



Western Treasure Valley

Community Food System

Assessment



University of Idaho
Extension
Payette County

Assessment Team

Steering Committee Members & Collaborators

- ▶ **Karie Boone, Ph.D.**
University of Idaho Extension, Payette County
- ▶ **Chrissy Hoefgen**
University of Idaho, Community Food Systems Student Intern
- ▶ **Dawn Callaham**
St. Luke's Community Health
- ▶ **Jim Felton**
Idaho Organization of Resource Councils (IORC), Community Member
- ▶ **Liz Amason**
Payette Community Alliance Network, Payette Farmer's Market Manager
- ▶ **Rebecca Luna**
Eat Smart Idaho Nutrition Instructor
- ▶ **Tyson Meeks**
Meeks Family Farm
- ▶ **Roy Vargas**
Treasure Valley Community College Small Business Development Center,
Labor Manager for Lower Snake River Farms

Assessment Report Authors

- ▶ Karie Boone
- ▶ Chrissy Hoefgen

Graphic Design

- ▶ Chrissy Hoefgen

For additional questions about the report and more information:

Contact: Karie Boone, *Extension Educator, Small Farms and Food Systems*

University of Idaho Extension, Payette County

16 S. 9th Street (PO Box 10), Payette, Idaho 83661

Email: kboone@uidaho.edu

Phone: 208.642.6022



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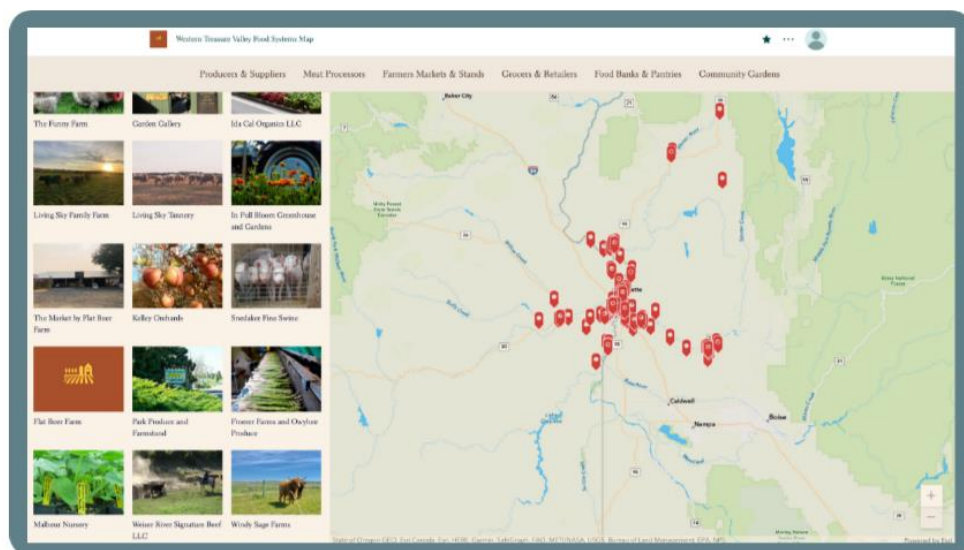
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Link to interactive Western Treasure Valley Food System Map:
<https://www.idahofoodworks.org/local-food-directories>

Executive Summary

Western Treasure Valley Community Food System Assessment

The Western Treasure Valley Community Food System Assessment was driven by steering committee members' interest in sustainable food system development and the University of Idaho Extension, Payette County. This research provides a critical tool for community members pursuing opportunities to localize the food system: it can support grant applications, be used as baseline information to continue research, and provides recommendations to help build a more resilient community food system.

Committee goals:

1 Increase WTV grower sales to local markets by 25% over next three years.



2 Increase community education on the availability and nutrition of locally grown foods in the WTV by collaborating with existing outreach efforts.

What is a food system?

The collective network of people, processes, and places involved in food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management. The food system is sustainable when it enhances the environmental, economic, and social health of a particular place.

The Western Treasure Valley Community Food Systems Assessment Steering Committee is a group of organizations and individuals working together in the food system framework.

We are all part of an interdependent system. Therefore, the many moving parts need to be coordinated to achieve bold goals such that food access, healthy diets, and a sustainable farming economy work together to promote greater health and quality of life for all.

The steering committee participated in monthly planning meetings to identify shared values, goals, and community assets to move toward a more resilient food system. Committee goals informed assessment trajectories.

Key findings from the assessment documented opportunities and challenges in existing WTV agricultural production, distribution, direct sales channels, and consumer food access.

Next Steps: *Regional Market Development & Education*

University of Idaho Extension Payette County...

- Will convene a group of producers interested in local market development in early winter 2021 to explore partnerships, funding, and roles for **collaboration**.
- Is scheduling **classes** on business and market development and production planning. Producers at future meetings will identify additional educational needs.
- Will **explore** farm-to-school programs in collaboration with regional schools, Idaho Preferred/Idaho State Department of Agriculture, and producers.

Continue reading to learn more about Western Treasure Valley small acreage producers and buyers in Washington, Payette, and Malheur Counties (Ontario Region).

The Western Treasure Valley

food system boundaries are flexible and include parts of Malheur, Payette and Washington Counties. We prioritized rural and urban populations, small acreage producers and their potential markets.



In 2017, within the three-county area:



Washington County

On average, farmers sold a gross total of **\$93,918** in agricultural products.

Median farm size: **53 acres**

4% of total farms, sold directly to their consumer.

Share of sales by type of production

58%
Livestock & Other



42% Crops

Payette County

On average, farmers sold a gross total of **\$261,562** in agricultural products.

Median farm size: **20 acres**

7% of total farms, sold directly to their consumer.

70%
Livestock & Other



30% Crops

Malheur County

On average, farmers sold a gross total of **\$366,521** in agricultural products.

Median farm size: **108 acres**

6% of total farms, sold directly to their consumer.

52%
Livestock & Other



48% Crops

**This data is from the most recent USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2017 Census of Agriculture.*

Producer Data Summary

Sample Population of Producers

Total producer respondent sample size: **(n = 17)**

Average farm size: **10 acres**

Farm acreage range: **1 to 10 acres**



▶ **Established Producers:** including 10+ years of production, multi-generational, diverse & established markets.

53%



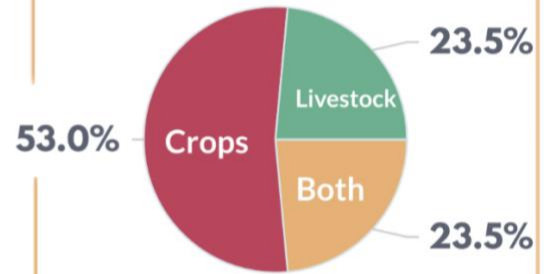
▶ **Beginning Producers:** including <10 years of production, diverse products, specialty markets.

47%



Type of Production

Producer respondents reported type of farm production:



Educational Interests

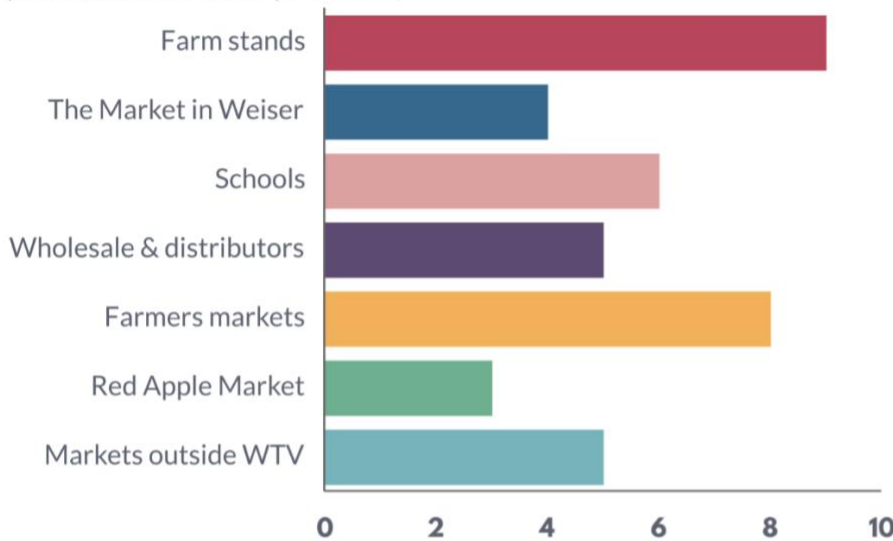
Producers top reported interests and educational needs in relation to training and growth for their businesses:

- ▶ Soil health & crop production 
- ▶ Business planning & development
- ▶ Direct marketing strategies
- ▶ Online marketing & brand development
- ▶ Rules & regulations for value-added production

Current Regional Markets



Reported market channels, including all avenues by which producers sell their products:



Barriers to Accessing Markets

The top challenges producers reported experiencing when trying to sell products to regional markets include:



