



FARM *to* FREEZER

PROOF OF CONCEPT



- Rice Bowl
- Nacho
- Chicken Enchiladas
- Chicken Taco
- Beef Stew
- Pasta Alfredo
- Mac n Cheese
- Chickpea Soup





PROOF OF CONCEPT

The Whatcom County COVID-19 Food Security Task Force

was established in March 2020 to ensure food security for all Whatcom County residents during the pandemic. From this task force a sub-group was created to pilot a new program designed to benefit both local farmers and hunger relief organizations. The Bellingham Food Bank was awarded a WSDA grant to pilot a program to purchase locally grown food products to provide vital income opportunities for farmers, and to build inventory for food banks and hunger relief agencies to distribute during the post-harvest months.

The following is an overview of activities that took place April — November 2020.





PROOF OF CONCEPT

- Create new markets for local produce farmers
- Prioritize sourcing from under-served and BIPOC farmers
- Produce quality meals year-round using seasonally-available, locally-sourced produce for those who are food insecure in Whatcom County
- Utilize the Bellingham Public School Central Kitchen to produce high quality meals using their scratch-cooking model
- Create and implement a model of cross-sector collaboration for potential inclusion in The Millworks' Local Food Campus (project in design & development)



KEY PARTNERS

BELLINGHAM FOOD BANK

Procured fresh farm produce from local farms experiencing excess supply due to restaurant closures and curtailment of farmer's markets

Managed and tracked expenditures (paid farmers, reimbursed BPS Kitchen Staff)

Coordinated partner roles and weekly meetings

BPS CENTRAL KITCHEN

Head Chefs managed and trained kitchen staff

Created recipes using available produce, based on existing scratch model created for BPS

Processed fresh produce into QUART sized frozen meals (soups, stews, etc.) and PINT sized sauces

COMMON THREADS

Provided kitchen support by reassigning AmeriCorps members to help with F2F

Scheduled kitchen shifts for AmeriCorps members

WHATCOM COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Convened countywide Food Security Task Force in response to COVID-19 pandemic

Invested in technical assistance to develop pilot into viable ongoing program



LOCAL FOOD SUPPLY FLOW





COMMUNITY IMPACT

25

Number of unique local farms provided with vital income by the program (7 BIPOC-owned, 5 vendors new to the F2F partners).

29

Number of AmeriCorps service members involved in meaningful ways to support the implementation of this project.

41,858

Quarts (or quart equivalents) produced to date—representing a daily average of 780 quarts.

\$215,322

Total purchases of local fruit, vegetables and animal protein from farmers in Whatcom and Skagit Counties.

\$139,765

Total purchases of local fruit and vegetables from BIPOC farmers.

Data from June 22 — November 16, 2020, duration of pilot.





FARM to FREEZER



Having failed to find a meaningful buyer the previous year, to the extent of not being able to pay the irrigation water bill, selling through the Farm to Freezer Program was such a huge support to the farm operations. I was able to pay my pickers a livable wage as well as strategically position the farm to be more competitive to reach other markets in the following years. The farm was able to buy lugs, a small reefer truck, and prepare to apply for a GAP certificate. I would love the opportunity to continue with this program. The farm was able to provide a livable wage to the pickers, paid bills, and is on track to employ more people this coming season. My humble request is; please keep the program going, it is changing lives for a better future.



Tibs Ssendawula
Farmer





FARM to FREEZER



"Many farms were able to offset Covid-related sales losses and participate in other ambitious local food projects because of this additional potential sales outlet.

We would love to participate in this program and others like it in the future. These types of projects are cornerstones for a resilient local food system, and we appreciate the incredible efforts of all involved to support our farmers and hunger relief efforts in our region."

Evan Lewarch
Puget Sound FoodHub

"Our cooks used the berry sauce to make crisps and cobblers which they incorporated into frozen meals. They used it in cakes and quick breads, as a topping and in applesauce. It did not need much if any additional sugar.

We would love to continue to be part of this program. We could incorporate the soups into our meals and/or distribute the quarts to our meals clients."

Julie Meyers
Council on Aging





FARM to FREEZER



"We really appreciated working with the Farm to Freezer program in 2020 and hope to have the opportunity again in the future. During a time when our normal sales channels were disrupted, this program gave us a valuable outlet for our fresh mushrooms while contributing to our community. We know that the food being distributed by the program will be very appreciated by those receiving it and their support of local farms is very much appreciated by all of us in the local food industry."

