

The Big Table

BY ANGELA SANDERS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY EBEN DICKINSON



IN RURAL OREGON, THE OREGON FOOD BANK IS TAKING
A GRASSROOTS APPROACH TO COMBATING HUNGER:
EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES TO WORK TOGETHER



Sharon Thornberry, the Oregon Food Bank's Community Food Systems Manager, describes the moment she understood the depth of hunger in rural Oregon. She was at the hospital in southeast Oregon's Malheur County when an elderly resident of Jordan Valley was brought in. "It was the first time I really saw a malnourished person," she says. In Jordan Valley, food is both scarce and expensive for residents because of bleak economic conditions, a steadily shrinking population, great distances between supermarkets and the high cost of gas. Now Thornberry spends her days working to help communities like Jordan Valley figure out how to access affordable, nutritious food.

Hunger in Oregon Runs Deep, Especially in Rural Counties

According to the USDA, about 13.6 percent of Oregon's households—more than 491,000 Oregonians—were "food insecure" in 2011. That means they didn't always know where or if they'd find their next meal. About 5.9 percent met the official definition for "hungry," meaning that they skipped a meal for lack of resources to buy or find food at least once during the year. (Nationally, 14.9 percent of households are food insecure and 5.7 percent are hungry.)

Rural Oregonians experience food insecurity at a higher rate than city dwellers. In sparsely populated Malheur and

Harney counties, for example, 24.3 percent and 19.3 percent of residents respectively took part in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), sometimes referred to as "food stamps," in 2010. By comparison, only 14.6 percent of the Portland metropolitan area accessed SNAP benefits.

"I see hunger as the canary in the coal mine," says Patti Whitney-Wise, Executive Director of Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon. "Hunger isn't the root problem; it's a symptom of other problems—economic stability especially."

In Jordan Valley, food is both scarce and expensive because of bleak economic conditions, a shrinking population, great distances between supermarkets and the high cost of gas.



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Whitney-Wise explains that housing costs and energy are increasingly expensive, yet wages haven't kept pace. Plus, in most families today, both parents work, adding childcare as another significant expense. In the 1950s, for instance, one person earning minimum wage could modestly support a family of four. Today, someone earning even Oregon's higher-than-average minimum wage can barely support herself.

Thornberry says, "Hunger is income. That's the bottom line. But in places like eastern Oregon, access is also a huge issue." The difference between food in the city and rural areas "can be night and day." She returns to her Jordan Valley example. "Say you're 70 years old and have a decent pension, but you can't drive. The closest supermarket is 64 miles away. The food at the local convenience store is expensive, and mostly soda and snacks. Out there, getting food costs a lot more."

Thornberry explains that rural communities face yet other challenges to getting nutritious food and enough of it. For one, food wholesalers don't travel to remote, thinly populated communities because sales aren't profitable. Rural residents often qualify for services such as SNAP, but don't always apply. Thornberry notes, "People out there are old pioneer stock and are proud about accepting help." Plus, it's an 80-mile drive to Ontario to get WIC coupons, which must be picked up in person. Gas is expensive, and cars are large and fuel inefficient; they have to be to weather the severe climate and

geography. Plus, the elevation is 4,600 feet, making gardening difficult because frost might strike even during the summer.

"Some people ask, why then don't people move to places [where] they can get food easily?" Thornberry says. "But don't we want to preserve our rural communities? Do we really want everyone living in cities?"

Community Organizing Mines Solutions at the Grassroots Level

Because these are complicated issues, the Oregon Food Bank has taken an innovative approach to breaking the cycle of hunger: community organizing built on the premise that no one food solution fits all communities. It's called FEAST, short for Food, Education, Agriculture, Solutions, Together.

FEAST is a one-day facilitated discussion in a community between the stakeholders of the local food system. Although the actual FEAST discussion only lasts four to five hours, the entire process takes about six weeks to prepare, and its results unroll over years.

FEAST's first step is most often a community food assessment. In some cases, an Americorps volunteer will help conduct the assessment, taking stock of the food providers and consumers in a community.

Next, the Oregon Food Bank focuses on gathering the people most important to the community's food system to

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form a steering committee of between seven and twelve people who will, in turn, assemble a larger panel. The steering committee and panel might include farmers, retailers, fishers, ministers, hospital workers, elected officials and others, depending on the community. FEASTs are most often conducted between October and the end of March to not interfere with farming.

Thornberry notes that one of the biggest benefits of FEAST is simply getting people together. Even before discussions begin, stakeholders learn about farmers or food pantries that they didn't even know existed in their community.

"Communities realize they have control...It's not their destiny to be the way they are."

During the actual FEAST day, participants discuss community food access. Thornberry emphasizes that virtually all the FEASTs move quickly beyond talking about emergency food help. They realize that food pantries, while essential, don't address the core causes of hunger. Perhaps the biggest outcome from FEAST, Thornberry notes, is that "communities realize they have control...It's not their destiny to be the way they are."

FEAST topics might include anything from school lunches to access to fresh vegetables to meat processing. Participants also spend time creating a vision of where they want their community to be, and they brainstorm how they'll get there, from organizing health education, community gardens and farmers' markets to influencing statewide policy changes. For instance,

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Residents in Banks, Oregon started a huge community garden to supply the local school. Rural towns all over are finding innovative solutions to hunger through FEAST, a community organizing tool facilitated by the Oregon Food Bank.