Absence of marketing skills



Inconsistent supply or lack of quantity



Lack of standardized product sought by buyers

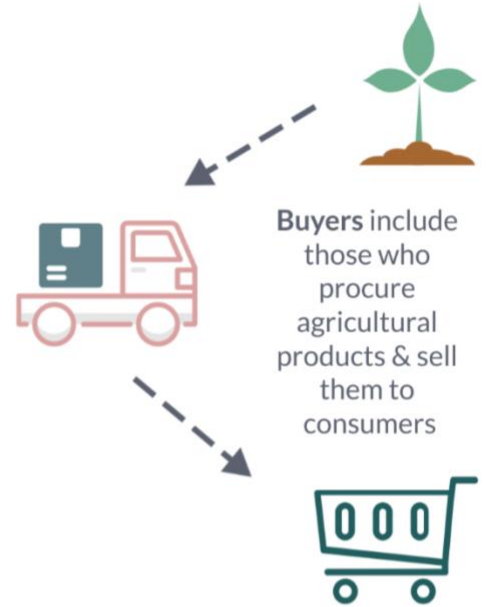
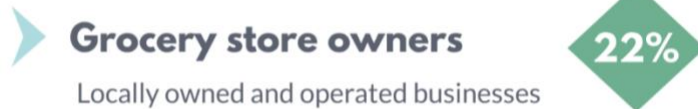


Higher price-point than competitors

Institutional Buyer Data Summary

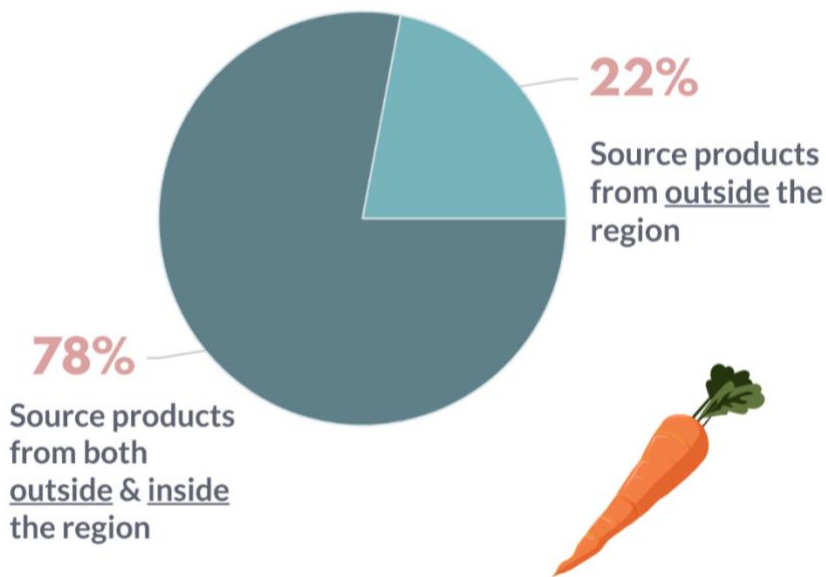
Sample Population of Institutional Buyers

Total buyer respondent sample size: (n = 9)



Current Purchasing Channels

Buyer purchasing channels:



Product Interest

Buyers reported products they would be interested in purchasing from regional producers:

- Beef & pork 
- Fresh fruits & vegetables
- Edible flowers
- Certified organic products

Barriers to Sourcing Regionally Produced Products

The top challenges buyers reported experiencing when trying to procure products from regional markets:



Delivery logistics



Buyer rules & regulations



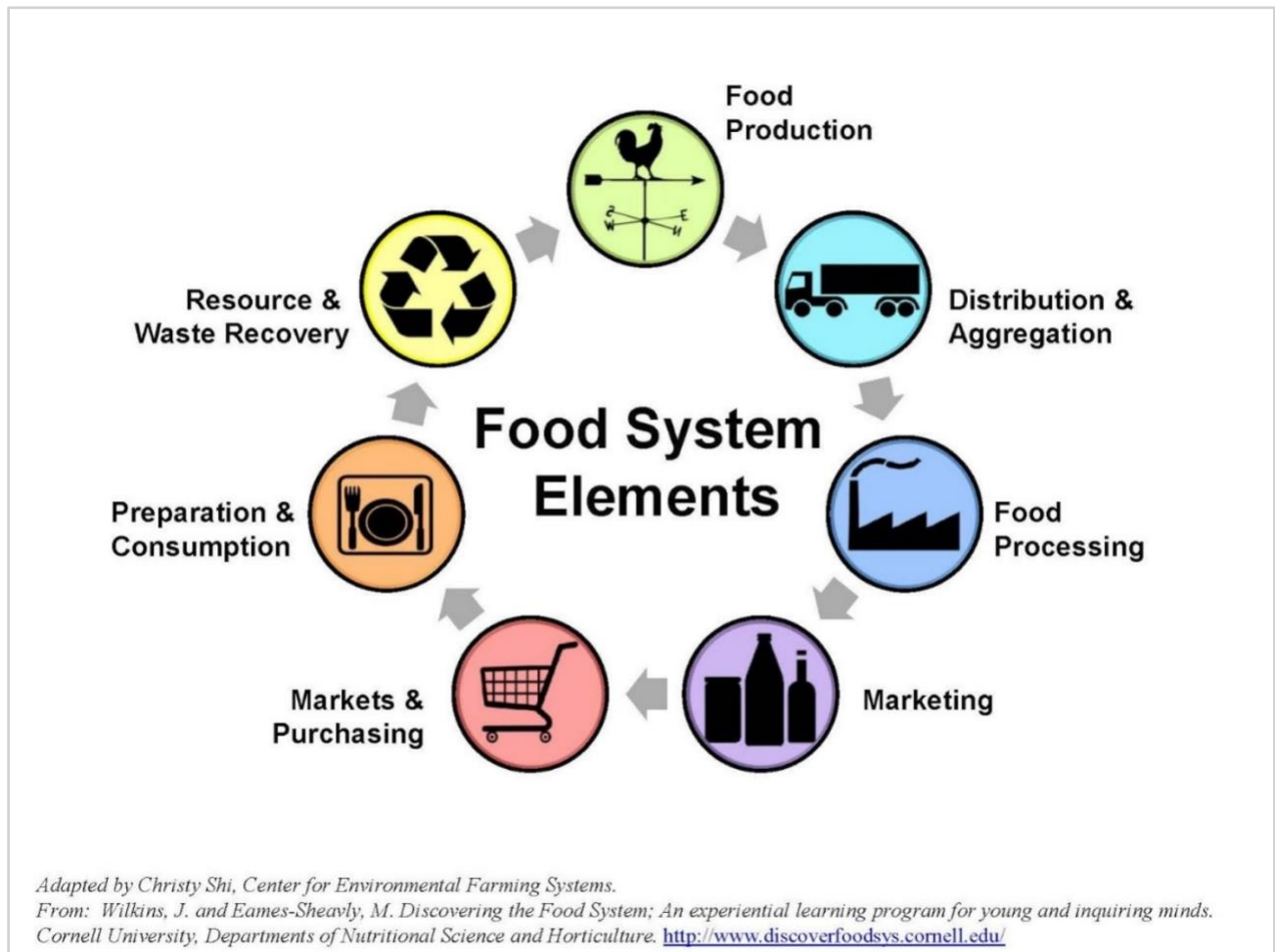
Inconsistent supply or quality of products



High prices

Introduction: *Precedent, process, team*

A community-based food system assessment is one component of a larger societal goal to ensure a sustainable food system. A sustainable food system is a collaborative network of people, including sustainable food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management. The food system is sustainable when it enhances the environmental, economic, and social health of a particular place.



Elements of a sustainable food system

In 2014, a regional Food Security Assessment covering Payette and surrounding counties identified needs for increased agricultural-related development and improved food access for low-income populations of all ages. Then, Idaho community leaders identified food system assessments as a statewide goal at the 2018 Summit on Idaho Hunger and Food Security.

Idaho community leaders identified food system assessments as a statewide goal to move toward these principles.

In response, the University of Idaho Extension in Payette County organized a group of innovative individuals representing different aspects of the food system including production, consumption, food access and health. UI Extension in Payette County facilitated monthly meetings to develop the committee's vision for the future of our regional food system. How can we make it better? How do we create more markets accessible for regional producers? Improve healthy food access for lower income populations and our children? This report represents the work of the steering committee throughout the assessment process.

The group named themselves: **The Western Treasure Valley Community Food System Assessment Process Steering Committee**. Members committed to seeing through a participatory process of assessment goal development, data collection, and advising on subsequent actions. The steering committee set food system boundaries, documented community food system assets (i.e., Distribution and aggregation options, infrastructures, knowledge, etc.) and developed the committee's goals for the future of our regional food system.

The committee's two primary goals include:

- 1.) Increase Western Treasure Valley grower sales to local markets by 25% over next three years (by 2024).
- 2.) Increase community education on the availability and nutrition of locally grown foods in the Western Treasure Valley by utilizing current outreach efforts.

With these goals in mind, the following report summarizes the data collected toward reaching these goals.



The assessment includes two methodological phases. First, the steering committee followed a facilitated planning method for development of the assessment goals and directions. Second, directed by the steering committee defined goals, the mixed-methods data gathering of primary and secondary data is described below.

1. Assessment Planning: Steering Committee Process

A focus on a participatory and engaged community process drove the assessment process methodology. Much of the ability to get ‘buy-in’ and integrate the food systems thinking into the fabric of the community is determined by having the right stakeholders at the table. The steering committee included representation from production, distribution, consumption, and health education. The committee defined the food system boundaries, identified regional assets, developed assessment goals and gathered feedback from the larger community during a facilitated community meeting. *For a detailed plan of the steering committee’s phased process and information about the community food systems meeting, see Appendix C.*

Regional Food System Boundaries

The steering committee defined a geographic food system boundary for where the assessment would take place, a three-county region including over the Western Idaho state border into Oregon. The boundaries include both rural and urban, small and large acreage producers, potential markets, and the physical location of the people who need support as well as those willing to support the development of our food system. The boundaries are flexible and represent a region of focus for data collection and future action plans.



