



# WASHINGTON STATE FOOD POLICY FORUM

## Charter

The Washington State Legislature initially created the Food Policy Forum through a budget proviso in 2016 and, in 2017, provided additional funding to support the Forum through June 2019. In 2020, the Washington State Legislature formally established the Forum in statute (RCW 89.50).

### Purpose

The Washington Food Policy Forum (Forum) is established as a public-private collaboration. RCW 89.50.010 and 89.50.020 identify the following goals for the Forum:

- a. Increase the availability of Washington-grown foods throughout the state, including by increasing direct marketing and other regional supply chains sales and consumption of Washington-grown foods.
- b. Expand and promote programs that bring healthy and nutritious Washington-grown foods to Washington residents, including increased public and private purchasing of Washington food products for schools, adult care programs, and other publicly funded food programs.
- c. Identify ways to improve coordination and communication among city, county, regional, and state food policy entities and communication between these entities and state agencies.
- d. Reduce food insecurity and hunger in the state.
- e. Identify current rules and regulations impeding the viability of small and mid-scale agriculture.
- f. Identify new policies that would improve the viability of small and mid-scale agriculture.
- g. Examine ways to encourage retention of an adequate number of farmers for small and mid-scale farms, meet the educational needs for the next generation of farmers, and provide for the continued economic viability of Washington food production, processing, and distribution in the state.

In addition to the goals identified in the Forum's statute, Forum members have identified additional goals regarding how the Forum could identify opportunities to address equity and the impacts of climate change in the state's food system.

According to the Forum's statute (RCW 89.50.020(2)) recommendations of the Food Policy Forum must consider, but not be limited to, ways in which the following may help achieve each of the goals:

- a. Increased collaboration and communication between local, state, and federal governments and agencies;
- b. Innovative public-private partnerships that can leverage private and public market influence, such as through institutional purchasing and contracts;
- c. Improvements to state or federal laws or regulations or funding relevant to the small and mid-scale farming interactions with the food system and food security in the state;
- d. Improvements in state or federal program implementation relevant to small and mid-scale farming interactions with the food system and food security in the state;

- e. Identification of additional federal, state, local, and private investments needed to accomplish the recommendations; and
- f. Defining and describing the variety of agriculture in the state utilizing farm acreage, farm business type, crop and agricultural product type, and defining what the term "local" means in the context of food production and distribution.

One role the Food Policy Forum plays is developing recommendations for considerations by a variety of interested parties. The State Conservation Commission and Washington State Department of Agriculture strongly consider and respond to recommendations put forward by the Forum.

## Structure and Management Relationships

The Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC), the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), and the Office of Farmland Preservation (OFP) work in partnership to convene, manage, and staff the Forum. Staff from the convening agencies are referred to as “co-leads.” Ross Strategic is contracted by SCC to provide facilitation support for the 2021-23 biennium. The SCC and the WSDA are jointly responsible for transmitting recommendations of the Food Policy Forum to the Legislature, consistent with RCW 43.01.036, by October 29, 2021, and every odd-numbered year thereafter.

**Administrative chair role:** A majority of the participating members appointed by the directors must appoint an administrative chair for the Forum. In coordination with the staff for the convening agencies, the chair may play different roles, including:

- Representing the Forum in various settings (e.g., legislative committee meetings, etc.)
- Opening and closing the meeting and assisting with managing the meeting
- Developing and fine-tuning agendas
- Participating in 1 weekly coordination meeting

**Observers’ role:** The Forum welcomes open participation (e.g., ask questions and make comments) from any stakeholder during meetings and agenda planning. In some cases, there will be a role for non-members to play in other aspects of the work (e.g., small group discussions on a focused topic). Voting is limited to Forum members.

## Forum Membership

The Directors of the SCC and the WSDA are responsible for appointing participating members of the Food Policy Forum and no appointment may be made unless each Director concurs in the appointment. The statute dictates that the Forum must ensure diversity of knowledge, experience and perspectives. Diversity is considered in terms of: sector of the food system; subject matter expertise; geography across the state of Washington; and inclusion of underrepresented communities, particularly those the Forum is trying to serve through recommendations, such as individuals or groups directly or indirectly impacted by recommendations (i.e., folks accessing food benefits, small producers, BIPOC producers etc.). Membership is tied to the invited individual’s affiliation or organization.

In addition to members appointed by the directors, four legislators may serve on the Food Policy Forum in an ex officio capacity. Legislative participants are appointed as follows:

(a) The Speaker of the House of Representatives shall appoint one member from each of the two largest caucuses of the House of Representatives; and

(b) The President of the Senate shall appoint one member from each of the two largest caucuses of the Senate.

Per the Forum's statute, each member of the Food Policy Forum shall serve without compensation but may be reimbursed for travel expenses as authorized in RCW [43.03.050](#) and [43.03.060](#).

Convening Directors review membership and consider recommendations for membership changes as needed. Members then receive reappointment letters from the convening Directors that members can accept or decline.

The Food Policy Forum membership can be accessed on the SCC website [here](#).

