

COVID-19 Check-In Meeting Notes
Tuesday July 28, 2020

Agenda

Schedule: Tuesdays from 9:00 am – 10:00 am through August

Today's focus: COVID-19 WA Emergency Food Box Initiative

Office of the Governor – JT Austin, Sr. Policy Advisor to Governor Inslee

Washington State Department of Agriculture – Derek Sandison, Director

Food Lifeline – Linda Nageotte, CEO

Second Harvest – Jason Clark, CEO

Northwest Harvest – Thomas Reynolds, CEO

Q&A – Questions, Feedback and Clarifications

Next meeting: Tuesday, August 4th 9:00 am – 10:00 am

Updates

Director Sandison: JT and Director Sandison appointed by the Governor's Office to lead the Coordination effort to try to meet the demand for food assistance and hunger prevention. Led by JT Austin of the Governor's Office and Director Sandison of WSDA, the Food Security Coordination Team mobilized in March and convenes every other week. Main objective is to secure food access to food insecure populations.

• **State Objectives –**

- Maximize low-barrier food access among new and existing food insecure populations
- Support and sustain operations of established hunger relief organizations in the statewide network
- Provide guidance, resources and operating flexibilities from established program procedures to maximize safety of hunger relief staff and volunteers
- Coordinate between State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC), FEMA, WSDA, Governor's Office, and all other state and federal nutrition and food assistance programs, as well as among largest NGO food bank organizations for efficiency and clarity
- Support efforts to bring other food streams (donations) back within the hunger relief network. We want to see the pre-COVID streams of food such as grocery and restaurant donations restored

• **Looking Ahead –**

- Monitor increased demand for state, federal and community-based hunger relief in August
- Continued support of emergency food box and emergency food procurement and distribution
- Develop a state-funded staffing plan to reduce future reliance on National Guard
- Begin scenario planning and strategy development for 3 month intervals; gather input from FSCT
- Continued investment in established Food Assistance Programs (EFAP & EFAP Tribal) and COVID pilots (AMI, Charlie's Produce)
- Procure TEFAP replacement food for Aug/Sept. USDA was unable to fill some orders, so we're making up for that loss
- Additional investment in emergency food system capacity and infrastructure including helping contractors set up more dry and cold storage.
- Sustain partnership with NGOs for emergency food box and cased out bulk emergency food through September and beyond
- Establish a reserve of emergency food to be agile in the face of a surge in demand in August or beyond
- Federal advocacy in supportive of relief provisions that fund hunger relief, support agricultural producers, and mitigate food bank demand. Very focused on the COVID four legislation that's expected to pass around 8/7. Not sure what provisions will be in that legislation in terms of food assistance, but we're trying to influence that legislation in a positive way.

Linda Nageotte:

- Much appreciation for collaborations with WSDA, Governor's Office, Second Harvest and NWH. Looking forward to sharing information regarding efforts to help move food through the system. The 13 counties where FLL is the lead are continuing to evolve. - - We've appreciated the input from agency partners. Hearing loud and clear that the preference is for us to move back to our traditional methods of offering food to our agency network and restoring access to our Agency Express online ordering system which should be in place the first week of August. We are also working on restoring donated food streams.
- WA Emergency Food Initiative -
 - The same food items that were inside the pre-packed food boxes, will now be provided instead in "cased out" quantities.

- Boxes will be available in the ordering systems so you can order the items and then pack them at your agency.
- Been hearing that the pre-packed emergency food boxes continue to be valuable so we'll continue to offer those to our partners who really those.
- Donated Foods and Other Food Distribution -
 - A variety of donated foods (assorted products from donors, donated fresh produce, etc.) Pre-COVID, donations made up 85% of the foods that FLL distributed. That stream has restored itself to ~45% of our overall food supply. Working to get that back up to ~65% by the end of Dec.
 - Continuing TEFAP
 - CFAP, dairy boxes and combo boxes will be available for order on Agency Express
 - Complementary Order Up! Products; diapers, toilet paper, etc.
 - Shop the Dock – on demand program
- Working to steadily grow our capacity to be able to provide a broader variety of foods and want our agency partners to experience:
 - The opportunity to order what you need each week
 - Access to the foods and food streams that match the needs of the clients/guests you serve
 - Ability to add to your orders via Shop the Dock
 - Order accuracy
 - Strong customer service from our team
- FLL continues to be active in public policy advocacy, advocating for programs that help families facing hunger as well as advocating for investments in the hunger relief system. Also to raise community awareness of the impact of COVID-19 on the issue of hunger and helping our community members understand that there is a role everyone can play to help with hunger.
 - **Please continue asking questions, raising concerns and offering your insights. We're better together!**
 - Join our bi-weekly Partner Agency Calls. Our next network call is Thursday, August 6th at 3pm.
 - Send your thoughts, concerns and questions to:
Feedback@FoodLifeline.org

Jason Clark:

- Big thank you to everyone who continue to work so hard, as well as the procurement team at WSDA to help source the product for our emergency boxes, and the National Guard. Learning as we go, working on stabilizing our deliveries.