The Western Treasure Valley regional food system boundaries with the surrounding communities.

In defining this region, the committee considered the area that steering committee members think of as their community (i.e., the area of physical space where residents live and interact daily). In addition, we studied:

- Where are the farmers located who (could) bring food to our food system?
- Where are the supporting businesses that farmers use or could use to bring food to market (farmers markets, meat slaughterhouses, etc.)?
- Where are the people who are willing to commit their time and resources toward building a community food system?
- Where are the people who need our support located?

Identifying Regional Assets

We looked at our community assets through the lens of the community capital framework. This framework represents seven diverse areas in which a community has assets and can make investments for future growth. The capitals serve as a framework for asset mapping. The seven capitals are as follows:

- 1. Natural**
- 2. Built**
- 3. Financial**
- 4. Social**
- 5. Human**
- 6. Cultural**
- 7. Political**

Investments can be made to each of these capitals — like one might add money to a savings account — to increase community resources or their ability to enhance the community. See *Appendix C for the community assets table the steering committee brainstormed.*



Source: Emery and Flora 2006; revised graphic: C. Cox

The seven community asset capitals visual

Assessment Goals

We built on the identified assets to develop draft assessment goals. In setting these goals, we analyzed the larger context and purpose of the food system in our community. From building a better community food system, we asked what are the key trends, events, or developments affecting our future and how we translate these into opportunities or challenges to aim higher and do better? With a set of preliminary goals, the committee organized a committee meeting to garner feedback and narrow their list of goals.

Larger Community Meeting Input and Assessment Goals

The draft assessment goals were presented at a larger community meeting. This meeting helped focus the assessment process and broadened the stakeholder base, contributing to a more inclusive food system envisioning.

The steering committee worked together to organize a community meeting with over 50 participants representing local government, health and wellness organizations, local producers, related federal and state agencies, school dining halls, farmer's markets, farm labor, and more. We gathered feedback and whittled down a broad list of potential assessment directions into two primary goals:

- 1) Increase WTV grower sales to local markets by 25% over next three years.
- 2) Increase community education on the availability and nutrition of locally grown foods in the Western Treasure Valley by collaborating with existing outreach efforts.

Once we had working goals, we circled back to the community food system assets to ensure that our identified goals will be enhanced with resources already present in our community. With these goals as direction, the data gathering phase began.

2. Data Collection Methods

A mixed-method approach was used that combined qualitative and quantitative data from various primary and secondary sources. A University of Idaho student intern gathered quantitative data from secondary data sources, including the United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service 2017 Census of Agriculture, and the USDA Farm to School 2015 Census¹. We examined data related to the agricultural production of farms ranging from one to fifty acres in the three-county area and indications of direct-to-consumer and local sales by agricultural producers. Also, we considered data of

¹ Other data sources include: The Idaho Department of Education and the Oregon Department of Education. Other sources include the Idaho Department of Commerce, the Idaho Department of Labor, the Oregon Department of Labor, the U.S. Census Bureau, the USDA Economic Research Service, and the Idaho Farmers Market Association 2019 membership data.

farmers market interest and farm-to-school activities. Furthermore, we examined data including county-wide resident demographics and economic overviews.

The primary data collection consisted of informal interviews with 28 respondents. We chose a sampling frame representative of the various aspects of the food system from production to distribution and consumption. Interviewees included 17 small acreage producers and potential local buyers, including four regional school districts, one private school, two local produce distributors, two grocery store owners, one farm stand owner, and one food bank worker.

Producers were asked about their current local sourcing strategies, their interest in increasing sales to local markets, the barriers to do so, and their educational interests. The potential buyers were asked about their local sourcing practices, supply channels, interest in increasing purchasing, and the barriers to doing so. Interviews were originally planned for in-person, but the global pandemic hit just before we started interviews. With the quarantine and social distancing restrictions, we adapted our plan to implementing phone interviews. *See Appendix B for the interview guides.*



Regional Small Acreage Food Production

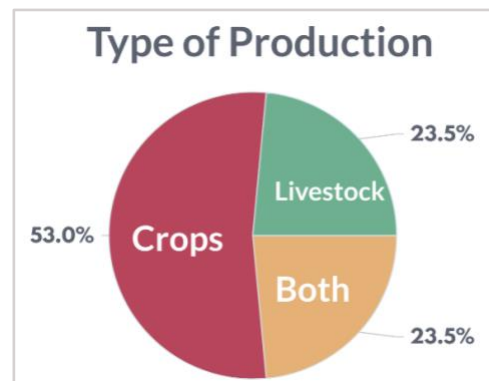
Payette County Extension conducted interviews with seventeen agricultural business owners in Washington, Payette, and Malheur counties. Interviews sought to understand the producer's capacity and interest in selling to regional markets, including businesses, institutions, and schools, and the barriers to doing so. Interviewees included producers of livestock, crop, and value-added products. The interviewees primarily encompassed two categories of producers: producers with ten or more years of business ownership, 53% of interviewees, and producers with less than ten years of business ownership, which included the remaining 47% of interviewees. Of the producers interviewed, the average farm size is about 10 acres and consists of farms ranging from about one to fifty acres. Of the producers with less than ten years experience, 80% were cultivating between 1-10 acres. Within the three-county area, the USDA Census of Agriculture of 2017 reported 51% of total farms had fifty or fewer acres in production. The selected sample of interviewees strived to match the broader scope of producers in the region.

Crops and Products

In the WTV, the primary agricultural commodities (by the value of sales) consist of cattle and calf production and other livestock products like milk from cows, sheep, and goat production. Despite the primary value of sales reporting as livestock production, there is a wide range of crop production. *See Appendix A for a table with the specific crops and products grown by small acreage producers.*

Current Regional Markets

The differences in producer market channels correlated with the length of business operation. The more established producers, including nine of the seventeen interviewee respondents maintaining ten or more years of ownership, reported their primary regional market channels: on-site and off-site farm stands, u-pick, wholesale distributors, and local schools. Newer business owners with less than ten years of ownership, including eight of the seventeen interviewees, reported their regional market channels as farmers markets in Payette, Ontario, Emmet, McCall, and Boise. Other market channels reported included social media sales and on-site and off-site farm stands. Overall, producers from both groups expressed the most interest and capacity to develop and sell at farm stands. In particular, producers reported interest in selling at their own farm stands (on their property) and at external sites including The Market in Weiser and Red Barn Produce in Fruitland. *See Appendix A for a graph with producers reported current regional markets.*



Small acreage producers reported type of agricultural production.

Increasing Sales to Regional Markets

Along with measuring the producer's current engagement in the regional market channels, the study asked about their future market access and ideal sales channels. While producers with ten or more years of ownership reported less interest in expanding their farm business to include new or more products, 33% reported enthusiasm in increasing their current sales to wholesale distributors. Additionally, about 45% of established producers expressed substantial interest in connecting with local K-12 schools. Respondents noted that sales to schools are an essential aspect of being part of the community. They also cited schools as a potentially less complicated market to sell to than other entities such as grocery stores. However, it was noted that the process would need to become more streamlined.

Approximately seven out of eight interviewees with less than ten years of ownership indicated a greater interest in expanding their sales to regional markets. Of the newer producers, 37.5% suggest a potential need to expand their product line to meet the needs of the markets and indicated their plan to expand to specialty stores, including health food stores. New product ideas include naturally-raised beef and pork, eggs, artisan cheeses, and berries. Furthermore, 50% of new producers plan to sell their products at more farmers markets in the region and expand their online presence including websites and social media, Facebook in particular. About 53% of established and beginning producers reported already selling their products to farm stands in the region or through their on-site farm stand. In comparison, 30% expressed interest in establishing new farm stands to expand their business.

Interest in collaborating on local markets development with other regional producers cut across experience level. All respondents recognized a need to develop and expand their marketing strategies and to do so in collaboration with other farmers and ranchers. One producer suggested organizing with neighbors to create a farm stand loop. In this vision, producers with farm stands would collaborate to build a comprehensive map which would display farm stand businesses to consumers in the surrounding region. Another respondent indicated she was already planning to meet with two other farms to strategize a similar loop but that they need help and organization to move forward. *See Appendix A for a graph with producers reported interest in increasing sales to regional markets.*

Barriers to Accessing Regional Markets

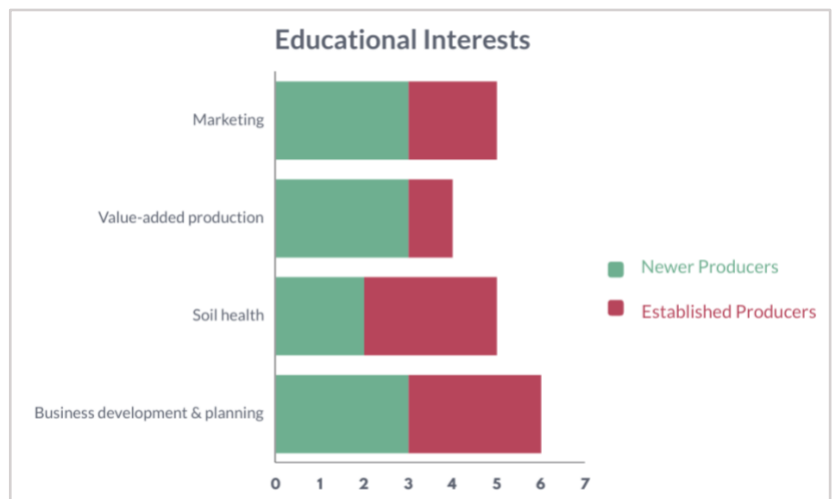
Interviewees reported multiple barriers to increasing their sales to regional markets. Approximately 41% reported inconsistent supply or quantity of products to meet market demand. Irregular supply is typically due to the seasonality of agricultural products and is experienced by both established and newer producers. Another reported barrier includes the producer's higher price point for their products when compared to competitors. Around 29% of

all producers said they could not compete whether selling directly to consumers or through larger market channels. For more established producers, approximately 33% noted buyer product standardization requirements including consistent shape, size, and overall quality of the product as a barrier to growing their regional markets.

