

Farm to School Connections Team Meeting

WSU King County Extension – Renton, WA

November 15, 2007

Present: Clayton Burrows (Growing WA/WSU Small Farms), Jim Baird (Baird Orchards), Jamie Baird (Baird Orchards), John Butler (American Produce Express), Mo McBroom (WA Env. Council), Patrick Green (Solid Ground), Erin MacDougall (Public Health-Seattle/KC), Vincent Felice (Growing WA), Elizabeth Fikejs (parent, Schmitz Park Elementary), Maggie Hoback (Full Circle Farm), Mary Dixon (parent), Eric Boutin (Auburn SD), Anita Finch (Seattle Public Schools), Sylvia Kantor (WSU-KCE), Lila Chapman (farmer, BarnPlace), David Chapman (Farmer, BarnPlace), Tricia Sexton (WSU-KCE)

Introductions and Updates

Local Farms – Healthy Kids – Mo McBroom (WA Env. Council)

Distributed copies of draft policy summary, fact sheet, and endorsement form

Provided a summary of the environmental coalition and the LFHK priority

Reviewed draft policy and took questions and feedback

Questions:

Eric Boutin – *Who are the organizations and where are they coming from? What are your strengths?* WEC is experienced with state level policy. They coordinate the environmental community (21 groups) to work on four environmental priorities each year. Those organizations represent 20,000-30,000 environmental activists around the state and lots of lobbyists in Olympia. She noted that the groups have in the past worked separately on their own legislative priorities and that the recent years of coordinated efforts have proven to create a strength in passing legislation.

Patrick Green – *Is it decided how schools will implement education around the WA Grown Fruits and Vegetable program?* Mo asked for suggestions. She doesn't want to mandate it from the environmental community, but is open to suggestions from the education community about how that might be included. Sylvia mentioned the Food Sense CHANGE programs through WSU and Patrick mentioned that Solid Ground's Apple Corps is another classroom curriculum option. Tricia noted that those schools currently using the federally funded Fresh Fruits and Vegetable Program (FFVP) often have an educational component, and also that in Colorado, the other state with a state-funded fruits and vegetable program, the applicant schools are asked to identify how they would incorporate an educational component when using the funds.

Clayton Burrows – *How does the money work in a non-budget year?* The current draft legislation includes a \$4-5 million total budget request. It is not that you cannot request any money, just that there isn't much to go around in a non-budget year.

WA Grown Fresh Fruits and Vegetable Program - \$2 million

WIC and EBT for farmers markets - \$1 million

Food Banks pilot projects to buy from farms – currently asking for \$1 million

Funding for a study to examine farmer access to in-state and institutional markets, including processing infrastructure, storage, insurance and creation of cooperatives – currently at \$250,000

Eric Boutin – *Wants to make sure we investigate the issue of intermingling state and local funds adequately– setting out a separate pool for state-funded school foods that can be purchased locally. Noting concern about legality of local preferencing. Also, they love the Fresh Fruits and Vegetable Program, but are there other models? Farm subsidies? Or other, so could spread local throughout the nutrition programs.* Mo is talking to George Sneller at OSPI about the legality and preferencing issues. The hope is that the Farm Bill will pass with clarification of federal rules and that this bill can address the state-level purchasing barriers. She is open to any suggested programs that might meet the needs of schools and kids.

Sylvia Kantor– *The bill should include some kind of evaluation of each piece – impacts, F2S programs, etc.*

Clayton Burrows– *Where are the teeth that will ensure that schools are buying from local/WA farms? In the current federally funded FFVP, are they using local? In the State program, it would be mandated, and the state Farm-to-School Program and Coordinator would be tasked with assistance on local purchasing connections. Currently most schools use Department of Defense Fresh funds if they have them, and go through normal distribution channels.*

Eric Boutin– *We do connect to farmers where we can. 75 schools would be wonderful, but if there's a model to help the thousands of schools have access, that would be better. Mo would love to add in some powerful pieces to this bill—the more potent this package is, the better, but they need to keep budget ask small this year. This year's legislative package is just the tip of the iceberg to what could be done.*

Mo made a closing note that we're in a good political position to get something done. WEC and others bring lots of resources, and are partnering with other organizations and agencies. But that what will make it successful is more help and more involvement. Please fill out endorsement form with how you'd like to be involved/informed. And please contact Mo with feedback on draft policies.

Farm Panel: Clayton Burrows, Jim and Jamie Baird, John Butler and Lila and David Chapman, with questions and input from others in the meeting.

