

The Network has worked strategically for 12 years to leverage public investment in programs and policies that promote sustainable food and farming systems. Our mission is:

The Washington Sustainable Food & Farming Network engages with partners to keep farmers farming and to ensure that all Washingtonians have access to good food. We advocate bringing food from the ranch and farm to the table in a way that is economically viable, environmentally sustainable, and socially equitable.

Many of the early seeds the Network planted are now blossoming and institutionalizing change on the ground. Organics, still a small percentage nationwide, continue to show phenomenal growth in Washington State. Today almost 100,000 acres are “certified” organic, a jump of 183% since 2003. In 2007 \$213 million was generated from organic farmgate sales, a 48% jump in one year. USDA census showed a 9% increase in “small” farms between 2002 – 2005. In the last ten years, farmer markets have doubled; sales have quadrupled. In 2008 \$63 million dollars was generated by approximately 130 markets. Many factors influence this growth, but our advocacy has built a strong foundation for these changes.

OUR PROGRAMS

Local Farms Healthy Kids : One of the three cornerstones of sustainable agriculture is ensuring a socially equitable food system that provides access to good food for all, regardless of income. The goal of our program is to build a more socially equitable food system in Washington by increasing access to good food for families in need and by facilitating the sale of WA-grown food to low-income schools.

- In June 2007 The Network had an exciting opportunity to conceptualize a piece of state legislation that would incorporate many of our goals. Working collaboratively with a loose coalition of environmental, farming, school, childhood nutrition and anti-hunger interests we successfully drafted the Local Farms Healthy Kids Act. This new “ Good Food Coalition” successfully advocated for adoption in March 2008. Local Farms Healthy Kids provides better access to fresh, Washington grown foods for all Washingtonians and helps keep Washington farmers farming. The bill was funded at \$1.49 Million and:
 - 1) provided the first ever *state* grant monies (\$600,000) for low income eligible schools to purchase Washington grown fresh fruits and vegetables, launched a new Farm to School program within WSDA (\$290,000), provided additional funds (\$200,000) for the Farmer Market Nutrition Programs which enables families and Seniors in need to receive food stamps redeemable at farmer markets, established a Farmer to Food Bank pilot program (\$350,000) to enable Food Banks to contract with local farmers for fresh produce, and provided Farmer Markets funds (\$50,000) to purchase equipment allowing them to accept wireless electronic benefits (i.e. food stamps), and eased state procurement regulations to facilitate public institutional purchasing of Washington grown food.
- In 2008 WA-Grown Fresh Fruits and Vegetables grants were awarded to 25 low income schools and Farm-to-Foodbank projects in Spokane, Seattle and Bellingham were funded resulting in:
 - 10,000 schoolchildren enjoyed WA Grown Fruit & Vegetable Snacks thanks to the popular grant program that has shown classroom improvements in attentiveness, learning and healthy eating habits.
 - 37,000 low income mothers and young children were able to buy healthy, fresh food at local farmers markets in 2008 because of increased support for the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program - a 23% increase in the number of women and children served in 2007.
 - 20 farmers markets in 9 counties began their 2009 season prepared with training, marketing materials, and the technology to serve customers with Basic Food EBT cards as well as credit and debit cards. Market numbers have shown increased purchases compared to this time last year.

Our Local Farms Healthy Kids program continues to work with the Good Food Coalition to promote and track implementation of the new state law. Funding was secured at reduced levels in the 2009-2011 budget for the WA Grown Grant program, USDA Farm to School and the Farmer Market Nutrition Program.

Washington State Department of Agriculture Advocacy

- When the WA State Legislature directed WSDA to identify the “strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats” to agriculture in 2007 and make recommendations back to the Legislature in 2009 to keep farming in WA “competitive and profitable, The Network identified this Future of Farming project as a critical opportunity to significantly leverage public investment in sustainable agriculture. Our goal was to ensure that sustainable agriculture was well-represented during this process. The report was released in March and is on line at www.agr.wa.gov/fof . The Network’s specific recommendations were included as a link in the report that sends readers to our website where our recommendations are listed. We continue to advocate for implementation of recommendations that promote more sustainable food and farming systems in the State.
- As our small farmers struggled and farmlands were paved, additional market opportunities were needed to ensure the economic viability of our small farms and ranches. Working with the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), we advocated for the Small Farms Direct Marketing program which provides technical and financial support for farmer markets and specialty crop sales. In the last ten years, farmer markets have doubled; sales have quadrupled. In 2008 \$63 million dollars was generated by approximately 130 markets. In addition, the recently released USDA Census data documents that since 2002, there has been a 9% increase in the number of small farms in Washington, 3345 more “small” farms since 2002.

Farm Market Nutrition Program Advocacy

- We long recognized the inequity of food access and the difficulty for low income families to access fresh fruits and vegetables. Yearly we use our grassroots advocacy to secure funds for the Farmer Market Nutrition Programs, where food coupons are issued to low income seniors and young families in need. These families purchase fresh fruits and vegetables directly from farmers: a win for better nutrition for families in need and a win for family farmers getting 100% of the food dollar.

Washington State University Advocacy

- As our state’s land grant university, Washington State University plays a key role in the direction of publicly-funded agricultural research, teaching and extension programs. Strengthening the organic and sustainable farming research, teaching and outreach opportunities at WSU is our program goal.
- Years ago we recognized the need for a sustainable and organic research program at the state level and prioritized establishing such a program at Washington State University (WSU). In 2006, first time ever, the state legislature funded the Biologically Intensive Agriculture and Organic Farming (BIOAg) program.
- Noticing the lack of academic training for organic and sustainable farmers, we worked with WSU to establish the first undergraduate degree in organic farming in the nation. The University began offering undergraduate degrees in organic farming in 2006 and, in 2007 they began offering a graduate certificate in sustainable agriculture.

Beefing Up the Palouse Research Project

- In partnership with WSU, this research project investigated the economic feasibility of converting dry, Eastern Washington farmland into a sustainable, pasture-based, grass-fed beef operation. It tests management practices that could potentially reconcile conflicts between existing agricultural land uses and protection of critical areas. This two-year project was funded by the WA Conservation Commission. Farming sustainably in Eastern WA is challenging. Strong winds, steep hillsides and decades of intensive tillage have resulted in tremendous soil loss over the last 100 years. Many of the farms in the area receive Federal payments from the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). More than 1 million acres of WA farmland has been converted to vegetative cover, such as native grasses and plantings for wildlife to prevent erosion. Soil erosion has decreased under CRP but when farmers stop farming, infrastructure decays and rural communities’ decline, as evidenced in rural Eastern WA counties. Managed grazing, done properly, increases soil nutrient cycling, invigorates grass cover, providing greater photosynthesis, higher carbon sequestration, better wildlife habitat and improve the economic viability of the rural Palouse region. Additional research funds are being solicited by WSU to continue the project.