Additionally, smaller acreage producers find costs and inefficiencies of delivering products to individual stores, schools, and farm stands as prohibitive. It is typically expensive for labor and requires specific packaging and hauling capacity. For newer producers, 63% report the absence of a marketing plan and the skills to make a plan—the sheer lack of time and resources to try to reach out to newer markets is a barrier. Nearly 38% admitted that lack of information and understanding of commercial kitchen regulations for value-added products and other food safety rules posed a significant barrier to market expansion. *See Appendix A for a graph with producers reported barriers to accessing regional markets.*

Educational Interests

Interviewee educational interests ranged in topics and varied based on experience level. About 30% of all established and newer producers expressed their interest in learning marketing-related information, typically online marketing utilizing websites and social media, and marketing products directly to consumers and through regional sales channels. Of all producers, 24% reported an area of educational interest in learning about the rules and regulations associated with developing and scaling value-added products, including the use of commercial kitchens. Producers of ten or more years of ownership noted their interest in learning more about soil health; two producers mentioned their interest in minimal to no-till farming practices.



The educational interests reported by small acreage producers.

Another producer expressed desire to learn the logistics of establishing a farm loop in collaboration with other interested regional producers. Although interviews focused on local markets, 25% reported interest in learning about soil health. Other newer producers emphasized their interest in improving their business management skills, and more explicitly, developing business plans.

Distribution & Direct Sales Opportunities

Distributors

Distribution and wholesale channels are fundamental to connecting Western Treasure Valley agricultural producers to regional retailers and consumers. Developed distribution channels require substantial organization between the agricultural producers, wholesalers, processors, retail buyers, and infrastructure, including refrigerated warehouses and trucking systems. Two primary distributors serve the Western Treasure Valley region, Grasmick Produce and Charlie's Produce.

Grasmick Produce's headquarters and main warehouse is in Boise, Idaho with a second warehouse in Idaho Falls, Idaho. Grasmick considers itself the largest sourcing and distribution channel of fresh produce in Idaho. They also serve Eastern Oregon, Northern Nevada, and Western Wyoming. Retailers, foodservice organizations, national chain operators, hospitals, school districts, hotels, country clubs, casinos, and universities across the Inland Northwest source products from Grasmick. Grasmick sources directly from agricultural producers and indicate interest in supporting as many Idaho producers as possible. Grasmick reports sourcing products like potatoes, apples, onions, blueberries, and other summer fruit from small acreage producers in the Southwestern region of Idaho.

Charlie's Produce is a large-scale distribution company with roots in Western Washington and its original warehouse in Seattle. Charlie's now serves most of the west, Washington, Oregon, California, Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, and Arizona. They distribute a large assortment of products, including a diversity of fresh produce plus retail and foodservice industry pre-cut fresh fruits and vegetables, floral products, and considers themselves Northwest's leading organic produce supplier. Charlie's Produce buys Idaho corn, onions, watermelon, tomatoes, cantaloupe, bell peppers, asparagus, apples, and cherries to distribute statewide.

While Grasmick and Charlie's Produce suggest desire and an attempt to work with smaller-scale producers, farmers experience several barriers. Working with distributors tends to pose the highest risk to the producers themselves. For example, they require Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification. The GAP certification is a voluntary state-specific third-party audit program that verifies fruits and vegetables are produced, packed, handled, and stored to minimize risks of microbial food safety hazards. The certification requires annual renewal and an audit and certification fee paid by the producers themselves. Some distributors also require producers to have a minimum of five-million-dollar liability insurance.

Producers need to meet the supply and quality demands and requirements of distributors, which can be challenging to overcome, especially smaller-sized production operations. Furthermore, distributors like Grasmick and Charlie’s Produce will choose to purchase the most competitively priced products, creating price-driven competition for producers. Often, small- scale Idaho producers can’t compete with larger producers in California or Mexico. Once a producer meets the distributors' baseline requirements, there is still high-risk for producers. The arrangement could lack a formal agreement between the two parties, ending in handshake deals. Both Grasmick and Charlie’s Produce indicate a growing interest in purchasing local and higher-end products by restaurants and other markets which could emerge as an opportunity for smaller scale and regionally based producers.

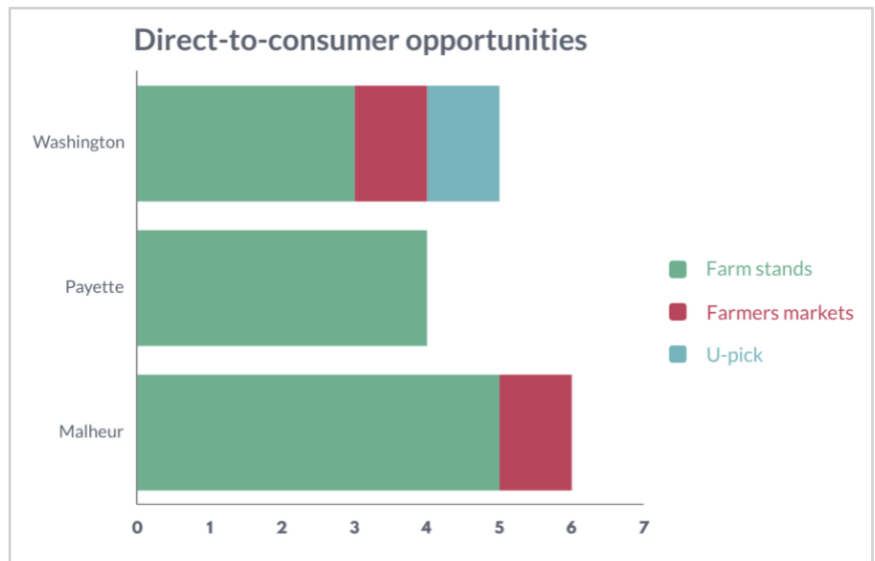
Direct Sales Opportunities

Direct-to-consumer sales opportunities are those in which producers are selling their products to individual consumers. The

USDA defines food sold directly to consumers as edible products, including value-added products, produced and sold for human consumption directly to consumers at farmers markets, on-farm stores or farm stands, roadside stands or stores, u-pick, CSA (Community Supported Agriculture), online marketplaces, etc. Direct-to-consumer sales typically support regional food system economies. The USDA

Census of Agriculture of 2017 reported that about 5.5% of total

farms in the three-county area sold their products directly to their consumers. Farms reported selling their products directly to their consumers, amounted to a value of \$1,392,000 from a total of about 124 farm operations in 2017 - which also accounts for about 0.24% of the total market value of all agricultural products sold in the three-county area.



Reported opportunities for direct-to-consumer sales by small acreage producers.

Farmer's Markets

Some of the most visible and established direct-to consumer sales opportunities are farmers markets. In 2021, across the Western Treasure Valley region there are two stable farmer's markets, the Weiser and the Ontario Farmer's Markets. Aside from these two markets, there is the recently dissolved Payette Farmer's Market.



The Weiser Farmer's Market, located at the Weiser Train Depot, first opened in 2013. The Idaho Farmers Market Association reported the market opened July 16th to September 10th in 2019 and was open once a week. The average number of vendors, including produce and craft vendors, was eighteen. The total estimated sales of the season amounted to \$10,000, with no reported Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) sales. The Weiser Farmer's Market will continue in 2021 with a July 15th opening and will run until September 9th and open every Thursday evening from 5:00 pm to 7:30 pm.

While the Payette Farmer's Market endured its fourth and potentially final market in 2019, the Weiser Farmer's Market is within just 15 miles of the old Payette Farmer's Market location. In 2019, the Payette market was open on Tuesdays from 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm from the middle of July to the middle of September at Kiwanis Park. The IFMA reported an average of fifteen total vendors, including produce and craft vendors. An estimated 170 total customers and \$7,450 in sales, plus \$365.00 of EBT sales and \$340.00 of Double Up Food Bucks (DUFb). The Payette Farmer's Market noted a lack of volunteers and interested produce vendors to keep the market running.

The House That Art Built originally started the Ontario Farmer's Market in 2008. As the market grew and new organizers took over, the location eventually moved to the heart of Ontario in downtown Moore Park. The Ontario Farmer's Market mission is to "provide the community a regular place to purchase locally raised, in-season produce directly from the farmer; unique handmade items from the creator/artist; and opportunities for educational or fun events." The Ontario Farmer's Market volunteers manage the market and plan to open June 12th and open every Saturday until September 25th from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm.

