

Exploring a State Brand/Marketing Program for Washington

The following document is based on Forum member contributions at the December 2021 Forum meeting, January 2022 small group calls, the February 2022 Forum meeting, April small group calls, and throughout the 2022 action definition process via email and verbal communication. This document is further informed by the presentations that took place during the April *Learning Meeting*, educating members about state brand models, as well as current and past marketing efforts.

The purpose of this document is to collate what members have shared to-date and inform broader Food Policy Forum members about the efforts surrounding State Brand/Marketing programs. Goals for the small group include:

- Understand and clearly map the current landscape
- Collect insights from stakeholders and how leaders and members see existing programs connecting to a statewide program.
- Outline the difference between a state brand and a marketing program and decide which is the central focus of this effort.

- Review work that has been completed by WSDA.
- Facilitate discussion from stakeholder perspectives on how a statewide brand would interplay with local and regional brands.

Summary: Action for the Food Policy Forum

- Convene stakeholders to understand the current lay of the land and the perspectives of those currently engaged in these various efforts.
- Research what's happened in the past and what worked and what didn't (e.g., From the Heart of Washington)
- Share information coming out of research.

Setting the Stage

This action relates to **two 2019 consensus recommendations**:

1. Increase purchases of Washington farm products with procurement policies and better visibility and promotion of Washington products in the marketplace.
2. Create a Washington state brand program that makes local products – and specific producers/farms – more visible and easier to code and track through existing supply chains.

Learning Meeting Framing Questions

State Brand Models:

- How are other state brands set up? Including: criteria for participating, cost to participate, type of promotions, staffing, funding, compliance checks?
- What lessons learned or recommendations do you have for Washington to consider?

Current Efforts in Washington:

- What is the current lay of the land? How are the programs run and what needs do they fill?
- What ideas exist for these efforts to interplay with a potential state brand?

Past Efforts in Washington:

- How were these programs structured?
- What did and did not work about them given our local context

STATE BRANDS AROUND THE COUNTRY

Many states have programs to identify and promote products grown in their state (Ex. [California](#), [Colorado](#), and [New Jersey](#)). 90 percent of existing state programs are maintained by each state's

Department of Agriculture.¹ In Colorado, any agricultural or food item that is grown, raised, processed, or produced by a company operating within the state is eligible to participate free of charge and use the Colorado Proud logo on its packaging.² Other states have more stringent requirements that include quality standards on products that aim to use the logo. Programs, such as New Jersey's 'Jersey Fresh' have observed "high returns" in agricultural cash receipts. Some successful state programs have been aided by funding from the USDA Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program (FSMIP).³

Launched in 2004, The PA Preferred Program aims to identify and promote local agricultural products grown, produced, and processed in Pennsylvania. The program is funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and is composed of PA Preferred, PA Preferred Organic, and PA Preferred Homegrown by Heroes. Influenced by 2011 legislation, PA Preferred has shifted the program to include farmers, processors, farmer's markets/retail businesses, restaurants, and supporting organizations. Qualifying requirements differ depending on entity type, with processors needing 75% of products coming from Pennsylvania farms, while restaurants must have one locally sourced item on the menu. Members of PA Preferred receive the following benefits:

- Mini-grants program offering branding packages and logos
- Online directory allowing people to search and locate PA farmers and producers
- Marketing materials focusing on different products every few months

A LOOK AT WASHINGTON

Currently, Washington State is one of three U.S. states that does not have an official state brand/label/marketing program that would identify and promote products from WA; however, there are multiple promotional efforts underway independent from the state that aim to elevate consumer awareness of Washington and/or more "local" products. These range from consumer education and awareness efforts to actual "brands" that are supported with marketing campaigns. An effort to launch a new statewide brand should consider how a Washington brand/identification would work alongside and in a supportive way with more local branding efforts that are in full effect in some areas with good success.

Existing efforts range in scope from the many "hyper local" brands, to statewide consumer education efforts and commodity specific marketing efforts. These initiatives have diverse leaders at the helm, from non-profit groups to local ports. Some examples of the existing programs are listed below and represent both official brands as well as broader-brush marketing efforts:

Examples of Statewide Programs:

Washington Grown

- "Washington Grown" is a program of the Potato Commission (a FPF member) and includes a TV show and a logo and active social media presence, but not a branded label program.

