

General Focus Check-In Meeting – September 24, 2024

Focus on Food, Highlights from Listening Sessions and Decision Package Review – Katie Rains, WSDA

- WSDA's Focus on Food Initiative
 - Launched in 2019 to demonstrate support for food systems broadly and bridge urban/rural divide
 - Underscored our commitment to:
 - Supporting all aspects of growing, processing, and distributing food
 - Helping farmers and producers connect with markets
 - Assuring consumers their food is safe
 - Making sure everyone in our state has access to good food
 - In the first year of COVID-19, agency budget doubled (>\$100M) to support pandemic response.
- Food Security During the COVID-19 Emergency
 - Key Issue Areas
 - Surging demand for food assistance, limited data
 - Widespread supply chain disruptions; donations down
 - Hunger relief sector relied heavily on volunteer labor
 - Need for immediate cross-sector coordination
 - WA State Food Security Coordination Team
 - Comprised of Governor's office, WSDA & all agencies that implement food and nutrition assistance, legislators, FEMA officials, NGOs
 - Monitoring and responding to unique hunger relief needs
 - Broad support for increased funding and new services at WSDA
- WSDA's New Service Areas since 2020
 - State Food Purchasing
 - Direct Emergency Relief buys
 - Strategic Reserves
 - Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA)
 - Hunger Relief Grants
 - Emergency Relief Staffing
 - FA Resiliency
 - We Feed WA
 - Producer Grants
 - Local Food System Infrastructure (LFSI)
 - Meat & Poultry
 - Resilient Food System Infrastructure (RFSI)
 - Farm to School Grants
 - Partnership with OSPI
 - Funds awarded to school districts
- WA State Equity & Environmental Justice Mandates

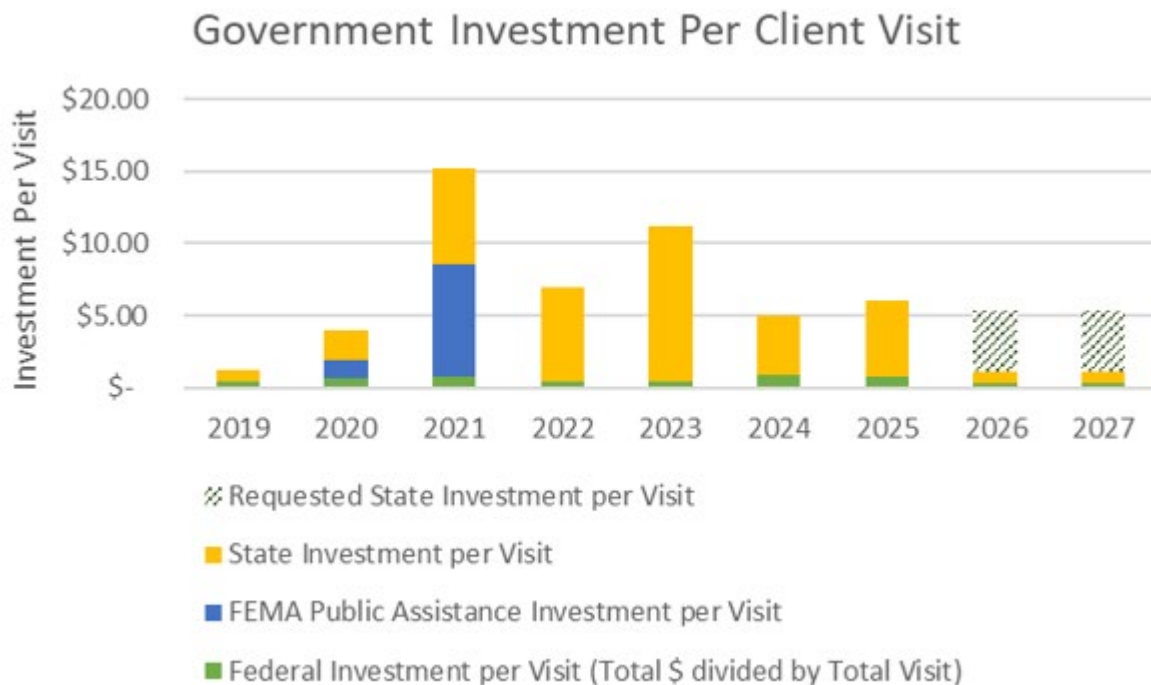
- Environmental Justice (HEAL) Act of 2021
 - Requires evaluation, engagement & mitigation when
 - Causing environmental harm
 - Creating Environmental benefits
 - Addressing environmental health disparities
- Pro-Equity, Anti-Racism (PEAR) Executive Order
 - Requires state agencies to adopt MO of ongoing relational engagement with historically marginalized groups
 - Establishing agency equity goals
 - Establishing a PEAR team
- WSDA's new Office of Equity & Environmental Justice
 - Nicole Johnson was appointed by Director Sandison to establish & lead the office summer 2024
 - Hiring Staff
 - Community Engagement
 - Language Access
 - Establishing Agency Goals
- Community Engagement at WSDA
 - The process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well being of those people (CDC)
 - Iterative and ongoing
 - Two-way communication – sharing and learning
 - Relationship-based
 - Identified Stakeholder Groups:
 - Consumers, especially people with lower incomes
 - Farm and food businesses, including hunger relief
 - Historically underrepresented minorities and community advocates
 - Municipal and county governments
- 2024 Focus on Food Community Engagement
 - Short-Term Goals:
 - Share information about WSDA food system programs and funding levels
 - Gather information about broad food system stakeholder concerns and priorities
 - Build network capacity and partnerships
 - Next Steps:
 - Food system stakeholder comment form: [link here.](#)
 - WAFOOD5 consumer survey: [link here.](#)
 - WSDA to share out a summary of summer 2024 engagement this fall
 - Future listening sessions
- Early Themes from Listening Sessions
 - Appreciation for WSDA's Efforts
 - And frustration, but we heard the gratitude! Thanks for recognizing our agency's efforts to support you and your community.
 - Worry for Future Resources