Farm Stands & U-pick

Other direct-to-consumer sale opportunities for farmers and agricultural producers include farm stands consisting of two business models. One farm stand in the WTV region is a farm business with a farm stand on-site, selling products grown and produced strictly from the farm itself. This type of farm stand may operate on seasonal hours or open on a self-serve honor system basis, possibly 24-hours a day. An example of this business model includes Hamanishi Farms Inc. in Payette County, which offers a self-serve farm stand where they sell onions and peppers.

Another standard farm stand business model in the WTV region (includes a minimum of eleven businesses) typically operates as a storefront with consistent year-round or seasonal hours. This model of farm stand business may sell products the on-site farm produces, but most usually sell other producer's products, regionally produced or otherwise. This type of farm stand business may sell fresh produce, meat, eggs, milk, value-added products like canned goods, honey, baked goods, and may have other products like floral arrangements and craft items. Purdum's Produce, Red Barn Produce, Kelley Orchards, Country Corner, Hot Springs Trading Post Farmers Market, Owyhee Produce, and Park Produce & Farmstand are examples of businesses in the WTV selling a range of products from many producers and creators.

The Market in Weiser is an example of a farm stand that sells various products produced and created by regional businesses, including fresh produce and plants. The Market is a new business run by local Weiser residents who established the company in early 2020. The first year, despite the pandemic circumstances, the business was a success. The Market's owners mention they need a large supply of products for their farm stand, so they work with many small- and large-scale growers and producers in the immediate region and distributors like Charlie's Produce. Since The Market is new and is developing its sales through various channels, accessing the appropriate products and receiving deliveries is a barrier to their business model.



U-pick produce is another option for agricultural producers to sell their products directly to the consumers. Consumers come directly to the farm site to pick ripe produce grown by the farm business and typically pay the price per weight for what they pick and take home. Kelley Orchards advertises both a farm store and seasonal u-pick fruit sales like; cherries, peaches, nectarines, plums, pluots, and apples.

Farm-to-School

The Idaho and Oregon Farm-to-School program within the USDA has helped public schools procure local food and provide educational opportunities since 2011. The Farm-to-School program aims to provide students education on fresh, healthy food and work with local producers to source local foods for school cafeterias. The USDA conducted a census of school districts across the nation for the 2013-14 school year to understand the participation in the Farm-to-School program. Of the nineteen schools within the four districts in the WTV region, Fruitland, Payette, and Weiser School Districts in Idaho and Ontario School District in Oregon, all reported participating in farm-to-school activities. Farm-to-school activities include procuring local foods for breakfast and lunch programs, field trips, tastings, and school gardens. Individual school districts' Food Service Directors or Director of Nutrition Services organize the entire school district nutrition programs. Each school district's food service director has staff members prepare meals for all the schools in the district and then send them to the school sites for the student population.

School District Information		
District	Total schools	Student enrollment
Payette	4	1,334
Weiser	4	1,533
Fruitland	4	1,644
Ontario	7	2,377
Treasure Valley Classical Academy	1	305

Data gathered from the Idaho Department of Education and the Oregon Dept. of Education

In the USDA report for the 2013-14 school year, all school districts reported participation in farm-to-school activities. However, in interviews with food program directors only three of four school districts report purchasing from regional food suppliers. Additionally, a private school within the WTV region not included in the USDA report, acknowledged purchasing food from regional agricultural producers. Overall, there is a strong consensus from all school district nutrition programs and encouragement from the school district in supporting the purchasing of food from regional producers. The motivation from school districts is essential towards

increasing regional food procurement. The largest barrier for school nutrition programs is the rules and regulations surrounding the purchasing of food.

The Federal Child Nutrition (CNPs) programs are federally funded and carry vast rules and regulations including:

- the menu items that may comprise meals;
- eligibility criteria for receiving free and reduced-price meals;
- standards for maintaining food safety;
- frequency of health inspections;
- and the procurement of all goods and services used.

School nutrition programs in the WTV tend to use a formal procurement method called sealed bidding. Formal bids require detailed product descriptions and pricing from vendors. The lowest-priced bid from a vendor can provide the product to the district. Other methods used by school nutrition programs include sole-source procurement when there is a single potential product vendor. Sole-source procurement is a less formal method that requires prior approval from the State Agency. The sealed bidding method of food procurement favors large-scale distributors, like Charlie's Produce and Grasmick, that offer the lowest priced products. Along with low prices, school nutrition programs require vendors to provide consistently high-quality food-safe products with uniform shapes and sizes, that meet the school-year quantity expectations, and have liability insurance.

Another method of procurement used by three of the five school nutrition program directors includes cooperative and group purchasing channels. Three school nutrition program directors purchase at least some of their products through the Treasure Valley Cooperative (TVC) bidding system which joins school districts together in the purchasing process. The TVC is a member-based business seeking to increase buying power and collective networking while reducing costs to procure a variety of high-quality products. All school nutrition program directors report using a combination of methods in procuring their food.

While the states require school nutrition programs to use a defined method of food procurement for most purchases, it is worth noting there are informal food procurement tactics. Some school nutrition program directors have informal, direct market partnerships with regional farmers. It requires additional logistics to procure food in this way. Directors practicing this arrangement are committed to supporting their community, local farms and feel it is essential to feed their student population with regionally produced foods. The quantities sourced regionally comprise an insignificant amount of the overall food budget. One director estimated the amount of regional food was less than five percent of all food purchases. The

most significant difficulty of purchasing food directly from regional producers is the delivery needs and additional communication on top of the existing TVC bidding system.

Federal and state funding exist to promote the purchasing of produce from regional growers. The federal USDA Fresh Fruits and Vegetable Program provides Department of Defense funding for school nutrition programs to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. The program does not require locked-in pricing bids, a potential avenue for local sourcing².

At the state level, the Idaho Department of Agriculture sponsors *Idaho Preferred*, a program to identify and promote food and agricultural products grown, raised, or processed in Idaho. During the interviews with staff, we learned that the program has not recently worked on facilitating farm-to-school arrangements. In the past they have provided:

- Training food service personnel on what's local and where to buy;
- Educating producers on selling into schools;
- Farm to summer: get local food into local feeding sites; and
- Workshops and facilitated discussions between schools and producers.

Respondents at Idaho Preferred suggested reaching out to local distributors and wanted to be kept in the loop for potential collaborations.

Grocery Stores

Ten grocery stores in the WTV region encompassed the sample size for respondent interviews. Malheur County sample respondents were Albertsons, The Oregon Natural Market, M & W Market's, and a regionally-owned Red Apple Marketplace, in Ontario. In Payette County, DJ's Pilgrim Market, Total Health Inc., and Albertsons in Payette. In Washington County, Ridley's Family Market, Gilmore's Get-More Quality Meats, Inc., and Pioneer Express Market.

Of the ten grocery stores in the sample population, six stores were contacted and chose not to respond. Two stores were unable to provide appropriate information and encouraged conversations with headquarters, and two responded. The two respondents indicated different barriers to sourcing regionally produced products for their operation. The most common barrier was the lack of desirable products available in the region compared with nationwide competitors.

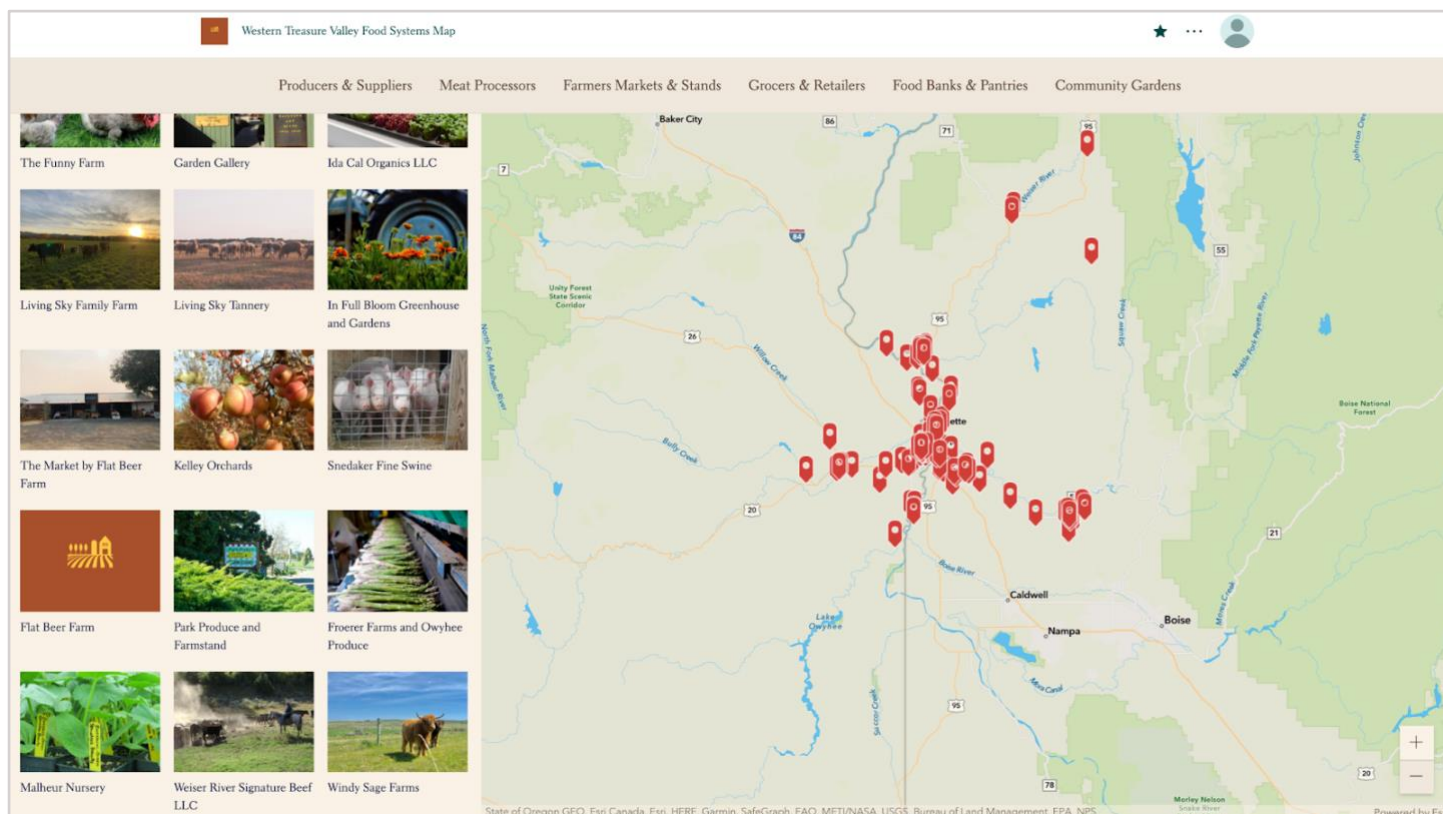
² For more information on this program about farm-to-school:
https://www.ode.state.or.us/wma/nutrition/snp/usda_dod_factsheet.pdf

