

Connecting Local Farms with Local Eaters

By Anza Muenchow, WSU Extension Island County SNAP Ed Coordinator

Washington State University Extension Island County is excited to be participating in a new project called the *Farm to Community Initiative (F2C)*. Our goal is to increase access to locally grown or produced food for our low-income communities. For this initiative to be successful, we need input from all those who grow, transport, prepare, sell and eat food in Island County!

Island County farms grow a variety of fresh, healthy produce, dairy, and meats that should ideally be widely available to the whole community. Grocery stores, hospitals, schools, senior centers, child care providers, and food banks all provide food for our low-income families, and struggle to offer locally grown foods for many reasons. It is a challenge for our local farmers and food producers often to sell and distribute their foods for a reasonable price that allows them to stay in business. F2C wants to find ways to connect our hungriest families with much needed local healthy food, while helping our farmers sell more food to neighbors and stay profitable.

F2C invites a variety of partners with unique resources to help overcome these barriers. Funded by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance-Education (SNAP-Ed) Program of the United States Department of Agriculture, F2C is led by Washington State University (WSU) Extension in partnership with Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA). WSU Extension has a long history of serving Island County and has strong connections with stakeholders that we're hoping to engage in this F2C Initiative. WSDA offers a wealth of resources and technical assistance related to connecting local farmers and producers to schools and beyond.

Let's remember that local growers can include community gardeners and small micro-farms that grow primarily for home use. We will examine all avenues to increase access to fresh fruits and veggies for our underserved population on the island.

Our goal in this first year is to gather input from our local growers, food producers, distributors, processors, and eaters. Yes – you as consumers, too. By bringing everyone together, we hope to learn from our community what makes it hard to purchase food from local farms and how we can help make it easier. We will be hosting meetings to learn the specific challenges and opportunities, as well as what services, tools, or resources are needed for success. This is a special opportunity for our local food system to build on the successes we have achieved and strengthen our ability to feed those most in need!

The local contact for the F2C Initiative is Anza Muenchow with WSU Extension Island County. Anza has 30 years of experience growing food crops in school and community gardens and has a small farm here on Whidbey Island. You may know her from her work coordinating garden volunteers through the WSU Extension Island County Master Gardener Program. Currently, Anza is helping to build two new school gardens and is leading garden-based education at Crescent Harbor and Olympic View Elementary Schools. Getting young people excited about eating fresh, local, and healthy foods is her passion.

Your voice is needed to help us get the F2C Initiative going! Please contact Anza at 360-279-5992 or email her muencha@wsu.edu.