter School

At Joseph Charter School (JCS), 8th graders can be Master Junior Gardeners. Kindergarteners grow their own herbs to dehydrate and sell to raise funds for their classroom. High school students learn how to water-bath can local produce. Teachers have a state-of-the-art greenhouse, designed with the help of students, at their fingertips.

Garden education at JCS started when the Magic Garden took over the school's neglected garden and refurbished the school's small greenhouse to begin growing produce for the cafeteria. Gardening activities really took off when Laurie Altringer, a middle-school science teacher, wrote and received a $72,000 career technical education grant to build a larger greenhouse on-campus. Altringer's class of 8th grade Junior Master Gardeners helped design the greenhouse, with the help of an expert, as well as the outdoor landscaping and trough-planters that accompany it. Grant funds were also used to purchase a state of the art food dehydrator and food processor to preserve and prepare produce grown at the school. Each class will start seeds to plant their own trough-planter. High school interns, managed by the Magic Garden's seasonal worker, will tend the planters during summer break, harvesting quick-maturing crops for the food bank and replanting so that students will have vegetables harvest when they get back from school. The school administration has committed to the project, hiring two student interns to care for the garden over the (*cont. on next page)*

summer and including a line item in the annual budget for Kindergarten through 4th Grade field trips to the Magic Garden every year. Joseph Charter School's relationship with the Magic Garden is a perfect example of how energy from outside leadership can jump start activities within a school, leading to sustained food system education.

Joseph Charter School 3rd graders at the Magic Garden

Wallowa Community Garden

"Hey, you were at that garden we went to a long time ago," a Head Start preschooler tells a volunteer as his class enters the Wallowa Community Garden. The class had visited the garden the previous fall and was returning to plant peas and potatoes in the spring. "There's just something about potatoes," Deb Reth, leader of the garden, tells me. "And carrots. Kids love harvesting them. I think it's because there's this treasure-trove of food under the dirt." And indeed, every single child on the field trip the previous fall had screamed with delight when Reth unearthed the brown lumps with a digging fork. The kids dug right in, literally, using digging forks taller than they were to harvest potatoes and running amok pulling carrots. Wallowa Community Garden was started in 2012 as a traditional community garden with personal plots. Although personal plots are still available, the garden is mostly used by a small but dedicated group of volunteers. In 2014, they donated nearly 900 pounds of produce, valued at $2,100, to Wallowa's food bank, Head Start, Meals on Wheels, a senior meal site, and to the summer lunch program for 1-18 year-olds.

Head Start preschoolers at the Wallowa Community Garden

A 2014 grant from the United Methodist Church allowed the garden to purchase weed fabric and open-pollinated and heirloom seeds. They hope to

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save seed annually, gradually creating a seed bank adapted to the particular conditions of Wallowa.

The garden is located on the grounds of the Wallowa River House, a residential facility for those suffering from severe mental illness and chronic physical health conditions. The original garden plot was developed when the River House was being built so that residents could benefit from working in the garden. However, many residents didn't participate in gardening because they had a difficult time kneeling on the ground for very long. Staff at the facility hope to engage more residents in the garden and are currently looking for grants to fund a greenhouse with waist-levels beds that would extend the short growing season. River House staff feel that gardening has allowed the residents who use the garden to gain life skills, learn responsibility, and gain ownership over a positive and productive project, while participating in a physical activity that encourages healthy behaviors. The River House plans to use greenhouse produce in the kitchen, hoping that residents will be more willing to eat vegetables that they have grown.

Farm to preschool

"I don't think my kids will eat spinach," says a preschool teacher when asked if she was interested in receiving the equipment to grow greens indoors. Four weeks later, she reported that all of her kids had tried spinach from the planters in their classroom, and most had liked it!

Head Start preschoolers at the Wallowa Community Garden

Food Access and Consumer Availability

In August 2014, Northeast Oregon Economic Development District secured a mini-grant of $1,500 from Ecotrust to develop farm-to-preschool activities in Wallowa County. By the time the grant period was over, 6 preschools had benefitted from gardening and food education supplies. The grant allowed some preschools to start gardening education and others to expand existing programs. The funds also paid transportation costs for 3 private preschools to go on fieldtrips to the Magic Garden for the first time.