Continued from page 27

the FEAST in Astoria eventually led to fishermen's bycatch going to emergency food pantries. (Bycatch, or fish species that are caught unintentionally, are normally discarded by choice or to avoid penalty.) In Banks, residents started a huge community garden to grow produce for the senior center and school. Because fresh food is a health issue, the local hospital pays for the garden's water. In John Day, local farmers now supply the town grocery store, which in turn acts as a wholesaler providing fruit and vegetables to the school and local restaurants.

FEAST Reaches Oregon's Hardest-Hit Counties

In the six years that Peter Lawson, Oregon Food Bank's Branch Services Manager for southeast Oregon, has been in his job, the number of emergency food outlets in Harney and Malheur counties has burgeoned from 5 to 23, and the amount of food distributed has grown from 600,000 to 800,000 pounds each year. Lawson operates a mobile food pantry in a refrigerated truck that delivers food to remote communities. Once a month he pulls up the truck next to the Jordan Valley Heritage Museum and distributes food to about 25 families—significant in a town of just over 200 people.

Lawson sees a growing focus on Harney and Malheur Counties' food systems. FEAST has helped eastern Oregonians to share ideas and resources beyond emergency food pantries.

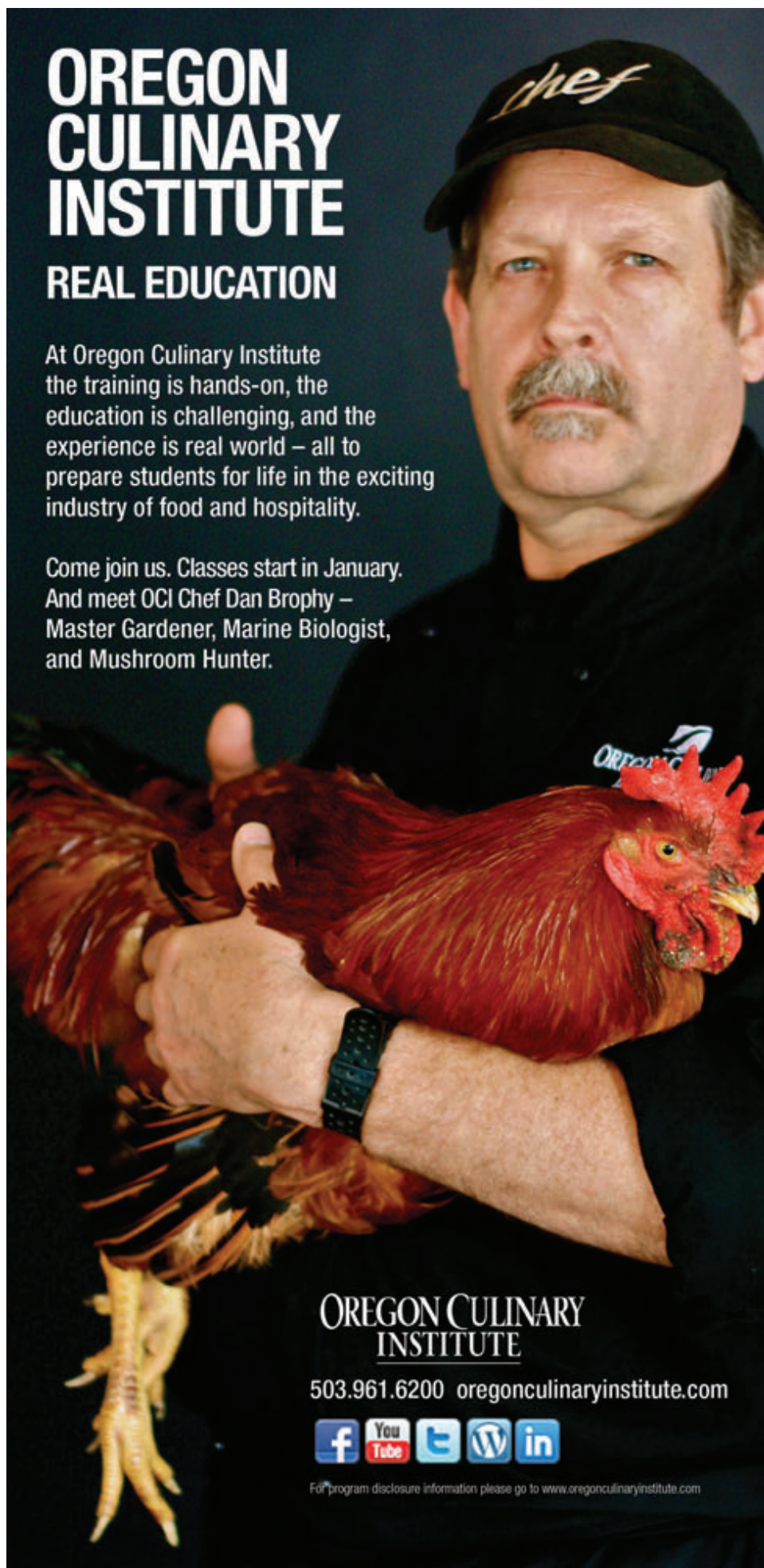
Jordan Valley is an example. While supervising lunch one day, Andrée Scown, Superintendent of the Jordan Valley School District, noticed some of her students eating poorly—or not at all. Because of the high cost of food in Jordan Valley, the federal government's reimbursement didn't come close to covering the real expense of a school lunch. As a result, the school district didn't offer lunch. The schools didn't even have kitchens.