- Regardless of affiliation with programs historically, all CBO's and grantees received historic award amounts from WSDA since 2020. As relief resources wane, how will people continue to access the food they need to be well?
 - Frustration at System Regression
 - Investments were born of necessity and have had huge positive benefits in overcoming access barriers and getting people culturally tailored services and foods
 - "Spending more and giving out less than ever before."
 - Creativity and Will to Collaborate
- What is State Food Assistance?
 - State and federally-funded programs that provide funding and food to:
 - Independently-operated
 - Community-based
 - Non-profit organizations and tribes
 - Food Assistance is NOT:
 - Complete funding for hunger relief programs
 - Tied to changes in rates of food insecurity
 - A state-driven, coordinated (command and control style) system of hunger relief
- Food Security is a Cross-Sector Issue
 - Hunger is a well-documented health disparity
 - Hunger widens the educational achievement gap
 - Hunger has long-term costs in future health outcomes and impacted lifetime earnings
 - Hunger affects marginalized groups at higher rates
- 2025 WSDA Food Policy and Budget Requests (Decision Package)

Agency budget requests can be found on the Office of Financial Management website: <https://abr.ofm.wa.gov/>

- **Sustained Enhanced Food Assistance - \$93.25 million**
- **Local Food System Infrastructure Grant \$**
- **Small Meat & Poultry Assistance & Grant \$**
- **WA Promotion & Labeling Program**
- **Equity for Underrepresented Farmers Staff**
- **Climate Resilient Agriculture Small Farm Incentives**
- **Climate Livestock Composting**
- ~~**Commodity Donation Grant Funding**~~
- ~~**ER Food Purchasing Funding**~~