¹ Naasz E., Jablonski B., Thilmany D., (2018) 'State Branding Programs and Local Food Purchases' Choices Magazine: Agricultural and Applied Economics Association

² Ibid

³ Govindasamy R., Schilling B., Sullivan K. et al. (2004) 'Returns to the Jersey fresh promotional program: the impacts of promotional expenditures on farm cash receipts in New Jersey'

- WA Grown has received \$950,000 from a specialty block grant to partner with QFC and Harvest Foods and develop a print magazine.
- In addition to a print magazine, Washington Grown produces a television show aiming to elevate agricultural voices and highlight agricultural commodities, food trucks, consumers, and local farmers. Washington Grown currently films 13 episodes a year focusing on producers in the state. The television program costs roughly \$400,000 to create and is funded through solicited funds from various agricultural organizations, including USDA and the Conservation Commission.

Eat Local First

- Originally launched in 2011 and rebranded in 2018, “Eat Local First” is a statewide consumer marketing and awareness program that originated with the organization Sustainable Connections and now includes other partners, including Tilth Alliance (a FPF member). It focuses on showcasing individual farms and helping consumers find local foods directly from specific farms as well as via retailers and restaurants. The program is funded by Sustainable Connections, Tilth Alliance, Pierce County, USDA, WSDA, Whatcom and Community Foundation and has shared decision-making and governance responsibilities amongst partners. It also has a brand component, but current efforts are strongly focused on building out the Washington Farm and Food Finder online tool (a multi-org collaborative effort), and promotions of direct/locally marketing producers. Elements of the program include:
 - Whatcom County farm tour
 - Marketing materials for producers including twist ties, shelf tags, stickers, logos, and digital branding
 - Online directory and map of local farms
 - Regional marketing efforts (e.g., Eat Local First Olympic Peninsula)
- To take part in the program, restaurants must source from two local producers per month or have 50% or more of a menu item sourced from local producers. Criteria varies based on the different types of businesses enrolled in the program.
- The program aims to play a foundational role in strengthening connections between local food, local communities, and regional economies going forward.

Examples of Hyper-local Programs:

Although statewide programs currently bring attention to local Washington food, a number of hyper-local programs are also working to elevate regionally grown food. Programs such as Island Grown highlight the efforts of San Juan County producers, with requirements for membership in Island Grown solely being farmers grown within San Juan County. The current iteration of the Island Grown offers online brand packages to producers, with funding for the program coming from the San Juan County lodging tax and dues. As a result, the program primarily targets tourists and visitors to the islands. Future efforts in the program will include a calendar indicating all agro-tourism related activities and an online map showing locations of Island Grown farms in the county.

Island Grown is one of many hyper-local programs. Others in the state include:

- [Yakima Valley Made](#)
- [Okanogan Producers Marketing Association](#)
- [Kitsap Fresh](#)
- [Vashon Fresh](#)
- [Pierce County Fresh](#)
- [Whidbey Island Grown](#)
- [Savor Snoqualmie Valley](#)
- [South Sound Food System Network: Sound Food Campaign](#)
- [Genuine Skagit Valley](#)
- [Gorge Grown Food Network](#)
- [Cowlitz Fresh](#)

Past Efforts:

Over the years, there have been a range of state brand/promotion efforts including “From the Heart of Washington” and “Puget Sound Fresh.” Puget Sound Fresh was originally inspired by a state brand in New Jersey called Jersey Fresh. The program primarily addressed Pierce, Snohomish, and King County and resulted in a paper farm guide which not only built brand loyalty, but also formed relationships with on the ground stakeholders. Puget Sound Fresh further partnered with Seattle farmer’s markets to launch the [Fresh Bucks](#) program and develop a mobile app.

Although these efforts are no longer active, they have shared key considerations for other initiatives going forward. As the Forum dives into established and new marketing efforts within Washington state, the following considerations were elevated by past branding efforts:

- Brand awareness requires constant attention and updated messaging
- Create and maintaining unique messaging that resonates with audiences and touches multiple demographics
- Promote across different populations and know how to shift efforts to meet audience where they are
- Embrace technology
- Connect emotionally with consumers
- Institutional knowledge is key- do not lose staff to burnout
- Have systems in place that allow for productivity and efficiency
- Set clear goals for the program
- Ensure you are in the room when legislation is written
- Center the program around efforts that are possible within the confines of staff capacity

Examples of Commodity Programs:

- [Washington Potato Commission](#)
- [Washington Apple Commission](#)
- [Washington Grain Commission](#)

Some of the above efforts have received state support in some form either directly via the state budget or WSDA at various points.

More recently, staff at WSDA have also done some preliminary research into other state programs as examples for how these programs function. Additionally, the 2019 report includes a footnote that: WSDA Regional Markets is exploring strategies with regional produce wholesalers to help their school and institutional purchasers identify and order Washington products (e.g. specific order sheets and dedicated item codes). A state branding program that makes WA-Grown product more easily identifiable could potentially assist.