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A photograph of a man with a mustache, wearing a black chef's hat with the word 'chef' in script and a black chef's jacket. He is holding a large, vibrant red rooster with both hands. The rooster has a prominent red comb and wattle. The background is dark and out of focus.

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FEAST starts conversations and forges connections. Solutions evolve from there.

In 2010, Scown attended the FEAST in Ontario. At about the same time, she struck up an arrangement with the Old Basque Inn across the street from the elementary school to make lunches for the kids. To bridge the gap between the \$4.00 cost per meal and the \$2.68 the federal government provided, she held a Bingo Night. She also convinced the Ranchers Feeding Children program to donate five head of cattle, which the Old Basque Inn turned into beef stroganoff, tacos, finger steaks and more. The Oregon Food Bank donated a freezer to store the beef. Now, every school child in Jordan Valley gets a hot lunch during the school year.

Although FEAST has led to new farmers' markets, community gardens, policy changes and other solutions, quantifying the program's exact impact on hunger is tricky. An evaluation of FEAST released at the end of 2011 showed that participants increased connections to other people in the community food system, but the evaluation didn't show a direct link to reduced hunger. Lawson says, "People want to find that single strand, that X leads to Y leads to Z." The reality is, he says, that FEAST starts conversations and forges connections. Solutions evolve from there.

As Andrée Scown testified at an Oregon Hunger Task Force Hearing in Ontario, "The moral to this story is that in order to solve hunger at the national and state levels, we have to solve it at the local level."

eP

Angela Sanders writes about food and Pacific Northwest culture and history.



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STATEWIDE STORIES

[For Oregon Food Bank, an award and a mission](#)

By [The Oregonian Editorial Board](#) on April 17, 2013 at 5:46 PM,



The Oregon Food Bank has won a 2013 Innovation Award in Food Banking for its community-organizing FEAST program. Benjamin Brink/The Oregonian

Oregon's struggle against its deep-rooted hunger problem has extended to food stamp outreach, canned food drives and 18-wheelers of produce donated by the state's dedicated farmers.

And portable gardens and kale smoothies.

Oregon's struggle against hunger involves strategies and weapons that many other states have never imagined. It's that resourcefulness, along with commitment, that last week won the [Oregon Food Bank a 2013 Innovation Award in Food Banking](#) at the Feeding America Network Executive Directors' Forum in Nashville. The national food bank alliance honored OFB for its [community-organizing FEAST](#) (Food, Education, Agriculture, Solutions, Today) program, gathering Oregonians to determine their local food values and approaches.

The food bank's outreach, and the persistence of the problem, is also on display today at the state capitol during Oregon Hunger Response Day, with more than 100 food bank workers from every Oregon county seeking the Legislature's support. The need and responses will also be visible in Portland this weekend at the [Food for Thought Festival](#), starting this evening, a four-day food drive disguised as a series of entertaining public events.

"A FEAST is not about our going out teaching," says Sharon Thornberry, who developed and pilots the program. "It's about getting community members to talk to each other."

People talk about what's important to them about food issues, maybe supporting local farmers, setting up a farmers market or community garden, or providing nutrition education. It's a statement that food issues aren't limited to hungry people or to the food bank, but include the entire community, and that Oregonians who do not face hunger themselves can still find ways to improve their food and nutrition situation.

The first FEAST program four years ago began in Clatsop County, and has created the North Coast Food Web. It's produced a new farmers market, efforts to get more people who qualify for food stamps onto

the program and support for local growers. It's adopted kale as its mascot -- and discovered that Astoria High School students will consume kale smoothies.

And, in a demonstration of just how local a strategy can get, the program came up with portable gardens -- planted in cheesecloth-lined shopping carts. The advantage on the North Coast, says Thornberry, is, "You can move it inside if the wind gets too hard." (A couple of stores donated the carts.)

It turns out, and this is the kind of thing you can discover when people get together to talk food systems, that shopping carts not only carry a lot of vegetables, they can grow a lot of vegetables.

The program has spread out to multiple parts of Oregon, and people around the country noticed it before Feeding America did. It's programmed in Washington and Idaho, people have come in for training from Kansas State University and northern Nevada, folks from California are due soon and inquiries have come from as far off as South Carolina.

The mission, says Oregon Food Bank Executive Director Susannah Morgan, is not just feeding people, but "tackling the question of how you get people out of the cycle of needing to go to a food pantry for a food box every month. We're walking that path; there are some states that don't realize there's a path to be walked."

There is a path to be walked, but we're learning that communities need to walk it together.

And at the end of the path, there's more than a kale smoothie.

[Oregon Food Bank Wins Award For FEAST Program](#)

OPB | April 12, 2013 3:41 p.m. | Updated: April 12, 2013 4:47 p.m. | Portland, Oregon Contributed By: [Virginia Alvino](#)

The Oregon Food Bank won a national award Friday for its FEAST program. The award for innovation was presented at Feeding America's annual forum in Nashville, and chosen from hundreds of food banks across the country.