The preschool mentioned above, which has no direct sunlight from their windows, received a grow-light, planters, organic potting soil, and seeds to grow spinach and lettuce indoors. They were able to grow and harvest several crops in the past year. Another preschool received window greenhouses, which allow kids to sprout seeds between clear plastic sleeves to see how the roots develop. In addition to supplies for individual preschools, Portland State University's *Healthy Harvest for Kids* curriculum was color-printed and assembled into plastic sheets and binders for the Enterprise Public library for preschool teachers to check out. Age appropriate gardening and food books were also purchased for the library for the benefit of the general public and teachers.

To continue support for farm-to-preschool, funds were requested and granted from Community Bank to fund 3 private preschools fieldtrip transportation in the 2015 season and to provide more classroom gardening supplies for all 6 preschools.

Although classroom activities allow teachers to consistently educate their students about healthy eating, it is fieldtrips, both to the Magic Garden and to the Wallowa Community Garden, that really excite and engage the children. The children remember their time in the gardens throughout the year, and the experience gives vegetables, which might otherwise be foreign and undesirable, an emotional connection to a beautiful place.

Enterprise Head Start

The 20 three to five year-olds of Enterprise Head Start preschool love eating green things. They ask their parents to buy them broccoli at the grocery store. They sow seeds in January, harvest lettuce in March, and stuff their faces with spinach they've grown in April. In May, they watch the roots of pumpkin seeds sprout, in September they take a fieldtrip to see their full-grown pumpkin plants, and in October they scoop seeds out of those pumpkins to plant the following spring.

Every September, the class goes to the Magic Garden. Volunteers host stations to teach the kids about different vegetables, and the kids collect what they harvest to take home. The Magic Garden is in a dramatic, beautiful setting. Golden canyon slopes surround the garden— a creek gurgles by, sunflowers tower, and an old orchard grows just beyond the fence. A preschooler once grabbed a volunteer's hand and said, "I never want to leave this place." Magic Garden staff and volunteers deliver vegetables and fruit throughout September and October while the kids are in class, making for an exciting weekly event. Whatever the Head Start center's cook can't use fresh, she freezes for later use, often putting in extra hours. Savings from donated produce allow the cook to buy more organic options from Safeway. Frozen Magic Garden tomatoes, zucchini, carrots, and squash are added to the regular menu through March. The experience of the garden (*cont. on next page)*

contextualizes vegetables for the kids—it connects their food to a beautiful place that they love. They ask all year long if the fruits and vegetables on their plate are from the garden.

Within their classroom, kids plant vegetables in the classroom in January and harvest them throughout the spring. The picture shown is of the kids eating lettuce they had clipped from pots that morning. The class also sprouts larger plants, like pumpkins, in the window greenhouses for the Magic Garden to transplant. They compost table scraps in a big ball that they like pushing around at recess, or they feed them to worms and use the results to fertilize their plants. The kids understand compost and it fascinates them—they scream with disgusted delight at the smell when the top of their compost ball comes off, peering inside to investigate the decomposition.

"Everything we do is an encouragement for the whole family to eat differently, to try a different recipe, and to see a local food source" says Kris Fraser, lead teacher. It's not very often that you see 20 three-five year-olds stuff their faces with spinach like they do at Enterprise Head Start.

Decrease stigma of food assistance programs

Voices

Oregon Food Bank's Voices program came to Wallowa County in fall 2014 to interview 5 community members who use the food bank. The events allowed participants to tell their stories, revealing the complexities of food access in rural places. One woman described how her family lost their SNAP benefits when her husband received a $1/hour raise. The loss exacerbated the family's food insecurity, but this women used a remarkable amount of intelligence and cleverness to keep her family fed, even if it meant going hungry herself some nights. Another participant spoke of working 3 jobs while caring for a sick partner, and the humiliation of having to go to a food bank in a small town. The Voices team posts these stories and portraits on social media, sends them out in emails, and printed a booklet to give to members of the state congress. Although the problem of stigma associated with seeking food assistance is too complex to solve in a single event, Voices is the first step in telling the truth about food insecurity in Wallowa County and empowering members of the community to tell their stories.

Educating community members about food assistance

Using preliminary data about community food systems compiled by Meyer Memorial Trust, several presentations have been given with statistics about the nature of food insecurity, SNAP participation, and poverty in Wallowa County. The data were presented to the board of Northeast Oregon Economic Development District, most of whom are local private business representatives appointed by county governments, as well as county and city

commissioners and work force development officials. The presentation helped debunk some common misconceptions about food assistance. In addition, a RARE Americorps member wrote a series of newspaper columns describing food insecurity in Wallowa County, and local newspapers have printed several stories about food assistance and SNAP, describing the economic benefits of the program.