Operating a commercial mushroom farm for over 15 years has taught us that the resilience and success of our farm relies on strong relationships with our community and our customers. Programs like this are a prime example of local organizations from the Food Bank, to the School District, to independent farms working together to make Whatcom County thrive even in hard times. We truly hope that this program will continue in the future and we would be honored to participate in any way we can."

Alex Winstead
Cascadia Mushrooms





FARM to
FREEZER

The logo features a stylized green plant with three leaves and a brown root, positioned to the left of the text. The word "FARM" is in green, "to" is in a smaller green font, and "FREEZER" is in blue. A blue swirl graphic is at the end of the word "FREEZER".

"We have been honored to provide berries to the Whatcom Farm to Freezer program. It brings us great joy knowing that with our work we can provide food to our neighbors. We were able to provide great wages for the workers and knowing that their labor was going to provide for local folks. We deeply value this partnership and opportunity."

Edgar Franks
Cooperativa Tierra Y Libertad





PROOF OF CONCEPT

Overall, the collaborators unanimously agreed that there are several indicators that illustrate the success of this pilot and viability to repeat it. All agreed that many points of the operations worked because of the flexibility and willingness that each took on to make adjustments to keep the project moving along.

The following is an overview of inputs and analysis to guide the next phase of the Farm to Freezer program and turn it into a sustainable operation.



STRENGTHS

- Flexible, collaborative partners
- Ability to purchase large quantities of seasonal produce from local farmers
- Inclusion of BIPOC farmers
- BPS' Scratch Kitchen model as a blueprint for pricing/planning costs
- High-quality end product (and the amount produced)

WEAKNESSES

- Space limitations
- Staff burnout/labor required
- No established funding stream
- Unsure of berry sauce demand (large quantity produced)
- Processing needed for some product (time x kitchen capabilities)

OPPORTUNITIES

- Potential for new partnerships with farmers/hunger relief organizations
- Millworks Project – can be built with project in mind
- Buy-in from the USDA to support local food systems
- The success of the initial run to request future funding

THREATS

- Unknowns of COVID and the long-term economic effects
- Competition for federal/private grant money is great





FARM TO FREEZER 2.0

PROGRAM BLUEPRINT

Aggregators	Farmers	Process	Prep/Storage	Distribution
<p>LABOR: Program Manager/ Coordinator</p> <p>EQUIPMENT: Refrigerated truck, holding rooms/cold storage</p>	<p>SOURCING: Fair pricing, planning around seasonal supply</p> <p>TRAINING: Wholesale prep for small farmers, crop planning</p>	<p>SPACE: Processing capacity with adequate production equipment</p> <p>LABOR: Head Chef with ability for recipe development/ planning</p>	<p>SPACE: Commercial kitchen, ## sq ft of frozen storage</p> <p>LABOR: Kitchen Manager, ## kitchen staff, janitorial/ warehouse staff</p>	<p>LABOR: Program Coordinator</p> <p>EQUIPMENT: Refrigerated truck for delivery</p>



FUTURE NEEDS

PERSONNEL

Project Manager

This role was filled by BFB. If the project expands, it will be necessary to hire a project manager/coordinator.

Kitchen Manager

This role was filled by BPS' Chefs. This was made possible because of the switch to remote learning. However, the demands of this program require its own full-time chef/kitchen manager.

Support Staff

This role was filled by BPS and CT AmeriCorps members. While it kept input costs low, there was a lack of time to properly train the staff. Moving forward, there is an opportunity to create a coinciding workforce development program to help with the extensive labor required in processing/preparing.

FUNDING

Revenue

The sole source of funding was provided by the WSDA (\$600,000). There is no indication that this funding will/can be renewed.

Expenses

Majority of budget was spent on procuring produce from local farmers which was a larger expense than anticipated. This expense though is a priority moving forward.

Future Expenses

The budget for the program will increase moving forward if the staffing structure changes (recommended) and for equipment to improve the process.

SPACE

BPS Central Kitchen

This space was available because of school closures due to COVID and then summer break. However, the kitchen cannot accommodate both the school needs and F2F simultaneously. The Local Food Campus planned for The Millworks project being led by the Whatcom Community Foundation will have space available to house an ongoing F2F program.

Processing

The kitchen lacked the capability to process large quantities of raw produce (such as corn on the cob). As noted above, The Millworks project will have space to accommodate F2F operations.

Long-term Frozen Storage

Prepared food is being stored at Bellingham Cold Storage.