The Oregon Food Bank's new CEO Susannah Morgan says Oregon's innovation is what drew her to the state in the first place.

"The fact that there is such a food culture means that food is more central to our opinions and our thinking in this state than in many other states. And to me it felt like oh great this state is really primed, maybe we can be the first state to end hunger."

The FEAST program's name stands for food, education, agriculture, solutions, together. It works to empower communities to build more equitable and sustainable food systems.

It also creates partnerships between farmers and the community.

Oregon Food Bank Wins National Award For Innovative Work Fighting Hunger

By [Albany Tribune](#) -- (April 12, 2013)

Oregon Food Bank received a 2013 Innovation Award in food banking at the annual Feeding America Network Executive Directors' Forum this week in Nashville. Feeding America presents the award to the year's most innovative programs from the 202 food banks across the nation in the Feeding America network.

Judges awarded Oregon Food Bank for its FEAST (Food, Education, Agriculture, Solutions, Together) program, an initiative that helps to create a "big tent" approach to food banking by empowering community members to build healthier, more equitable and more resilient food systems through a community organizing model.

During FEAST events, community members tell the story of their local food system and are introduced to community food systems organizing principles and language from throughout the area. Outcomes of the FEAST process have included partnerships between farmers and emergency food providers, new farm-to-school partnerships, new and expanded farmers' markets, and the formation of food systems coalitions.

The FEAST program has also become a key strategy in the food bank's work by building stronger, more-connected communities and mobilizing existing resources to improve local food systems and individual food self-sufficiency.

"Oregon Food Bank continues to show why it's a leader in our Network," said Bob Aiken, president and CEO of Feeding America, the nation's leading hunger relief charity. "This award shows the innovation and creativity of the food bank's staff to help fight hunger in their community."

"We are thrilled to receive this national honor," said Susannah Morgan, CEO, Oregon Food Bank. "I especially recognize the thoughtful work of OFB's community food security team, Sharon Thornberry and Megan Newell-Ching, who have crisscrossed Oregon to introduce FEAST in more than 40 communities. The beauty of this model is that it builds on community empowerment and self-determination. It encourages people to envision – and bring about – what works best for their own special place."

OREGON'S SOUTH COAST

Food for thought

April 13, 2013 7:00 am • [By Gail Elber, The World](#)

After the FEAST

Oregon communities that have participated in FEASTs have:

- Formed and expanded Farm-to-School partnerships between rural school districts and local farmers
- Built community connectivity and formed regional action networks
- Created new farmers markets and community gardens
- Increased acceptance of WIC and Senior Farm Direct Checks and WIC Fruit and Veggie Vouchers at farmers markets and local businesses
- Formed new and innovative partnerships between food donors and emergency food providers

Source: Oregon Food Bank

Reedsport's FEAST

Reedsport had a FEAST April 3. Participants there focused on improving the supply of fresh food to low-income people. The possibility of a mobile farmers market or a gleaning program to collect local crops after the harvest was raised. Read more in The Umpqua Post at bit.ly/XvA3rQ/.

COOS BAY — A FEAST is coming to Coos Bay April 20. If you're interested in food's role in the South Coast economy, there's a seat at the table for you.

FEAST stands for Food, Education, Agriculture, Solutions, Together. Since 2009, Oregon Food Bank has been facilitating FEAST gatherings all over the state.

The goal: "Build a healthier, more equitable and more resilient local food system."

Community members get together, eat a meal and talk about local food resources:

- What food is raised, harvested or processed in the area?
- Where does it go?
- How can we use more of it locally?
- How can we sell more of it to other markets?

- How can we develop businesses related to food production?
- How can we ensure that nobody around here goes hungry?
- In an emergency, how will we feed everyone?

To sustain participants in the five-and-a-half-hour event, Oregon Coast Culinary Institute has concocted a lunch menu that portrays the Bay Area as a gourmet paradise. There'll be shrimp from Charleston. Watercress from Tenmile Lake. Kale from OCCI's own garden. Local mushrooms and berries. Something called "French breakfast radish."

But discussion will be the real meat and potatoes of the event.

Sharon Thornberry, Oregon Food Bank's community food systems manager, will lead the activities. She'll be joined by local panelists who represent pieces of the food puzzle — growers, fishermen, processors, even community gardeners.

The event's local hosts are South Coast Development Council and Wild Rivers Coast Alliance. SCDC is a business group that seeks to improve the local economy. WRCA is a foundation started by Bandon Dunes owner Mike Keiser with the goal of "blending conservation, community and economy on Oregon's South Coast."

SCDC's executive director, Sandra Geiser-Messerle, said the event fits in with the recommendations of the Sustainable Design Assessment Team of development consultants that visited Coos County in 2010. SDAT suggested the community capitalize on existing resources by branding and marketing its agricultural and fisheries products.

Geiser-Messerle said the goal is to recognize and strengthen the businesses that already exist, and explore opportunities to encourage the development of new ones.

"We're looking at ways to expand the market for locally harvested livestock, seafood and produce," she said. "It's an effort to make access to locally grown products as available as possible within our county, and take a look at what we can do to assist our agriculture industry to broaden their markets and make them stronger."