- Agency budget requests can be found on the Office of Financial Management website: <https://abr.ofm.wa.gov>
 - Select a budget session 2025-27 Regular (can review other budget requests also)
 - Search for AGR
 - Scroll to FA-Sustained Enhanced Food Assistance document (3/21 priority)
 - \$93.25M (largest request so far)
- Sustained Enhanced Food Assistance \$93.25M
- Local Food System Infrastructure Grant \$
- Washington State's Investment in Food Assistance
 - In 2019
 - 1.17M Washingtonians received food assistance
 - 7.8M total visits
 - State investment was \$0.78 per visit
 - In 2023
 - 1.74M Washingtonians received food assistance
 - 10.99M total visits (estimate 13M for 2024)
 - State investment was \$4.19 per visit (peaked in 2021 with \$10 per visit)
 - Requesting \$5 per visit (the most we could negotiate at this time)
- WSDA's 2025 Food Assistance Budget Request



- Stay in touch and share your feedback
 - In addition to staying in touch with program staff you work with, you can:
 - Email food@agr.wa.gov with food policy questions and comments.
 - [Sign up for Focus on Food newsletter](#)
 - [Share feedback with WSDA](#)
- **Questions/Comments**

- Listening to Katie's review of COVID-era is a bittersweet reminder of what many of us may have compartmentalized: Bitter = the amount of upheaval and stress across the hunger relief system, and Sweet = the truly remarkable response of so many INDIVIDUALS and organizations to work through what was a pretty desperate time for so many people.
- Monthly meetings are helpful!
- We [heart] WSDA and all of your hard work and advocacy on behalf of this network!
- Important point: In tough state budget situations (seems to be all of them), various state agency decision packages all have to compete for limited resources. With hunger relief funding showing up across several packages, we have to make sure all of our priorities advance – and not be pitted against each other.
- Longer meetings are welcome.
- **Contact:**
 - Katie Rains, Food Policy Advisor to the Director
 - krains@agr.wa.gov
 - 360-688-4549

Washington Food Coalition – Trish Twomey

- WFC Conference last week, went well.
- Translation Project has additional funding, \$10k WSDA grant
 - New link to sign up: <https://wfc.memberclicks.net/translation---interpretation-services> or email Trish directly.
 - Note: the link in the Newsletter only works for members of WFC.
- **Questions/Comments:**
 - Great conference – congratulations to Trish and the committee!
 - Thank you for the awesome networking opportunities at the conference, and the weather was absolutely perfect
- **Contact:**
 - Trish Twomey, Executive Director
 - trish@wafoodcoalition.org

Advocacy Updates – Claire Lane, Aaron Czyzewski, Jamie Wheeler, AHNC

- Energized from the WFC conference. Good sessions and discussions.
- Results of our candidate questionnaire will be sent out soon. 15 responses so far and almost all of them are not incumbents on the state legislative level.
- Big push in 2025 for all of us to participate as much as we can.
- Congress yesterday has a spending deal to get us through Dec 20th. Sept 30th budget ends, no deal. Will have budget deal after the elections.
- Criminals have been skimming food benefits from EBT cards. DSHS can return stolen benefits twice a year.
- State budget, WSDA has been a champion in request for emergency food.
- Organizations who receive FNS funding, are responsible to aid in voter registration. But need to be careful to be non-partisan and without endorsing individuals but can endorse initiatives.

- [FRAC \(Food Research and Action Center\) Guide to Permissible Activities for 501\(c\)\(3\)s.](#)
- [Register to Vote in Washington State.](#)
- Initiatives coming up that impact hunger relief that we want to vote “No”
 - I-2109: Repeals Capital Gains Tax, which provides \$800M/year for K12 education and childcare funding ([link in chat](#))
 - I-2117: Repeals Carbon Tax from the Climate Commitment Act, which provides \$1.5B in conservation climate protection ([link in chat](#))
 - I-2124: Repeals WA Cares program, the state long-term healthcare insurance program
 - Altogether would cause a \$10B budget deficit in the next two years.
- WAFood Survey is open now. Please share with your clients, your community partners that serve low income people and more! [Link here](#)
- **Contact:**
 - Aaron Czyzewski, aaronc@foodlifeline.org
 - Claire Lane, Claire.Lane2@gmail.com