One of the two respondents reported not currently sourcing any products from regional producers, although they've attempted. The higher price-point, combined with the inconsistent availability and quantity plus the additional logistics makes it unappealing. The respondent noted the products they source must be USDA compliant, therefore, sourcing all their products from one broker who purchases from various companies in the nation simplifies and assures USDA compliance.

The second respondent has difficulty finding regionally grown certified organic or at least "natural practices." The respondent sources regionally produced bulk honey, garlic, garbanzo beans, eggs, beef products, and pre-made cookie dough. Still, they would like to source as many regionally produced certified organic or natural products as possible. Instead, they primarily source their fresh produce from distributors procuring from Western Oregon or Washington and dry-packed goods in the Pacific Northwest, California, and Utah.

They identified divergent and complicated rules and regulations that vary across Oregon and Idaho state lines. It is often less challenging for a business in Oregon to purchase products within the state even if the proximity is further in the distance. In general, the two store-owners reported varied interest and willingness to support regional producers. However, the small sample size cannot indicate broad themes of store owners within the region.





Interactive Western Treasure Valley Food System map for consumer food access³.

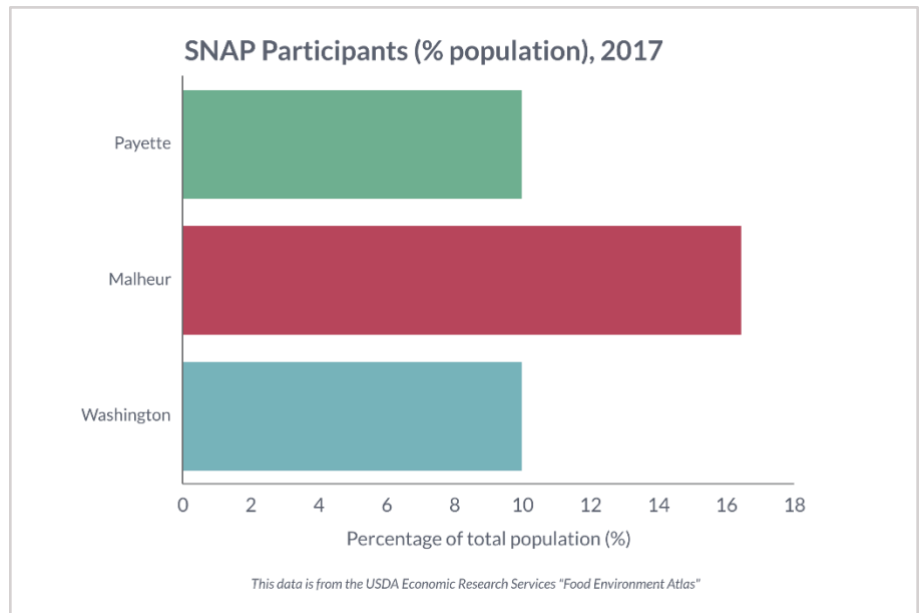
An essential indicator of a sustainable food system is the accessibility and equitability of consumers' access to food. Food access means all consumers can obtain the food they need at reasonable spatial accessibility and affordability. Many factors play a role in a consumer's ability to find and purchase food, including income, employment, culture, transportation, and even the seasonality of products.

According to the Idaho Department of Commerce and the Oregon Department of Labor, and the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2019, the total population of Washington, Payette, and Malheur County was 64,257 people, and the average annual household income was \$41,093. Among the three-county residents, in 2017, about 20% fell below the national poverty threshold.

³ For more information and access to the Western Treasure Valley Food System Map: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/95883cf477c74943aa1133c58531f57e>

Affordability is a significant factor that can affect the accessibility of food for consumers and therefore alter the sustainability of a food system.

Federal nutrition assistance programs like the special supplemental nutrition program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), assist a family or individual's nutritional needs. The size of a family's SNAP benefit is based on its income and other expenses and then is determined through state agency guidelines. The SNAP benefits are automatically loaded into the participants' accounts each month and can be used to buy groceries at authorized food stores and retailers. In 2017 in the three-county area, there is an average of about 12% of each county's population participating in SNAP benefits. Households that may be food insecure are more common than those might think; demonstrating the importance of community interest in sustaining many options of consumer food access points.



Individual county SNAP participant percentage, based on the total population.

Food banks & pantries

Consumers' access to food may be through channels like food banks and pantries, mobile pantries, and free meal sites. A variety of community programs, non-profit organizations, cities or counties, or churches organize food access points. There are fourteen food pantries within the Washington, Payette, and Malheur County area, including mobile pantries, churches, and free meal sites.

Most food banks, pantries, and meal sites abide by federal guidelines to receive federal food allotments from The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). The Idaho Food Bank (IFB) is the central regional food bank that distributes food to food pantries and other Washington and Payette County agencies. IFB moves and distributes about 22.3 million pounds of food annually throughout Idaho. They distribute to Oregon, Montana, and Washington through collaborative programs like Northwest Harvest and Feeding America. The IFB's central distribution warehouses are in Meridian, Pocatello, and Lewiston.

A component of the IFB includes the Food Sourcing team, which is responsible for identifying and arranging for the transportation of donated and purchased food to be distributed statewide through their community partner network. About 92% of the food is donated to the Foodbank. The central aspect of the food sourcing teams' coordination is agricultural producers in the state, who donate excess products to the food bank. According to a food sourcing team member, some of the food IFB procures and distributes onions from Payette County, various fruits from across Idaho, green beans from growers in southwestern Idaho, and many potatoes from across southern Idaho. The agricultural producers maintain relationships with IFB food sourcing team members and typically reach out when they have excess products they would like to donate. The IFB then finds transportation to pick up donations from the site of the agricultural production. The relatively simple process of donation benefits both agricultural producers and community members the food bank supplies.

Since the IFB distributes food throughout the region to food pantries, meal sites, and churches, they play a vital role for the community by supplying and providing food assistance to many individuals and families.



The Western Treasure Valley Food System Assessment Steering Committee advised on assessment direction, reviewed the data gathered and suggested next steps based on their understanding of local context and this newly gathered information. The steering committee then dissolved as they had finished their scope of work and encouraged moving forward with the future trajectories outlined below.

Tools for the Local Food System Development

This research is a tool to help support the growth of the local food economy. The assessment report provides baseline information for subsequent phases as determined by future steering committees and the University of Idaho Extension programming. The steering committee hopes this information will support grant application, continued investigations related to food in our region, and institute programming where possible.