SNAP participation

In 2002, Wallowa County's SNAP participation rate was extremely low: 43%. *Less than half* of those eligible for SNAP participated in the program. Currently, SNAP participation in the county is about 58%, meaning that many more eligible have signed up. However, this rate is still one of the lowest in Oregon, which averages a 73% SNAP participation rate. A future strategy to improve food access could be to encourage more residents to apply for the program to determine eligibility. Programs like SNAP Match bring public attention to food assistance programs, connecting them in people's minds with positive community events like farmers markets. As the community learns more about SNAP Match, organizers hope that SNAP in general will be seen in a more positive light, thereby reducing stigma and possibly leading to better SNAP participation.

Develop farmers markets and encourage their collaboration

Wallowa County Farmers Market

Wallowa County Farmers Market (WCFM) started in 2002. They operate weekly markets in Joseph and Enterprise with 6 core vendors and a variety of less consistent vendors. Although it's a small market, it has a good community following.

Wallowa County Farmers Market in Joseph

They teamed up with the Wallowa Valley Music Alliance to hold the Enterprise markets during the Alliance's summer Courthouse Concert Series. The City of Joseph has funded music at the Joseph market two years in a row. Both markets have weekly events such as pie socials, tomato tastings, and apple cider pressings. Although they've had difficulty in the past keeping a market manager, they've had more success hiring a vendor who already has a stake in the market.

WCFM hopes to increase vendors and customers in the coming season. Although their Joseph market benefits from tourist traffic, their Enterprise market often falls into the classic Catch 22 of small markets: you can't get more vendors if you don't have customers and you can't get more customers if you don't have vendors. Their new manager has successfully recruited new vendors through personal contact and persistence. The introduction of a SNAP Match program, where SNAP (food stamp) users can spend their benefits at the market and receive up to a $10 match every week for fresh fruits and vegetables, will hopefully broaden the market's customer base. The market received funds from Soroptimist International of Wallowa County to purchase an EBT machine in 2012, but the machine broke during the 2013 season. The market applied for Farmers Market Coalition's Free SNAP EBT Equipment Program, funded by the USDA, and received a new machine and 3 years of free service.

Lower Valley Farmers Market

Lower Valley Farmers Market (LVFM), located in Wallowa, Oregon, was started as an outdoor market in 2012 by a group of community members. A community member in neighboring Lostine, June Colony, received a USDA Farmers Market Promotional Program (FMPP) grant in 2011 on behalf of June's Local Market Producer Network LLC. Given the option to help with the Lostine market or start their own using some of the grant funds, the Wallowa group decided to start their own weekly outdoor market. The funds were used primarily to hire a market manager and to publicize and organize the market. In 2013, the group opened an indoor market in a building purchased by one of the group leaders, Deb Reth, in the hopes of providing access to local food year round. Although the group tried to hold the open air farmers market for a third season in 2014, there was so little traffic, and consequently very few vendors, that it was decided to switch entirely to the indoor market. The indoor market has several refrigerators and coolers, a freezer, and a kitchen perfect for cleaning and packaging produce.

Since the FMPP grant ended, Lower Valley Farmers Market has depended on a core group of volunteers to manage the market and work in shifts as cashiers, one day a week in the off season and three days a week April-October. Commission on all sales is 20%, reduced to 15% if vendors work a certain number of shifts at the market every month.

Having an indoor space has several advantages: it's less work for vendors than setting up a booth, it allows the market to stay open year-round, and perishables such as frozen meat and fresh produce can be stored there easily. However, the cost of keeping up a store front necessitates a reliable income from commission on sales.

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Further, the store front is much less noticeable than an open-air market; rather than the energized community event open-air farmers markets can be, it's just another shop on Main Street. The group has made it a priority to try and bring more customers into the indoor market.

Wallowa, where LVFM is located, is 20 minutes from Enterprise, the county seat and commercial center of Wallowa County, and 30 minutes from Joseph, the hub of tourism activity in the county. As one faithful volunteer put it, "We need to figure out a way to get people to stop here without blowing past us." Because Joseph and Wallowa Lake are the iconic tourism destinations and Wallowa still lacks tourism-related businesses, it isn't known as a place to stop. Further, the usual demographic that shops at farmers markets, people with moderate to upper income, is less represented here. Both points make increasing customer traffic to the store more challenging.