Resiliency Grants Overview – Anna Berrey Hamill, WSDA FA

Total Allocation	\$5,000,000.00
Staff	\$1,420,642.00
Operations	\$454,902.00
Food Purchases	\$2,092,743.00
Pass-thru/Contracted Services	\$219,846.00
Equipment	\$653,500.00
Capital Improvement	\$15,000.00
Indirect	\$143,367.00



- **Contact:**
 - Anna Berrey Hamill and Britt Beug: foodassistancegrants@agr.wa.gov
 - <https://agr.wa.gov/services/food-access/hunger-relief-resources/food-assistance-grants/resiliency-grants>

Harvest Against Hunger



**WE MAKE CONNECTIONS TO
GET HEALTHY PRODUCE TO
PEOPLE IN NEED**



Core Work

Finding and delivering truckload-sized donations of produce for hunger-relief partner warehouses



Harvest VISTA

Place AmeriCorps VISTA members with partner sites to build food recovery and food systems across communities



Farm to Community

Create, support, and manage systems that connect local farmers directly with hunger relief organizations



Capacity Building

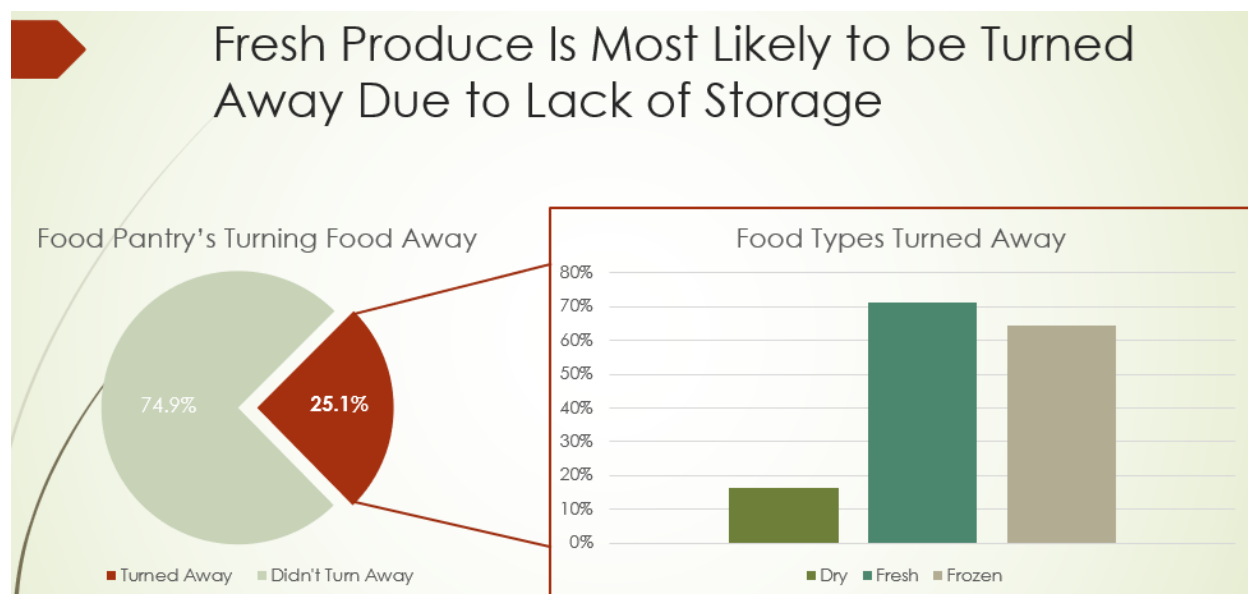
Develop, fund and support programs to build local capacity to safely handle and distribute perishable food