In SCDC's discussions with local food producers, "there are some issues that keep recurring," she said. "One of them is transportation to markets outside of our area. Storage is a big one."

She hopes to see food producers, processors, purveyors, retailers and even consumers at the event.

The FEAST will run from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Oregon Coast Culinary Institute on the Southwestern Oregon Community College campus at 1988 Newmark Ave. in Coos Bay. To make the event accessible to as many people as possible, it's free, includes lunch, and offers child care nearby on the campus.

But to reserve your spot (and child care, if you need it), you'll need to register by Sunday at cooscountyfeast.eventbrite.com/.

Reporter Gail Elber can be reached at 541-269-1222, ext. 234, at gail.elber@theworldlink.com, or on Twitter at @gailtheworld.

Food organizers create a FEAST of opportunities



Chefs at Oregon Coast Culinary Institute prepared a meal of bay shrimp, asparagus, radishes and mushroom bisque — all local — for participants in Saturday's FEAST meeting in Coos Bay.

April 22, 2013 10:37 am • [By Gail Elber, The World](#)

[More than just talk](#)

Oregon Food Bank's FEAST program just won the 2013 Innovation Award in Food Banking from Feeding America, the national organization for food banks. The 40 Oregon communities that have held FEAST discussions have seen measurable results from them, such as:

- Construction of a greenhouse at the food bank in Florence.
- Establishment of a community garden in a unused park in Florence.
- Establishment of a farmers market geared toward low-income customers in Astoria.

- Distribution of “mobile gardens” in shopping carts to Astoria WIC recipients.
- Funding of youth food enterprises in Tillamook County with Individual Development Accounts, a program that matches the savings of low-income people.
- Reopening of a disused grange building in the Applegate Valley.

This year, seven other states are piloting similar programs.

Get in on the discussion

If Coos County’s FEAST process works as it has in other Oregon communities, the interest groups will incubate numerous projects that will offer opportunities for businesses, social service agencies and volunteers. To get on a mailing list, contact Michelle Martin at South Coast Development Council, michelle@scdcinc.org.

Presentations from Saturday’s meeting will be broadcast on cable channels 14 and 98 or can be viewed at coosmediacenter.pegcentral.com.

COOS BAY — Coos County residents soon might be producing more food, eating more of it locally and sending it to market more profitably.

After a local summit meeting Saturday, people in the local food industry are chewing on numerous ideas for improving our local food system.

Sharon Thornberry, community food systems manager for Oregon Food Bank, facilitated Saturday’s meeting as part of a statewide program called FEAST — Food, Education, Agriculture, Solutions, Together.

Thornberry said a food system is “the pieces and parts that end up putting food on the table.”

That includes farms and ranches, fishermen and processors, farmers markets and grocers, restaurants and school lunch programs, food banks and community gardeners — anyone who produces, distributes, sells or gives away food.

Oregon Food Bank’s goal is to make local food systems more “resilient” — better able to withstand economic declines and natural disasters. That means increasing the variety of food that can be produced locally, year-round. And it also means making it easier for people to eat local food.

For example, every year, local ranchers send 22,000 head of beef cattle to market. Why not eat some of those cattle here, without paying the cost of hauling them hundreds of miles?

But the closest USDA butchering facility is in Springfield. Then the meat has to go somewhere else to be packaged and make its way into supermarket distribution.

Chris and Deana Bussmann and their son Chris, who own Bussmann’s Mobile Ranch Butchering in Bandon, have been trying for years to develop a USDA butchering plant. But such a facility would likely cost at least \$1 million.

On Saturday, the Bussmanns sat around a table with a USDA employee, a farmers market manager and someone with connections to venture capital. In just a few minutes, the group had explored the problem from several angles that were new to the Bussmanns.

Would ranchers be willing to form a cooperative to support the butchering facility? Could the cooperative have tiers of membership, so that some ranchers could get marketing help and others could go it alone? Could legislation be introduced, as in some other states, creating state-level certification of meat, so that meat could be sold within the state without the expensive USDA certification process?

The group made plans to research these topics, then meet again.

Each interest group made a similar commitment. At the end of the meeting, the projects under way included:

- A website for local gardeners.
- A push to get local growers onto localharvest.org, a website that helps people find local food.
- Outreach to nutritionists to help them inform their clients about where to get local foods.
- Development of a local brand under which foods could be marketed.
- Getting local food served in local school lunches.

In addition to Oregon Food Bank, local sponsors of Coos County's FEAST meeting were South Coast Development Council, a group of local businesses and governments that seeks to expand job creation in the area; and Wild Rivers Coast Alliance, a foundation started by Bandon Dunes owner Mike Keiser with the goal of "blending conservation, community and economy on Oregon's South Coast."

Sandra Geiser-Messerle, executive director of SCDC, said this is just the kind of opportunity SCDC seeks to help local businesses create jobs.

"The more we can start acting regionally, the stronger we will be," she said.

Reporter Gail Elber can be reached at 541-269-1222, ext. 234, at gail.elber@theworldlink.com, or on Twitter at @gailtheworld.