The City of Wallowa awarded LVFM a small grant in 2015 to help with advertising, including color posters, promoting their Facebook page, and boosting Facebook posts. Other cost-free advertising strategies such as a creating a Google Business page so that LVFM is searchable on Google Maps, updating store location and business hours on Facebook, posting producer Bios on Facebook, and listing the market on the Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce's website and other farmers market directories will hopefully lead to an increase in sales.

LVFM started accepting SNAP and debit cards spring 2015. They will introduce a SNAP Match program in 2015 in partnership with Wallowa County Farmers Market in hopes of attracting more customers with low incomes.

Lower Valley Farmer Market

Agritourism rack card

In partnership with Travel Oregon, Northeast Oregon Economic Development District created an agritourism rack card to promote Wallowa County's farmers markets and farm stands. The rack cards will be distributed to hotel and bed and breakfast owners to distribute to their guests.

SNAP Match program

Although Wallowa County Farmers Market (WCFM) began accepting SNAP benefits in 2012, the market only averaged 1 EBT transaction per week. In order to encourage more low-income people to access the healthy food available at the

market, Wallowa County Farmers Market and Lower Valley Farmers Market jointly applied for Slow Wallowa's community grant in 2013 to fund a SNAP Match program. Slow Food's Pignic event raised $2,800 for the program. In 2015, Soroptimist International of Wallowa County awarded the project $1,500, and Wallowa Memorial Hospital contributed $200. Various administrative challenges kept the program from starting in 2014, but the assistance of a RARE Americorps member helped launch the program at all three markets in May 2015.

The markets believe that engaging SNAP users will be the top challenge for this program. Outreach to social service agencies in the area would be key to robust participation. Because many people didn't even know that SNAP benefits could be used at the farmers markets in the first place, DHS was informed and given fliers about the program to give to every new SNAP client; all SNAP entrance interviews should inform people that they can use their benefits at the markets. Fliers were posted on every low-income housing apartment in the county and were sent home with every K-6 student in Wallowa and Enterprise. Other social service agencies such as Building Healthy Families, Head Start, and Safe Harbors (a domestic and sexual abuse service provider), as well as Wallowa Memorial Hospital and Winding Waters Clinic, were informed of the program so that staff could encourage clients/patients to take advantage.

Connie Guentert, director of the organization that runs the regional food bank (Community Connection), believes that people with low-incomes don't see themselves as farmers market goers. "Another barrier is transportation. Although there's a bus, markets aren't open as often as grocery stores, which makes transportation tricky. Another is simply cost. Whether it's true or not, people think that the food at farmers markets is drastically more expensive than canned and frozen food." Originally, a $5 Match per market was planned. Yet other farmers markets in Oregon have found that increasing the match from $5 to $10 markedly increased SNAP spending. In Wallowa County, organizers raised the match to $10 to help overcome the barriers that Guentert identified. The $10 match will decrease the price difference between grocery store food and farmers market offerings, as well as making transportation and the inconvenience of limited market hours worth the hassle.

The markets were invited to take part in the Farmers' Market Fund's FINIP (Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Program) grant request to fund SNAP Match for the 2016/17 seasons. The Portland-based non-profit will share funds awarded through the USDA to match any funds that the markets can fundraise. The markets hope to prove the program's impact in 2015 with careful record keeping of match redemption and use these statistics to fundraise locally. Further, Farmers Market Fund will purchase the rights to Double Up Food Bucks, a SNAP Match program based in Michigan with a well-recognized brand. The Double Up Food Bucks brand will standardize many SNAP Match programs across the state and the country (other states have likewise acquired the Double Up Food Bucks brand), making the program recognizable to newcomers to the county.

Food Access and Consumer Availability

Lemonade stands for SNAP Match

To fund SNAP Match long-term, WCFM and LVFM plan to use the Lemonade Project model, a fundraising tactic from Newport Farmers Market. Volunteers will sell fresh-squeezed lemonade for $3 a cup. Lemonade has a high return of $2.50 a cup and people often donate their change. Newport has had great success raising funds for their SNAP Match program using this model. Although holding a volunteer-run stand every week like the Newport Farmers Market would prove challenging, WCFM and LVFM hope that holding several lemonade stands at high-traffic events throughout the summer will raise a substantial amount of matching funds. Oregon Food Bank donated an industrial lemon juicer to the markets, community members will supply much of the necessary equipment, the local Safeway will donate a small quantity of lemons, and the local grocer Dollar Stretcher has offered to sell lemons to the program at wholesale cost, all of which will help keep costs down and profit-margins up.