Doing our best to work out inconsistencies in deliveries. We know there is interest in cased product as well as emergency food boxes; open to supporting those to the best of our ability. Eager to hear feedback about what distribution looks like in your world so we can shift to meet your needs.

- 2nd Harvest is working on getting back to their first priority – to get food to their partner agencies. Want to get out of the mass-distribution business and are making progress. Expanded mobile market program but also trying to bring that down to a normal cadence. Some of those mobile markets, particularly the Columbia Basin area have been operated by the National Guard, which has helped tremendously. Those need to wind down during August.

Thomas Reynolds:

- Been travelling around the state and been hearing the level of concern especially among the senior population and newly arrived immigrant communities about how this pandemic is impacting them, being out in public spaces, the level of racism that people are experiencing and how frightening it can be when you need to access essential services. Thank you to each of you to make food less terrifying for those who are struggling.
- NWH will continue to distribute emergency food boxes at least through the end of Sept. Possibly through the end of Oct.
- Working with the state ensuring the predictive model created earlier this year is updated. Helps us to see around the corner. This was one of the main factors in determining August would be a difficult month in terms of change in policy – equaling possible changes in food insecurity.
- Predicting COVID-19 will continue to have an impact for at least another 9-18 months. Ramping up, preparing for a marathon. We're celebrating endurance and courage, milestones, etc. All of NWH staff will be off 9/3-9/8. Deliveries will be scheduled around that break.
- Focused on policy and advocacy work. Trying to reach decision makers in Washington, importance of SNAP, need to replace the enhanced unemployment benefits.

Communication moving forward:

- We share a concern that August could be a difficult month for many Washingtonians, both due to increased rates of COVID and new economic challenges as federal relief programs, like enhanced unemployment benefits, sunset on 7/31.

- If your agency experiences food, personnel or supply shortages, or a marked increase in demand, we need to know in order to help. If you experience shortages or have additional questions, concerns, suggestions, or feedback, please contact
 1. Your county lead
 2. Your WA emergency food box county lead agency (FLL, NWH, 2H)
 3. WSDA Food Assistance & Food Security Response Team (regional rep)
 - For staffing, supplies, and emergency food feedback
 - Katie Rains
krains@agr.wa.gov
 360-688-4549

Chat box comments:

- Hunger Fighters: appreciation to Linda and FLL for their attempts to provide some flexibility.
- Brittany gave props to the National Guard, huge resource.
- Last week, one of the ways that JT has advocated was to help clarify some concerns regarding further draw-down of National Guard. At this time, maintaining approx. 400 statewide; a reduction by roughly 300 from previous numbers. Pending response from the federal government about ongoing federal funding.
- BFB: If schools start w/on line learning, and options for free and reduced lunch are reduced for families, how might we partner with OSPI and local schools to better support hungry kids and others in the household. Any coordination between OSPI/WSDA/and the three large NGOs?
 - o We do have a food insecurity coordination team call this Thursday and we will be looking at some planning and getting that started, so I will make sure to bring this up. Christina Wong has also been working with Rep. Gregerson on a coordinated community response local task force model.
- Nichelle: we are partnering directly with the school district providing weekend hunger bags to their 26 meal sites that provide the free and reduce lunches M-F for anyone in need
- Hunger Fighters: What drives the motivation for sticking with emergency food box production? Is it rural areas that need these? Is it safety issues of distribution that push it? It would be helpful to know the bigger picture.
 - o Thomas: this is a good question and one we're asking every 3 weeks when we review and decide on changes. Our analyses is that the # of cases will continue to grow in our state which really features the importance of

social distancing and hygienic practice. There are large urban sub-distributors who have shared with us that the emergency food boxes work really well and they can acquire perishables on their own. These boxes reduce the labor factor too.