ROGUE VALLEY FOOD SYSTEMS PLANNING PROCESS

ORGANIZATIONS LOOK TO IMPROVE VALLEY'S FOOD SYSTEM

February 20, 2012 By John Darling for the Mail Tribune

FEAST workshops aimed at helping community build healthier, more nutritious and more abundant food supply

ACCESS Inc. and area food banks have long been known for their efforts in distributing food to needy families. Now they're taking their mission several steps further by attempting to develop a plan that coordinates all the players in the local food system, from farmers to food banks and retailers to consumers.

The idea is to create a food supply that's nutritious, abundant, sustainable and available — and one that supports local farmers. It's not just about having enough food to distribute, it's about having the right kind of food and about creating a culture of self-sufficiency, both for families and the region.

As part of a yearlong community food system planning process, organizers will hold several FEAST workshops (Food, Education, Agriculture, Solutions, Together) in area communities to hear people's vision and to create a plan for turning the vision into reality.

"The mission," said Philip Yates, ACCESS Nutrition Programs director, "is to create a better, more efficient food system, increase food production, to create more healthy and organic food, to get it to markets and food banks and to support economic development."

The effort is being funded by a \$50,000 Meyer Memorial Trust grant to ACCESS, The Rogue Initiative for a Vital Economy, or THRIVE, and the Josephine County Food Bank.

The foundation awarded the grant, said Yates, in large part because so much progress has already been made here, from a Farmer Incubator Program that trains new farmers, to a THRIVE website that promotes local foods and existing local partnerships among providers and growers.

While area food donation organizations, such as ACCESS and the Food Project, are involved in the community food system planning, the project will address the entire food process and not just charitable efforts.

The idea of developing a comprehensive plan was also triggered by the identification last year of several "food deserts" in Jackson County. Food deserts are areas in which entire neighborhoods have access only to overpriced, inorganic and packaged food, with no fresh produce — and often only after they travel long distances to get it, said Yates. The move was also prompted by declining donations of food from markets, he said.

The Jefferson Founders Forum, a coalition of up to 20 regional foundations, is backing the planning process and looking for ways to "go upstream" beyond food pantries for the hungry, said Kathy Bryon, executive director of the Gordon Elwood Foundation, one of the grantors.

"We're excited to see how we can impact the economy positively, the jobs potential in agriculture and to get healthy foods on the table, no matter what your income," said Bryon. "It's about training more farmers, getting nurses out from the university, teaching nutrition in local schools, reducing chronic illnesses and increasing employment."

John Javna, creator of the Ashland Food Project — which has branched out to include Medford and several other cities — said the new system will help eliminate inefficiencies, duplicated efforts and wasted resources that nonprofits often face, "especially at a time when resources are so precious."

"It's great that all the stakeholders are taking on the task of seeing that their neighbors are fed, and doing this by joining forces," Javna said. "It's an enormous shock to most people to hear the percentage of food-insecure people in Jackson County who are children — and we owe it to them to give our best efforts."

The community food system planning process will include seven FEAST workshops, as well as smaller meetings in less-populated areas. The first workshop will be from 1 to 6 p.m. March 11 in the Applegate River Ranch House.

Eventually, planners want to combine in a "summit" that merges the efforts of Jackson and Josephine counties, Yates noted.

"The goal is also to teach people to grow food," said Yates. "They can do it at the ACCESS Community Food Share Gardens, which produced 60,000 pounds of food last year. We encourage people to work there if they get Food Share boxes, instead of them being overwhelmed, going from scratch."

That focus on local, nutritious produce is at the core of the effort, Yates stressed.

"There's still a big gap (in food supplies) and local produce has a high value to us and the people we serve," he said.

John Darling is a freelance writer living in Ashland. E-mail him at jdarling@jeffnet.org.

Rogue Valley Grabs A Seat At The FEAST

Medford Mail Tribune | March 11, 2012 4:42 p.m. | Updated: July 17, 2012 1:02 a.m. By Nils Holst

More than 70 people filled the main room of the Applegate River Ranch House on Sunday during Jackson County's first-ever FEAST, an event organized by the Oregon Food Bank, and local food pantries and nonprofits to discuss food security in Southern Oregon.

Essentially a structured brainstorming process, the event brought together farmers, ranchers, gardeners, store owners, food pantry volunteers, and others from Jackson and Josephine counties, with the goal of developing better connections between the grower, the grocer, the food bank and the consumer.

"The goal of this is to help rural communities get in contact with their rural food resources," said Sharon Thornberry, community food-systems manager for the Oregon Food Bank.

Thornberry explained that each FEAST, or Food, Education, Agriculture Solutions Together, coordinates with the local community to identify what it wants most, and then helps to start programs aimed at solving the problems.

"We don't come in with a plan for what we're going to do," she said. "The reason (FEASTs) are so successful is because people decide what they want to do themselves."

Hannah Ancel, community food-systems coordinator for ACCESS Inc., Jackson County's emergency food bank, said the program relies on local support to get projects off the ground.

"From production to processing to distribution to the customers themselves, we want everybody to be involved," she said. "We really want this to be a grassroots effort."

This is the first FEAST in Jackson County, but the Oregon Food Bank has been hosting these events around the state since 2009, even expanding the program into Idaho. FEASTs in other counties have helped to start farmers markets, establish and expand partnerships between schools and local growers to get fresh produce into the cafeteria, create community gardens and establish community supported agriculture programs, and build regional networks between local food growers.