Farmers market coupons

Winding Waters Clinic, one of the primary health care providers in Wallowa County, employs a health coach who works directly with patients to improve their diet and lifestyle. In order to encourage their patients to access the fresh food at the farmers markets, the health coach will give specific patients $5 coupons to spend at either Wallowa County Farmers Market or Lower Valley Farmers Market. The markets will send the clinic redeemed coupons, allowing the clinic to track which patients have used the program. The coupons will be funded through Winding Waters' general funds, and the clinic is currently seeking local funding to expand the program.

Conclusion

Gardening education programs like the Magic Garden and Wallowa Community Garden have proven very effective in changing the way that children in the County view food. Continued financial and volunteer support will be vital to sustain and expand these programs' reach to K-12 students and preschoolers in the County. Wallowa County Farmers Market and Lower Valley Farmers Markets' SNAP Match program makes farmer fresh produce more accessible for people with low-incomes. The SNAP Match program will need continued funding to thrive, as well as continued targeted outreach to ensure that people are aware of this resource. Food literacy education has proven challenging to recruit participants for in the past; those interested in providing these opportunities in the future will need to target populations who are interested and design classes to fit into peoples' busy schedules. Consistent engagement with targeted populations, and allowing those populations to voice their needs, will result in opportunities that people are excited to take advantage of.

Community Food System Development

Wallowa County Food Council's annual strategic planning meeting

Photo credit: Tracy Gagnon

A FEAST (Food Education Agriculture Solutions Together) was held in Wallowa County in 2011 and a Community Food Assessment was completed in 2012. While the FEAST established a network of people working to develop local food systems, the CFA reported the baseline of Wallowa County's food system and described efforts underway to aid producers, create markets, and increase access to affordable, healthy food. Members of Slow Food Wallowas were instrumental in providing leadership on the Wallowa County Food System Council by helping keep interested individuals engaged and putting on public demonstrations and events that kept the issue fresh in the public's mind. A change in leadership has shifted Slow Food's approach; the group currently offers less direct programming to the public and has transitioned to more social gatherings that celebrate the pleasure of food. The Wallowa County Food Council, made up of much the same membership as Slow Food, continues to meet at least annually, undergoing a yearly planning process to prioritize goals, identify suitable partners for different projects, and to learn how members can help projects proceed. Wallowa County's small population translates to a small pool of leadership, and organizations such as these can be hugely affected by events in the personal lives of important members. A book tour, illness, and the opening of a new restaurant all shifted council members' focus elsewhere, and both the Food Council and Slow Food have diminished their activity. However, leadership in a place like Wallowa County is always opportunistic and in flux. An infusion of new leadership for a brief period of time can jump-start projects that continue when that leadership goes away, or existing projects can rev up when new energy and ideas emerge. Although new organizing isn't taking place on the macro level, this addendum demonstrates how vital and dynamic Wallowa County's food development efforts are.

RARE Americorps

Photo credit: Janie Tippett

With the help of funding from Oregon Food Bank, Northeast Oregon Economic Development District (NEOEDD) has hosted two RARE Americorp members in food systems development. The University of Oregon's RARE program's mission "is to increase the capacity of rural communities to improve their economic, social, and environmental conditions, through the assistance of trained graduate-level participants who live and work in communities for 11 months." Oregon Food Bank partnered with RARE to place members in communities throughout Oregon to help plan FEAST events (Food Education Agriculture Together), write Community Food Assessments, and provide capacity for food systems development.

Sara Miller, supervisor to both RARE members, feels that the program has been important to the success of this work in Wallowa County. "The targeted services provided by RARE participants have greatly increased our ability to engage partners and volunteers in community food system development in Wallowa County. (*cont on next page)*

The RARE participants have provided professional quality work, engaged in positive ways with community members and businesses, and have been a pleasure to work with. We hate to see them leave, but we know they will go on to use the skills they've developed to help other communities in the future," says Miller.