## Member Expectations

Consistent membership is critical for the Forum to be able to have productive conversations and engage in its consensus process. The Forum requires regular engagement, and members are expected to attend regularly occurring calls and meetings. Members are asked to review materials sent via email and provide comments when applicable. If an individual is not able to participate in an ongoing manner or in a particular meeting, they are expected to designate an alternate. Members are expected to brief alternates adequately so that alternates can represent them at meetings.

Members shall hold decision-making power for their organization or agency when present at the Forum.

If a member is unable to regularly attend meetings or engage with the Forum, their membership will be reviewed by the convening Directors.

### *Engaging non-members in Forum Team activities*

Members are expected to continue to meet with colleagues and stakeholders outside of Forum meeting or call time to gather perspectives and input on the direction the Forum is going. Non-members can be invited to Team meetings as technical or subject matter experts or participants with important lived experience to share. The intention of non-member engagement is to diversify the experience and expertise of current Forum membership. If a member is interested in inviting a non-member to a Team, members are asked to propose the idea to their Team for discussion. Items of discussion may include understanding who is being considered, why the person is being invited, and how the participation of the non-member aligns with the Team's activity and optimal size. If the Team approves the invite, the Forum member who proposed the non-member for participation will be asked to extend the invitation. Non-members can weigh in during the light decision-making that occurs during Team meetings. Members are asked to brief invited non-members prior to their participation, including by reviewing the Forum's charter.

## Member Transition

If a member leaves the Forum, the convening Directors may appoint a replacement from the same organization/department if an identified replacement can provide a similar or needed perspective to the

Forum. The convening Directors may appoint a person from a different organization or department. The Forum may recommend to the convening Directors who should be considered for appointment.

## Equity

Since its inception, the Forum has taken a systems approach to considering and identifying the challenges and opportunities in our food system; the Forum recognizes that this includes analysis of potentially disparate effects on the diversity of geographic and demographic communities as we work to achieve a food system that provides healthy food for all people in Washington. The Forum uses an equity lens to guide its work to develop and take action on recommendations so that the Forum contributes to the development of a food system that benefits all people in Washington. An “equity lens” can be defined as a process by which a series of questions are posed to potential Forum recommendations, such questions being oriented to identifying the equity implications of the proposed recommendation or action.

## Climate Change

The Forum recognizes that climate change affects the viability of Washington agriculture and the food system as a whole. In consideration of the potential impacts of climate change, the Forum will pursue opportunities to increase resiliency in the state’s food system.

## Managing Principles

1. The Forum strives to have a shared perspective on what the problem is even if proposed solutions differ. A shared understanding of the problem is the foundation for discussion of solutions.
2. The Forum will focus on common ground and take action where there is agreement. Topics that are found to be unproductively contentious will be set aside and can be taken up at a later date.
3. The Convening Directors, in consultation with members of the Forum, may also set aside certain topics for a variety of reasons, including that the topic is highly complex, influenced by other scales of policy change, the policy is outside the scope of the Forum, and/or the topic is being discussed elsewhere.
4. The Forum’s statute identifies an emphasis on small and mid-scale agriculture. However, the Forum’s work concerns the food systems as a whole including multiple scales of agriculture.
5. The Forum believes farmers are the experts in their operations/business models and trusts them to make decisions about production practices.
6. The Forum endeavors to be responsive to timely issues and emerging opportunities.

## Decision Making and Voting Procedures

Consensus is desirable but not required. The Forum’s definition of consensus is “I can live with it”. This Charter provides for decision making through consensus voting; however, it is anticipated that the need for formal consensus voting will be rare. The consensus voting procedures are:

- The facilitator will run through voting by asking each member if they have ‘no’ or ‘stand aside’ votes for any of the ideas under discussion so that the group can focus its discussion on objections or areas of clarification. The Forum will consider actions with no objections/clarifications as a consensus vote of ‘thumbs up, I can live with it’. Forum members must be present at voting meetings to participate.

- Consensus is reached when 100% of members vote yes or stand aside.
- Members may choose to 'stand aside' if they feel they do not understand the opportunity sufficiently to weigh in. Members are asked not to overuse this option because it could minimize the value of the Forum to bridge spheres of expertise and make collective recommendations. A 'stand aside' does not count against consensus. Stand aside votes will be documented in reports, letter, etc.
- Ideas that garner 2/3 or more 'yes/stand aside' votes but receive one or more 'no' votes need to be workshopped and further refined and can be brought back to the Forum for another vote (either by email or at a future meeting). These may be included in reports or other deliverables as 'promising ideas' and members will be invited to submit a short minority statement explaining the rationale for the 'no' vote.
- Members must be present (in person or online via webinar) in order to vote on recommendations or be in communication with the Forum convening agency staff as soon as possible to plan for their absence, including inviting alternates to participate. Absence from a meeting is in effect a 'yes' vote.
- Only one vote per appointed entity is permitted.

There is an assumption that within a sector there may be natural agreement on certain recommendations, but it is not necessary for there to be consensus within a 'caucus'. Formal caucuses are not part of the Forum's process.