Connect & Collaborate

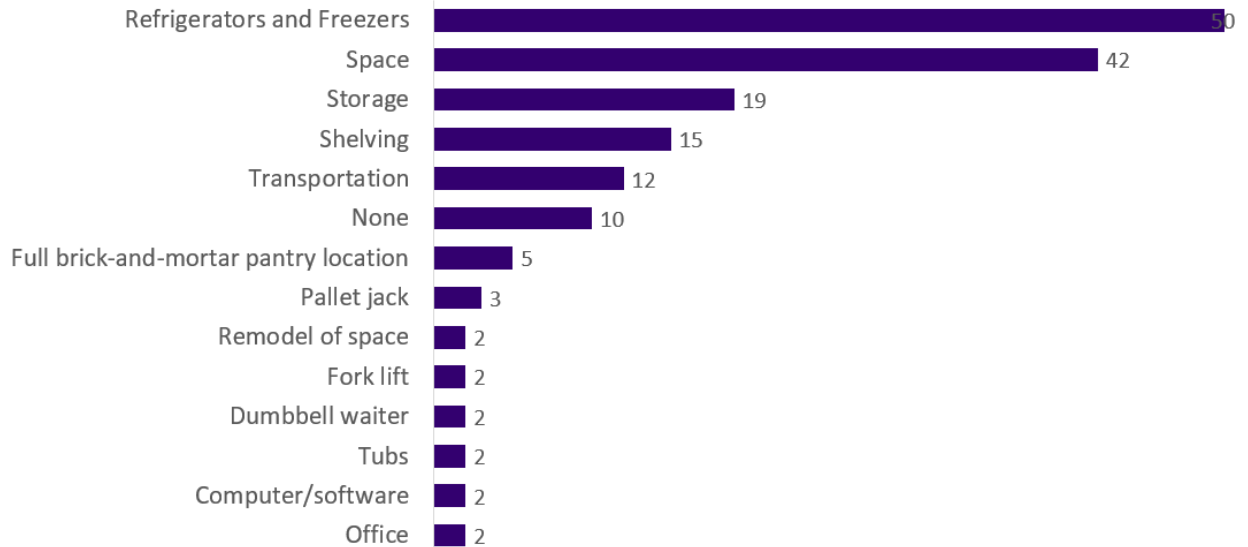
Facilitate monthly calls among statewide partners to share ideas and develop solutions to challenging problems

- Small Scale RG (Community Building work)
- Capacity Building:
 - Fresh produce is most likely to be turned away due to lack of storage
 - 25.1% of food is turned away from food pantries
 - Best to fund organizations to purchase what they need rather than dictate what the orgs need.



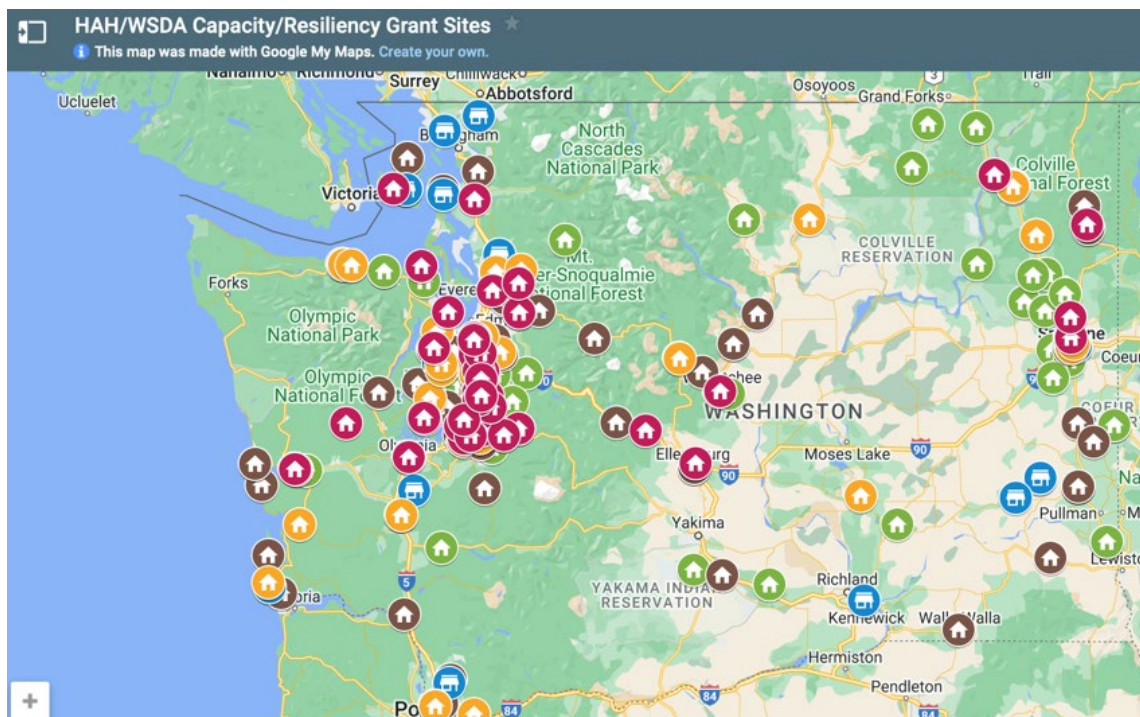
- 2018 Washington State Hunger Relief Capacity Survey (UW)
 - Storage improvements were the top 4 identified needs
 - Increased funding for those needs