Clayton Burrows – Growing Washington's school food sales are mostly in NW WA, with a more recent limited amount in KC. GW is a non-profit, and considers it's role to be that of a "benevolent broker," and the organization uses a team approach, working with 35 farms. Their focus is on service, not profit, and they serve as an intermediary between farms and schools. They also have several farms, so understand seasonality and farmer limits. They support the organization financially with food sales. Their produce has supplied snacks through the federal FFVP, and highlighted vegetables and salad bars, in addition to regular lunch service. They have also provided for special events, like Eat Local Day.

Tricia Sexton (TS): *Are the special veg and salad bar free and separate from lunch?*

Clayton: Not sure. Many of the schools they sell to are on the FFVP. GW has improved their distribution and efficiency by using a team approach. They provide a familiar and consistent face to schools, and provide accountability. Schools

used to having efficient modern companies deliver food to them, and the GW team approach allows them to compete with that. Having a number of growers means they can supplement shortfalls with other farms in system. And they can serve as an umbrella for the insurance levels required by schools. He doesn't see insurance as big barrier, but it is a basic barrier.

Seasonality is an issue. And procurement rules not supportive of buying local. Many schools don't have kitchen facilities to prepare fresh foods. A key challenge is in making it profitable for farms and affordable for schools is a challenge, with current funding levels.

He hears from schools that local food is often not as consistent in quality and quantity, as what they get from distributors and wholesalers.

There is lots of support for local food and farms, but basic realities are not changing on the ground. Farms are still a low-margin industry and schools are still underfunded.

John Butler – Omak – 3rd generation apple farmer supplying 60-70 schools Idaho and North Central and Western WA.

He got his foot in door as a desperation move, because not making money farming. Tried taking business out of state, selling apples elsewhere, and then started knocking on doors at local schools with story of trying to save family farm and have a great product. Business built about quality, service, dependability.

In the beginning schools worried and said quality and consistency had never worked when using local farms.

In 2002, developed the sliced apple product – wrote \$50,000 grant to do value-added product research. The sliced apple bag is now their biggest seller, at 50,000 pounds/month.

The downside is that it has taken John out of farming and more into sales and distribution. Biggest obstacle is probably distribution. It is an 8-9 hour day just driving to Western WA and back for delivery, plus fuel costs.

Buys other fruit from neighbors in Okanagan valley. Business has boomed. Didn't have processing equipment in the beginning, but never turned down business or sold inferior product. Now has great loyalty with schools.

Has to be a price-maker to sustain himself. Wants to make a profit, not subsidies. Stuck with it through lower-price competitors, asking for the price he needed, rather than competing on price with other businesses. Schools always come back to him for quality.

His farm is not organic. 99% of farmers in state are not organic. We don't want to bash each other in farm to school race. Hopes we can work together.

David Chapman: *How do you keep apples from turning brown?*

John – “Nature Seal” – ascorbic acid/Vitamin C – first in nation to use this technology. Fine mist spray technology avoids old problem of contamination in vat solution method. Lots of trial and error went into developing his method. There are organic versions of it. They use such a small amount, they are not required to list in nutrition stats, but do anyway.

Vincent Felice: *Congratulations. Exciting to hear. What is your next step? What are you looking forward to?*

John: Looking forward to retirement. The business doesn't make a ton of money. Equipment and infrastructure, trucks, etc., are expensive – have to keep doing it to make investments pay off. Need to get to point of enough sales to have someone do parts of it. Looking into additional value-added products. Farms can't afford to do it with just one product.

Has been asked to do salads, says we don't know how to do it right, so we don't do it. Supplement with other fruits, now adds grapes. Has looked into orange slices.

John believes it's important to do the distribution themselves. Doesn't want to work with distributors, but hears complaints from schools, who blame producer, not distributor when quality and freshness are not acceptable. Self-distribution ensures fresh delivery.

Maggie Hoback: *Are you becoming more of a processor/distributor?*

John - I am right now, but want to be on tractor. Now has to be the buyer/marketer/processor to maintain business. But when started, it was a matter of saving the farm. No one wants to sell to schools because they have extra time. He does it to sustain farm.

Maggie: *interesting, profitable reaction to marketplace and to form almost a cooperative – it opens market to local farms who can't take steps themselves to reach larger markets.*

John: It doesn't just happen, it's a lot of work. Lots of farms want to sell it because have no markets. He doesn't dicker with growers, but gives them price they say they need and adds margin to make distribution costs – schools just have to make that price. Schools don't complain.