Although a dedicated staff person working on these issues would be ideal, such a position hasn't been a possibility so far for NEOEDD or Wallowa County. Both RARE members have provided capacity to food system organizers at critical periods. "We have a variety of people doing food systems work in both their professional and personal lives, but they are deep in the weeds of their work. RARE members have stepped in and asked them to think strategically," says Miller. Further, both RARE volunteers have contributed their skills in helping organizations develop systems. Although their terms are only for 11 months, the technical support and capacity building they provide continues to aid organizations after the RARE members depart.

Strategic planning for community food system development

Sharon Thornberry, Community Food Systems Manager for Oregon Food Bank, facilitated FEAST follow-up meetings in 2013 and 2014 for the Wallowa County Food Council. In 2013, the group prioritized the following goals: 1) Local Food Production and Processing: Strengthen producer network through increased collaboration (share information, resources, transportation, marketing, etc.); 2) Develop and expand community/school gardens, including collaboration for incremental capacity building and long term financial stability; and 3) Encourage development and collaboration among farmers markets. These prioritized goals and strategies were used to create a work plan for NEOEDD's 2014-2015 food systems RARE Americorps member. In 2014, the group retained the same three goals but reordered them, prioritizing community/school gardens first, farmers markets second, and production and processing third.

Inform the public on current and future food system development activity

Katy Nesbitt of the La Grande *Observer*'s Wallowa County section and Steven Toole, Rob Ruth, and Kathleen Ellyn of the Wallowa County *Chieftain* have been very attentive to food systems development efforts, attending many events in person and writing articles about any events or activities that they're informed of. The Chieftain published several columns about food systems and hunger written by NEOEDD's 2014-2015 RARE Americorp member. Northeast Oregon Economic Development District's newsletter provides information about upcoming food system organizing activities. Public outreach in the form of fliers, press releases, and posters inform the public and partners about specific planning efforts.

Community Food System Development

Collaboration among local, regional, and state organizations working on food system development projects

Oregon Food Systems Statewide Network

In 2011, Meyer Memorial Trust (MMT) made grants to organizations throughout the state to support multi-year food systems development work. Regional partner, Oregon Rural Action, used MMT funds to contract with NEOEDD to provide food system development services in a five county area. On three occasions MMT brought grantees and project partners together from across Oregon to network, share ideas, and support each other's work. Participants soon realized the value of this kind of regular networking, and during the 2014 convening several organizations expressed interest in investigating the creation of a formal statewide community food systems network. MMT provided a small grant to support the planning process, and Sara Miller of NEOEDD volunteered to be on the Interim Leadership Team. Miller felt that her participation in the process provided a voice for northeast Oregon and rural communities in general. The planning process itself allowed Miller to forge valuable relationships with organizations throughout the state.

As of this time, 38 organizations agreed to become founding members of the Oregon Community Food Systems Network, with a focus on providing shared metrics, messaging, knowledge, and purpose for four priority project areas: Veggie Rx, SNAP Match, Wholesale Success, and Access to Land.

Five teams were organized and populated with over 40 volunteers to carry forward with work of implementing the network. These include the four project teams and a leadership team responsible for further development of the Network's structure and a definition of its services. The leadership team is also tasked with creating a budget and pursuing funding to support network development and transition. The long-term goal is to leverage resources for the Network's collective impact approach to improve Oregon's community food system. Miller is currently serving on the Leadership team and Access to Land team, with an eye on helping keep rural interests, and the interests of Baker, Union, and Wallowa counties, represented.

Participation in the MMT Community Food System grantee cohort and network has also strengthened the relationship between organizations working on food systems development in Wallowa County and in neighboring counties. Oregon Rural Action and the OSU Extension office in La Grande have proven valuable contacts. For example, when NEOEDD decided to host the Women in Agriculture Conference, Extension gladly offered their space to hold the event and ORA helped spread the word to their membership base, making the event very successful.

Community Food System Development

Conclusion

Although consistently sustaining food system organizing efforts in Wallowa County can be challenging, the original connections made during the FEAST and follow-up events, and during the writing of the CFA, have continued to help organizers further their cause. Connections with organizations across the region and the state have greatly aided organizing efforts, providing opportunities to take part in grant requests and other wide-reaching efforts. Current leaders continue to develop Wallowa County's food system, revealing through their work potential areas of leadership for newcomers.

A volunteer harvests tomatoes at the Magic Garden