In Jackson County, participants said their top concerns included food support for low-income families, establishing new farmers markets and expanding existing ones, creating cooperatives between local business owners to purchase on wholesale prices, and starting community gardens.

"This is just one of the four FEASTs we're going to have," said Ancel. "We're looking for some themes in the community, things that come up again and again."

"This whole issue is really interesting to my wife and I," said Rick Levine, who runs a 25-acre ranch, vineyard and tree farming business with his wife. He also volunteers at the Applegate Food Pantry. "I think what a lot of us want to see is a networking system that brings people together and see food move from one place to another, as in from the farm to the people."

Levine said the Rogue Valley has plenty of resources -- "I think the only thing that's missing in this valley is fish" -- but the problem was connecting these producers to the people and organizations that need them.

"What we hope to do is activate the local community," said Thornberry. "At the end of the day, it's not just a conversation, people commit to come back and do things."

Reach reporting intern Nils Holst at 541-776-4368 or email holstn@sou.edu.

This story originally appeared in [Medford Mail Tribune](#).

MEETING WILL FOCUS ON BOOSTING USE OF LOCAL FOODS

Registration deadline is Thursday for the May 12 event at Ashland's Bellview Grange

May 09, 2012

Residents of Ashland and surrounding areas are invited to take part in a Community FEAST — a collaborative effort to improve the Rogue Valley's food system — from 1 to 6 p.m. Saturday, May 12. The meeting, which includes a free meal prepared with local foods, will be at the Bellview Grange, 1050 Tolman Creek Road.

Sharon Thornberry, community food systems manager at the Oregon Food Bank, will speak at the meeting. This is one of several sessions in the region intended to help shape a Rogue Valley Community Food System Plan to improve the processes that make food available to people in Jackson and Josephine counties.

Because a large turnout is expected, participants are asked to register by Thursday, May 10, by contacting Hanna Ancel, ACCESS community food systems coordinator, at 541-618-4019. During the FEAST discussions, participants will share their thoughts about the local food system, brainstorm for priorities, help create an action plan and work in small groups organized by interest area. FEAST is an acronym for Food, Education, Agriculture Solutions Together.

Ancel said topics will include hunger and nutrition, access to local food, local agricultural and food production, and youth opportunities. Organizers have several goals, including:

- Producing a strategic plan for the regional food system that increases collaboration among groups.
- Increasing food production in the Rogue Valley.
- Increasing consumption of healthy, local food by residents in the Rogue Valley.
- Increasing healthy food in local food banks.
- Identifying opportunities for economic development within the food system.
- Increasing nutritional awareness of Rogue Valley residents.
- Involving more people in the food system.
- Engaging local government in supporting food system strategies.

Other communities that have participated in FEASTs have formed and expanded Farm-to-School partnerships between rural school districts and local farmers, built community connectivity and formed regional action networks, created new farmers' markets and community gardens, increased acceptance of WIC and Senior Farm Direct Checks and WIC fruit and vegetable vouchers at farmers' markets and local businesses, and formed new partnerships between food donors and emergency food providers.

The Rogue Valley Community Food System planning process is funded through a grant from the Meyer Memorial Trust, which was sought through a partnership among ACCESS, The Rogue Initiative for a Vital Economy (Thrive) and the Josephine County Food Bank. The Oregon Food Bank also is supporting the project.

Several FEAST workshops, along with "community foods conversation" meetings, are planned throughout Jackson and Josephine counties this spring. FEASTs already have been held in the Applegate Valley and in the Phoenix-Talent area. Community conversations have taken place in Jacksonville.

Keeping it cool

Organic Produce Warehouse stores bounty from many Southern Oregon farms, strengthening the local food system



Tom Marks' Organic Produce Warehouse on Oak Street in Ashland provides grocery stores with a one-stop shop for locally grown and raised food. Julia Moore / Daily Tidings

By Sam Wheeler

Ashland Daily Tidings

Posted: 2:00 AM July 17, 2012

Tom Marks began selling organic produce out of the back of his pickup truck about eight years ago, he says.

He'd fill his truck bed with potatoes from Klamath Falls, salad greens from the Applegate Valley and boxes of garlic cloves and onion bulbs from Ashland farms.

Now the Ashland resident is working to fill spacious walk-in refrigerators at his Organic Produce Warehouse, which he opened last year on Oak Street.

The warehouse is a big step in his effort to provide the Rogue Valley's food merchants with a one-stop shop for locally grown and raised food, he says.

"We need to create more of a market for these smaller local farms and ranches," Marks says. "It's hard for small farms to connect with some of these larger distributors, because they just aren't producing enough food."

That reality, Marks says, leaves most of Southern Oregon's low-acreage farmers, ranchers and other food producers struggling to sell their products by way of local restaurants and stores.

"One of the hardest things about farming is the marketing," says Geoffrey Stewart, owner of Four Winds Farm.

Stewart cultivates a variety of plants on his 5-acre plot outside Ashland, dedicating one-half of an acre solely to vegetables, herbs and other edible plants.

Most of his garden space is filled with potatoes, garlic and onions, he says, because there is a local demand for those items.