TS: *To John and Clayton – are either of your businesses cooperatives? It sounds like you buy from farms and then sell on to clients.*

Both buy from other farms and sell on to clients. Neither includes the cooperative model of shared investment, administration and risk.

Clayton – Has found that farmers like John who've worked butt off to do a unique market and fit a niche do well, but that others don't have a way to sell to institutional markets. Schools don't have incentive to go look for farms, and farmers don't have time or money to do marketing and sales.

The broker position takes the initiative to make it big and make it easy for schools.

John agrees. It is all centralized to keep schools from having to break their backs and budgets seeking out local food.

TS: Thanks. Now on to Jim, who has not sold to schools, but is interested.

Jim Baird – Note: the apples you are eating (which he brought—Thanks, Jim!) are Ultima galas organic – not certified but organically grown.

Jim farms 150-200 acres, 6 million pounds/year of apples. Fruit goes into large warehouse and is sold over the year to wholesalers. Now down-sizing into smaller entities to sell more directly. It's hard to get my fruit out of the system once it's into it. Has never tried selling to schools, but thinks it sounds great. Is starting a nonprofit arm with an educational component. Would like to include field trips and connection to the land. Concern is that he does not want to get into the broker role or to expand "product line" in order to meet markets.

TS: To all of you who grow food, what are your thoughts about food safety concerns?

Clayton – Hasn't had problem. Sells low hazard fresh fruits and vegetables. Schools require insurance and a safety plan, which they have. Not certified.

John – regarding the liability issue – schools have said they were slicing their own apples and now buy from him to shift liability. They have a HACCP plan, but not state approved yet. School customers do ask the question. Now has a transparent system and all is available for clients to see.

Vincent – Small farms visible in local food discussions, but most not certified by food safety programs like HACCP, and don't have warehousing contracts, or distribution capabilities, etc. Does see it as a big issue for small farms.

TS: Let's shift to Education component of farm to school. What is your experience and goals around education about farms or on farms?

Lila Chapman – Has a very small farm. She grew up on large farm. Nine years ago, they had 4 ewes and 21 chickens. Now have a small flock of sheep 28, over 100 chickens. They sell eggs and wool directly from the farm. They did a farm plan and became livestock advisors in 2000 and now have taken hours of classwork through WSU, with volunteer hours in return. Their focus has always been about educating youth. Each put in hundreds per year 300-500—through 4-H program. She is struck by how much adult development can be affected by childhood experience/education. Her youth included chickens, markets, trading eggs for stockings during rations, etc.

Livestock advisor program and farm tour participation - this year 250 people on farm to learn about animal life on farm. Small things, like not all baby chicks are yellow, some are brown. Young people get to see chicks hatch, and it affects children and parents.

Their idea has developed over years to do more educating youth by bringing farmer to school to teach about animals' lives and needs, how meat and eggs are raised and what the process is. Health concerns now part of education, but in her youth, it was

common sense and more safe. Now teach kids about health concerns for humans and animals. And also about tracking in other things on shoes. They bring public to farm on a limited basis because of tracking things in.

Current thought to bring animals to schools in their trailer. Has taken 2 sheep, 3 rabbits and 4 chickens to summer camps and private schools to let children handle animals – tactile involvement is unforgettable.

TS – *Have you approached schools?*

Lila – the schools have come to them last year 3 schools, this year 6 have contacted – taking kids on a school. So far, all small private schools.

Clayton – Lila’s right – the kids love it. 21 Acres and north farm has had thousands of kids visit.

Lila - 21 Acres goal to build a building with a commercial kitchen plus classrooms for farms to use for value-added, and also for education projects. As program advances, she and David will probably do more classes there than on their own farm. Insurance is a problem for working with animals. They were denied insurance because worked with animals and youth and it is illegal in State of Washington.

F2S Details for wrap-up of meeting:

- Committees up for grabs – take the initiative and start one or make things happen.
- The Outreach Committee is still working on the nutrition toolkit, but Elise is no longer able to lead the committee, due to time. It is open for someone to step up and lead the committee and to create some new goals and activities for that committee, if it is to continue.
- Policy committee is generally focused on researching and providing information for policy development for “Local Farms-Healthy Kids.”

Eat Local Thanksgiving info from Erin.

Next Meeting: December 13th, 11am-1pm, Safeco Jackson Street Center, will include a panel of the perspective of School Nutrition Directors