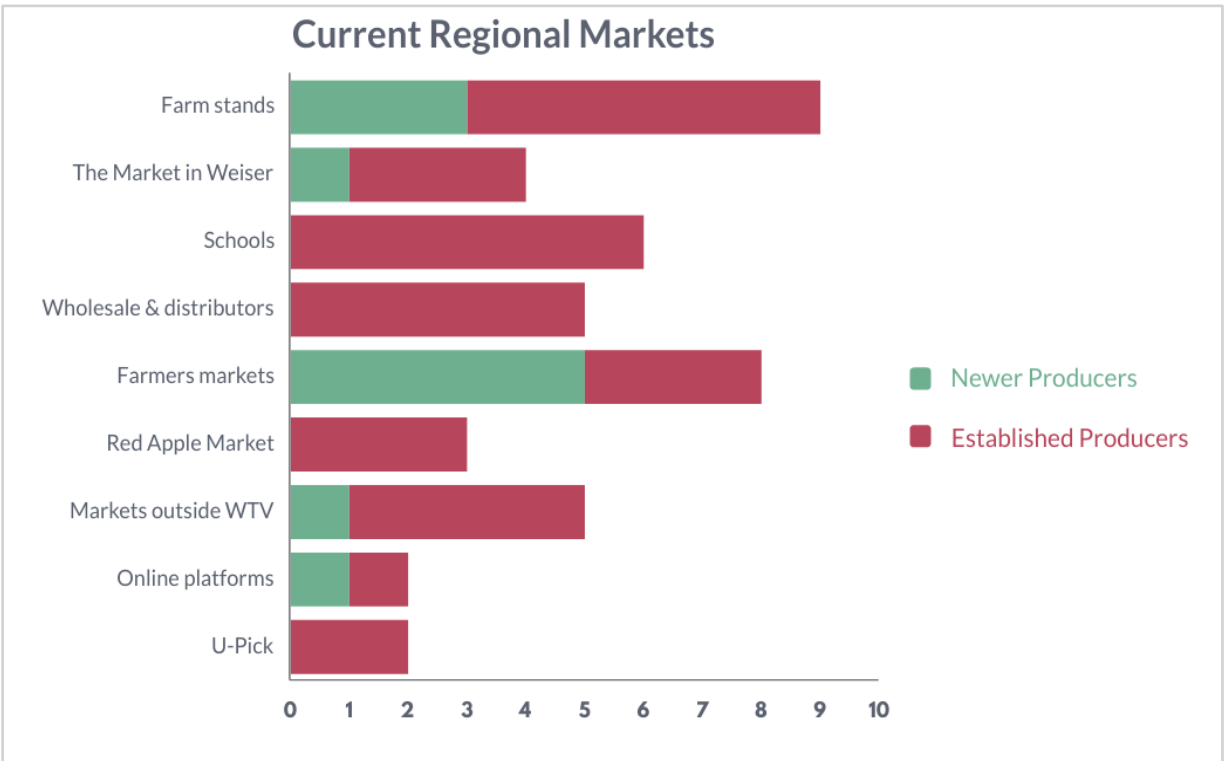
Regional Market Development

1. Producer interest in local market development cut across experience level. All respondents recognized a need to develop and expand their marketing strategies and to do so in collaboration with other farmers and ranchers. Next steps include convening a group of interested producers in early winter 2021 to explore partnerships, funding, and roles for such a collaboration.
2. There is a broad interest in streamlining sales of local products to regional K-12 schools. In collaboration with or separate from the above-mentioned producer group, University of Idaho Extension Payette County will initiate conversation between regional schools, Idaho Preferred/Idaho State Dept. of Ag and producers. These conversations will find more efficient, cost-effective methods for K-12 dining halls to source locally.

Community Education & Extension

Product standardization, marketing and business planning, information gaps surrounding commercial kitchen use and value-added rules and regulations were identified by respondents as barriers to expanding regional markets. Since the gathering of this data in early 2021, University of Idaho Extension Small Farms and Food Systems programming have already or are scheduled to offer classes on business development, record keeping, legal requirements, site assessment, market analysis and production plan, efficient planning, food safety and infrastructure. An online multi-week, value-added business development class is scheduled for early Fall 2021. Additional community educational needs will be identified at the early winter producer meeting mentioned above.

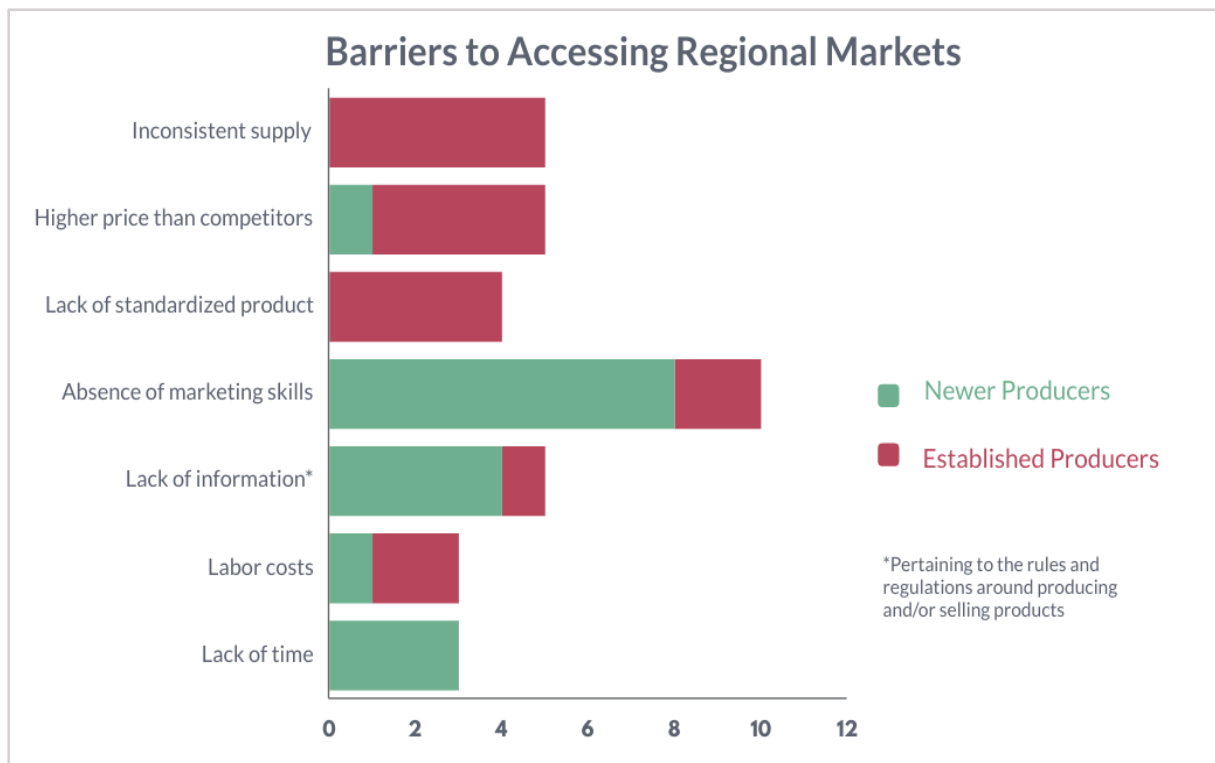
Appendix A: Figures & Tables



Reported interest from small acreage producers to increase sales to regional markets.



Reported current regional markets small acreage producers sell their products.



Reported barriers from small acreage producers to accessing regional markets.

Appendix A: Figures & Tables

Type of Crop	Established Producers	Newer Producers
Tree Crops	Apples	
	Plums	
	Peaches	
	Nectarines	
	Apricots	
	Pluots	
	Tart Cherries	
Fresh Produce	Strawberries	Asparagus
	Watermelon	Zucchini
	Cantaloupe	Green Beans
	Tomatoes	Tomatoes
	Peppers	Peppers
	Cucumbers	Cucumbers
	Mint	Garlic
	Lima Beans	Beets
	Winter Squash	Winter Squash
	Sweet Corn	
	Potatoes	
Onions		
Other Crops	Beans	
	Peas	
	Barley	
	Triticale	
	Winter Wheat	
	Alfalfa	
	Hay	
Animal Products	Beef	Beef
	Lamb	Lamb
		Chicken
		Pork
		Raw Milk
		Eggs
Value-Added	Honey	Pickles
	Dried Fruit	Wood spatulas & bowls
	Jam	Jam
	Leather Products	Jelly
		Goat Milk Soap
		Animal Hides

Reported crops and products grown and sold by small acreage producers.

Western Treasure Valley Food System Assessment Supplier Interview Guide

Audience: Western Treasure Valley producers: Washington and Payette Counties and Ontario the region.

Objectives:

- Understand basic farm attributes: size, type of product.
- Goals for farm and barriers to reaching those goals, e.g. educational needs.
- Measure capacity and interest in selling to local markets and barriers to doing so.
- What products would potential suppliers want to sell?
- How do producers see the future of local market access? What are their ideal selling, distribution options?
- Identify small farms & food systems educational needs including topics (from supply questions above) and format.
- Identify most appropriate communication channels for communicating educational options.

Data Collection Methods:

- First do research on website and FB so don't have to ask questions that can be answered from publicly available info, understand some background on supplier.
- Phone call informal interviews which will serve to both establish relationships and gather information.
- Before asking the questions below, the interviewer will explain that they are with the University of Idaho Extension, the purpose of the call, the type of information we're looking for and why.

Project introduction to share with respondent:

- We are carrying out a food system assessment process in the Western Treasure Valley Region (list counties) to identify the interest in local markets and food system education.
- The goals of this assessment process were developed by a multi-stakeholder community group convened by Payette County Extension Educator, Karie Boone.
- We are talking with regional producers and potential institutional buyers to better understand their interests related to regional markets as well as food systems-related educational needs.
- Would you be willing to chat with me for twenty minutes about these topics?