- Linda: welcome input from agency partners and if we hear they'd like to return to emergency food boxes that would be something we'd be ready to think about. The input we've been hearing has been to restore choice. Based on our needs vs. other counties around the state.
- Jason: similar, just want feedback so we can continue to adjust. The volunteer/National Guard is an issue for box production.
- Claire: Thanks, NWH, for this morning's alert about yesterday's proposed Senate COVID relief package - it includes no boost to SNAP, lower unemployment support, no rent assistance, and other missing or weak responses to our economic crisis. Please call your US Representative & Senators to urge their support to boost SNAP by 15% and raise the minimum benefit to \$30. We are very concerned about school meal access this fall - PLEASE reach out to your local school district's superintendent and school board members to talk about their plans to feed kids -- school meals only reached 50-60% of kids last spring, and they need to *do better* and *do differently* this fall.
- Hunger Fighters: Thank you, Tom. One of the challenges we are hearing from agencies in our region (South King County) is that emergency boxes are available in so many places that client numbers are way down and they cannot distribute enough. Storage now a huge issue. Several agencies are having dozens of unused produce and mixed goods boxes dumped on them after sitting out for hours and then they have the added work to rescue food (about 2/3) with hundreds of dollars of dumping fees.
 - Trish: so many non-profits are getting the CFAP boxes and distributing them on the corners, or what have you, but when they can't distribute them all, they want to return them to the food bank. But they don't know if they've been stored properly, refrigerated, etc. which leaves them to have to be dumped and takes time to go through them.
- Hunger Fighters: I am concerned about how resulting lower service numbers will later impact funding allocations just as these extra support systems sunset and numbers climb
 - Katie: Great point, one of the things I've been working on with Kim's team on trying to understand not just what the numbers tell us from this period of hunger relief response, but what are all the factors that make an apples

to oranges comparison to pre-COVID. CFAP distribution being one factor, faith and community based partners that have popped up that are not part of the established hunger relief network have an impact. Feel free to email me or your FA contact with what you think are a factor.

- Claire: would WSDA consider convening the CFAP distributors and nonprofits to organize distribution better/more efficiently? We've been hearing this kind of thing w/ other CFAP distributors
- Brent: The WSDA has no control over CFAP
 - o Katie: that's true and I've tried reaching out to all of the CFAP distributors in the western region and only got response from a few of them. We don't have control over it, but would be willing to help provide a coordinating roll but it's not clear if there's will or capacity for that right now.
- Claire: Has WSDA published which food banks have been awarded state storage/distribution grants so we understand distribution capacity better?
 - o Kim: not yet, we're working on those now, so in the future, you will see something about that.
- BFB: CFAP was well intentioned, but a total mess from the start.
 - o Katie: we all understand the dynamics and many agree. There have been some positive impacts, but the lack of coordination has been problematic.
- Claire: If CFAP nonprofits were to urge their distributors to be more collaborative, perhaps they'd be more likely to respond to WSDA request for a convening
- Nichelle: The sizes of most items don't take in to affect those on the street, hotels, or rooms in shelters, with small or no fridges, and storage, or cooking with microwaves
 - o Katie: were you referring to the CFAP boxes, emergency food boxes or all of the above?
 - o CFAP
 - o Katie: great point. I don't know of any changes within CFAP at this point, I know we've been looking at ways to provide additional resources for our houseless community members or others who are not in a position to cook foo.
- Brent: Claire. CFAP distributors don't care to coordinate. All they care about is dumping product asap.
- David M.: We use additional resources to unpack CFAP and distribute smaller portions.
- Trish: is PPE getting out?

- Katie: we've been able to successfully get some disposable masks out to the lead NGOs to distribute to local partners. Struggling to find gloves. Orders continue to be delayed, trying to find other sources. Intend on ordering more hand sanitizers for everyone.
- Ken: gloves are a major need in Yakima County
- Brent: It will actually target areas of the country where virtually no CFAP boxes have been distributed. And in areas where they claim the programs is working well.

Katie: some takeaways at this point are to see what we can do for additional conversation or coordination with OSPI and make sure that we're working at the state level for child nutrition, knowing we may or may not see a return to the classroom. Also what else can be done with CFAP.

- Claire: there is a new RFP out for the CFAP program for distributors through the end of the year. The boxes will be required to be larger, more to break down, require distributors that provide all of that food which will ace out WA producers who are making the produce boxes. WA distributors will be affected. Much concern about what this next round will entail. If recipients hear from them that we all need to come to the table that might generate more of a response.
 - Nichelle: when does the next round start:
 - Claire: heard that the RFP is open now for producers that would have food in the Fall.
 - Mike: next round is Sept-Dec. I believe

Closing remarks & recap:

Looking closely at what's coming up at the end of August, the commitment with the NGO partners is currently through the end of September, anticipate some sort of coordination at least through the end of the year.