What capacity-related improvement would have the biggest impact on your work?



**Only includes answers with multiple survey respondents*

- 2021 Washington State Hunger Relief Capacity Survey (WSDA and UW)
 - Lead to the Resiliency Grant program at WSDA
- Capacity Resiliency Grant Sites



- 2024 Resiliency Small Grant Program
 - 86 applications, \$342,600
 - Awarded: 61 organizations, \$266,242
- 2024 Capacity Survey Now open Link <https://redcap.iths.org/surveys/?s=AWWWHR88DJJAYPA>
 - Please participate. This helps show the current situation of hunger relief orgs and identify needs.
- **Contact:**
 - David Bobanick
 - david@harvestagainsthunger.org

FA Surveys

- Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) Survey
 - Open from 8/15-9/30/24
 - Share your thoughts on change proposals for the next biennium (07/01/25-06/30/27)
 - [Link to survey](#)
- Emergency Food Assistance Program – Tribal (EFAP-Tribal) Survey
 - Open from 8/15-9/30/24
 - Share your thoughts on change proposals for the next biennium (07/01/25-06/30/27)
 - [Link to survey](#)
- Focus on Food Systems Comment Form
 - Continuous Opportunity
 - We invite food system stakeholders to share input through our new comment form. Your insights will help WSDA gather information about your food system concerns and priorities.
 - [Link to survey](#)
- WA Food 5 Survey
 - Open from 8/29-9/30/24 but may be extended into October.
 - Option to provide an email to enter a drawing for one of 100 \$50 gift cards.
 - We want to learn how Washington residents are navigating health, food security, food access and your economic wellbeing. Taking part in this study is voluntary, we will NOT ask for your name, protected health information, or any identifying information. The survey should take 15-20 minutes to complete.
 - [Link to survey](#)

LFPFA & LFPFA Plus Extension

- Requesting a “no cost” extension (SFY 2026) from USDA AMS for any unspent LFPFA and LFPFA Plus Funding as of June 30, 2025.
- **Questions/Comments**
 - We have work to do, everyone!! And we’re better positioned than ever before to take it on. Every community in the state, many people, one voice against hunger!

Office Hours & Trainings – Kim Eads, WSDA FA

- LFPA
 - Quarterly open office hours, TBD last week in October
 - Quarterly reports due Oct. 20th
 - Farm to Community Team
 - Contact Jeff Mathias – jeff.mathias@agr.wa.gov
- Lead Agency – Core Programs
 - 1st Tuesday of the month
 - Q&A, info sharing
 - Problem solving
 - Contact your Regional Representative
- Resiliency Grant
 - 2nd Friday of the month
 - Contact Anna Hamill
- Food Order Work Group Meeting
 - TBD
 - Contact James Scovel or John Carney

Upcoming:

- Lead Agency Check-In Meeting
 - Friday, October 4th 9:00-10:00am
- General Check-In Meeting (last General Check-In meeting for the year)
 - Tuesday, October 22nd 9:00-10:00am
- Food Assistance Advisory Committee
 - Thursday, October 24th 10:00-11:30am
- Lead Agency Check-In Meeting (last Lead Agency Check-In meeting for the year)
 - Friday, November 1st 9:00-10:00am