Supplier Informal Interview Questions

1. Farm/ranch name and location:
2. Respondent name and position:
3. Background information gathered from internet, potential topics for introduction/relationship building:
4. Total acres on your farm **under operation** (owned and/or rented): _____ acres
 - a. If they seem uncomfortable with this question, ask: do you consider your farm small, medium, or large?
5. Circle the top preferences for how you would like to receive information about upcoming events and classes:

Direct Mail

Extension Newsletter

Newspaper

Radio Program (list)

Webpage/Internet

Others (list)

6. Do you currently sell any products to regional markets/businesses/institutions?
(clarify regional: Washington, Gem, and Payette Counties and Ontario region)
 - a. Direct to consumer (e.g., farmer's markets, farm stand, CSA, u-pick)
 - b. Retailers (e.g., grocery store, supermarket)
 - c. Institutions (e.g., schools, hospitals)
 - d. Food bank or food pantry
 - e. Other: _____
7. To what extent are you interested in increasing your sales to the following markets?
(i.e., Very, somewhat, not at all)
 - a. Direct to consumer (e.g., farmer's markets, farm stand, CSA, u-pick)
 - b. Retailers (e.g., grocery store, supermarket)
 - c. Institutions (e.g., schools, hospitals)
 - d. Food bank or food pantry

Appendix B: *Interview Guides*

8. What are the barriers inhibiting you from selling or increasing sells to local markets?

Examples:

- a. Haven't tried, don't know where to start
- b. Transportation
- c. Storage (freezer, refrigerated, cool, dry)
- d. Product quality/quantity
- e. Purchaser requirements, please explain:
- f. Seasonality of products

9. How interested are you in participating in trainings related to:

- a. Food safety practices
- b. Creating value-added products
- c. Business management
- d. Farm and ranch planning
- e. Marketing your products
- f. Crop production
- g. Livestock selection or care

10. Are there other educational topics you are interested in? If so, please list them here:

Before hanging up:

- Thank them for their time.
- Are they potentially interested in us contacting them about selling to regional markets in the future?
- Please don't hesitate to contact Karie Boone at the Payette County Extension Office if you have any questions: 208-642-6022

Western Treasure Valley Food System Assessment Buyer Interview Guide

Audience: Potential institutional buyers in the Western Treasure Valley: Washington and Payette Counties and Ontario region. Focus will be on groceries and school dining halls.

Objectives:

- Measure current purchasing of regional foods: description of what (from where?) and how much.
- For those that are sourcing from regional producers, document the supply chain characteristics. How is transportation, processing, (cold) storage, etc..
- Identify capacity and interest to purchase and/or increase quantity and diversity of regional/local foods.
- Understand the challenges to overcome that would allow (increased) purchasing of locally produced foods.

Data Collection Methods:

- First do research on institutional websites and fb so don't have to ask questions that can be answered from publicly available info, understand some background on potential buyer.
- Phone call informal interviews which will serve to both establish relationships and gather information.
- Before asking the questions below, the interviewer will explain that they are with the University of Idaho Extension, the purpose of the call, type of information we're looking for and why, time commitment expected.

Project introduction to share with respondent:

- We are carrying out a food system assessment process in the Western Treasure Valley Region (list counties) to identify the interest in local markets and food system education.
- The goals of this assessment process were developed by a multi-stakeholder community group convened by Payette County Extension Educator, Karie Boone.
- We are talking with regional producers and potential institutional buyers to better understand their interests related to regional markets as well as food systems-related educational needs.
- This is completely voluntary, would you be willing to chat with me for twenty minutes about these topics?

Buyer Informal Interview Questions

1. Name and type of organization (i.e., K-12 school, grocery, senior center):
2. Interviewee name and position:
3. Background information gathered from internet, potential topics for introduction/relationship building:
4. Does your business/organization source from producers in the surrounding region? (Washington, Gem, and Payette Counties and Ontario region)

If Yes	Which products? Where from?	
	Approximately how much of your purchasing is sourced regionally?	
	Who transports from farm?	
	Is any processing involved? Who does this?	
	If needed, who provides (cold) storage?	
	Does your business or organization purchase through a private or cooperative distributor? Which one?	

If No	To what extent are you interested in sourcing from regional/local buyers?	
	Does your business or organization purchase through a private or cooperative distributor? Which one?	

Appendix B: *Interview Guides*

5. What are the primary barriers to your organization/business purchasing from regional suppliers?

Examples:

- a. Price of products
 - b. Unavailability of specific products – what is not available that they would like to buy locally?
 - c. Are there things they know are produced here but that they can't find or access?
 - d. Inability to access the variety of products needed
 - e. Seasonality – when do they need certain products?
 - f. Lower quality of products
 - g. Inability to access products when needed
 - h. Inability to access a large enough quantity
 - i. Unreliability of vendors
 - j. Order process
 - k. Your purchasing requirements
 - l. Concerns about food safety
 - m. Uncertain (inadequate knowledge on) how to source regional products
 - n. Other (please specify):
6. If interested or these barriers were solved, which products would you be most interested in purchasing and in what form (fresh, frozen, canned, dried, other (specify))?

Before hanging up:

- Thank them for their time.
- Are they potentially interested in us contacting them about purchasing from regional markets in the future?
- Please don't hesitate to contact Karie Boone at the Payette County Extension Office if you have any questions: 208-642-6022.

Appendix C: *Community Food Systems*



The steering committee's phased process for the community food system assessment.

COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEMS GATHERING

February 7, 2020
10 am to 3 pm
Lunch Provided
Saint Alphonsus, Ontario
Don Roumagoux Conference Room

The Western Treasure Valley Community Food System Assessment steering committee, led by the University of Idaho Extension, is bringing together community partners to gain your input. It is an opportunity for you to engage in an informed and facilitated discussion about Food, Education, and Agriculture in our community and begin to work towards solutions together that will help build a healthier, more equitable, and resilient food system.

Please RSVP to:
Karie Boone, U of I Extension Office, Payette
(208) 642-6022, kboone@uidaho.edu

Flyer for the community food systems gathering.

Appendix C: Community Food Systems

This is a list of the community assets the steering committee brainstormed based on the various capitals available in a community. The committee considered which assets are currently available, the elements of these assets, and the potential enhancements they would like to see in the community.

Western Treasure Valley Community Food Systems Asset Chart				
Type of Capital	Capital Assets Currently Available in Community	Elements of Capital Assets	Other Capital Assets Available in Community	Enhancements/investments to Be Made in Community
Natural	Farm ground close to people; Diversity in things produced; Long-ish growing season; Volcanic soils	Towns/populations spread out on landscape; need to draw people into central location (farm stand & FM); food culture in Boise;	Local parks – access to markets, Payette River and other rivers provide reliable irrigation, soil conservation groups/methods; markets: farmer’s markets, farm stands, CSA; Plots of land available for gardening: Porcha Club, Boys & Girls Club, WICAP, Fruitland Prep Academy	Climate change adaptation planning (water access could change), poverty, what do young people want? Engage young people on the land; paid farmer’s market manager, community gardens that teach science
Built	School cafeteria buys some local foods; Dickenson’s; Fry Foods; Hengglers; CTI Foods; Boston Beef; Appleton’s; farmer’s markets; CS Beef; custom butchers; NW Premium	Utilizing locally grown/produced food for distribution	Unused potato sheds; fairgrounds facilities	More local markets; more local processing capacity; local aggregation; centralized place where local producers sell products
Financial	WIC; Veggie Rx; Food stamps/state assistance; Grants and loans through: NW Credit Services, USDA, DL Evans, First Interstate Bank, Farm Bureau, hospitals; federal school lunch programs; food banks; University of Idaho	Live in ag-based region; focus on food-based projects; educating community on food safety; live long Idaho; ability to produce large amounts and a variety of food at relatively low cost		Physical and organizational infrastructure for local distribution of locally produced foods; mobile food pantry; grocery store in Fruitland, New Plymouth; community kitchen
Social	Snake River Econ Development (SREDA); Local farmers markets, roadside stands; Local gov’t: soil conservation, NRCS, commissioners, P&Z; Payette Valley Food Connection; Payette Community Alliance Network; Soil Keepers; Snake River Seed Coalition; PC-CHAT	Alternative markets; food access; health of ecosystem by providing leadership and info	UI Extension; TVCC; Potato Commission; Payette Culinary Arts Program; Chambers of Commerce; Idaho Crop Improvement Association; Boise Co-op	Building a network for beginning farmers; support “small groups” in their efforts without starting something new; have public experience (build trust)
Human	Compared to 10 years ago, we think local food awareness has moved from a	Financial bottom line; the need for families to support multiple	4-H; FFA; non-profit education: St. Luke’s	Small farm workshops; engagement with local government (city, county); look at

	one to a five but still a long way to go; there is still a beginning to intermediate level of knowledge about local foods but sometimes even when people know about it, there is not interest; we are on the lower level of innovation related to local foods	generations of farmers/ranchers; federal regulations drive increased admin/oversight; not driving innovation; the fear of change and the associated risks; perceived unprofitability of local markets	education program; Do we have a diverse skill set in the ag community?; onion pride; Simplot; frozen French fries; Warren McCain; Albertsons; knowledge of regional seed production (people from all over the world); dwindling orchard management skills	each city's/county's strategic plans to see where overlap with our goals; get gov't to community gathering; find way to reduce risk for producers; education on how to use/cook local foods; alternative growing methods for new/beginning producers
Cultural	Various camps: garden, hunting, fast food, small group of people interested in "local" foods, large Japanese & Hispanic community with cultural food preferences; supermarkets: organic departments lacking in choice; people want cheap, quick food	Groups that want to know from where food is sourced; economy; poverty; health systems focused on nutritious food & cooking	Gleaning/ buying bulk at harvest; farmer's markets, food banks	Cross-pollination between cultural groups; more education on nutrition/cooking/shopping; community gardens; cultural food tasting experience; programming that bring together K-12 and senior population around community garden; develop hunting/fishing event with food options as education
Political	County commissioners; county P&Z; Senator Abby Lee; Producer Associations; Food/Health Community Groups; USDA; EPA; IORC; U of Idaho; Dept. of Education (lunchroom decision-making); Health Dept	Commissioners and P&Z can influence laws and regulations for farmer/ranchers if they are ag positive; senator has the ability to influence state-wide		Create a co-op for farm labor employees to have access to medical/401K/sick leave; grocery tax; education opportunities for food production, etc; connect larger ag producers with regional sellers – diversify; research food distribution routes in/out of state and who benefits