Marks started buying produce from Four Winds about three years ago, but last year was the first time most of its crop went to a single distributor — OPW, Stewart says.

"I think what he's doing is a pretty valuable resource for local farmers," says Stewart, who works as Ashland Food Co-op's assistant produce manager purchasing local produce and other food items. "I don't think I would be able to sell nearly as much without Tom."

Growers markets help local food producers offload some of their bounty, he says, but getting rid of everything can mean driving from one restaurant and grocery store to another, hoping for a sale if no deals have been arranged ahead of harvest.

That scheme has sustained some successful small farms and ranches in Southern Oregon, Marks says, but he sees room for improvement.

"It's not about us (OPW) ruling the food supply, it's about creating a sense of community for our food supply," Marks says. "Our vision is to be an integral partner in our bio-region's quest for a thriving and sustainable food system."

Marks, who began working as an independent local food distributor under the name Del Sol Co. in 2004, has evolved into the Rogue Valley's exclusive distributor of Columbia Gorge Organic juices and Brew Dr. Kombucha. OPW topped \$1 million in sales last year, Marks says.

"We do need a local distributor for more local products, from the coast to Klamath County," says Annie Hoy, outreach manager for the Ashland Food Co-op. "There are a lot of budding growers "... and little opportunity for them in the big-distributor system."

The co-op, which has agreements with about 25 local farmers, ranchers and producers of other food items, also purchases produce from OPW when it needs to fill a gap in supply, Marks says.

Many of the local food items sold in the co-op are the result of a time-consuming collaborative effort, Hoy says, in which food producers are taught how to package, where to get licensed and other details of getting their food to a grocery store's shelf.

"I think there is room in the market and an increasing demand for a more regional distributor," Hoy says. "That's where Tom can fit in."

Consumers in the Rogue Valley have a taste for locally grown food, says ACCESS Inc. community food system coordinator Hannah Ancel.

The Medford-based nonprofit organization has been providing social services for families and individuals in need since 1976, and is about halfway through a yearlong analysis of the Rogue Valley's food system through a series of community discussions.

Dubbed FEAST (Food, Education, Agriculture, Solution, Together), its goal is to find the best way to meet the needs of local food sources, Ancel says.

"We are looking to make the entire food system more efficient," she says. "Certainly, distribution is a major challenge for producers here."

Not everything Marks sells though OPW is local, but limiting the amount of mileage food has to travel from producer to plate is something everyone should work toward, he says.

There are no large, locally based food distributors for grocery stores to buy from in the Rogue Valley. That means the California-grown avocados most stores in Southern Oregon buy get trucked through the valley to Portland, Eugene or Seattle before being shipped to store destinations.

When Marks buys avocados and fruit from California, they come straight to Ashland before getting dispersed in Southern Oregon by OPW.

OPW is certified by the Oregon Department of Agriculture as an organic distributor. Marks is working to become certified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture so he can buy and sell meat products as well.

Marks thinks local grocery stores will throw more of their support behind locally grown, low-mileage organic foods if they become more convenient to buy.

"We can be that source of organic local food," Marks says.

Last week, Marks was certified by the ODA to begin labeling produce under the brand Rogue Nation Foods, which means local farmers no longer have to package their product before selling it to OPW.

The daily workload is bit heavier now, Marks says, but he and five other employees keep food moving through OPW's doors.

"We think we can be the example," he says.

Reach reporter Sam Wheeler at 541-499-1470 or email swheeler@dailytidings.com.

FOOD SUMMIT

Gathering will teach Rogue Valley residents about all things local, from produce to marketing



Free distribution of locally grown produce at Medford's Peach Street Market was one effort for improving local access to healthy food, a topic of this week's Rogue Valley Food Summit. Photo courtesy of ACCESS

March 06, 2013 By **Sarah Lemon** Mail Tribune

Stocking convenience stores with fresh foods, funding more purchases at farmers markets and training volunteer cooking instructors are among the projects sprouting from a series of local workshops.

These and more initiatives are the bill of fare at the first Rogue Valley Food Summit, planned for 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday, March 8. Open to the public, the daylong conference in Rogue River caps off a year of community effort to improve the region's food system.

IF YOU GO

What: Rogue Valley Food Summit, a conference hosted by ACCESS, Thrive and the Food System Steering Committee with funding from Ashland Food Co-op, Meyer Memorial Trust, and Jackson County Health & Human Services.

When: 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday, March 8.

Where: New Beginnings Church, 270 W. Evans Creek Road, Rogue River.

To register: Go to www.tinyurl.com/b79dnl or call 541-618-4019. The cost is \$20, which includes lunch.

"What we're presenting ... is really the vision," says organizer Hannah Ancel, community food-systems coordinator for ACCESS.

Participants will attend panel discussions about access to healthy food, local food marketing, mapping and measuring resources, cooking-skills education, food-system infrastructure and community gardening. The lecture topics emerged as top regional concerns last year in a series of workshops, dubbed FEAST (Food, Education, Agriculture Solutions Together). Since March last year, more than 400 people in 10 local towns met to evaluate the food system, set priorities and brainstorm solutions.

"We're all kind of moving toward implementation at this point," says Ancel.

The FEAST format was developed by the Oregon Food Bank to move beyond its mission of providing nutrition assistance to the poor. If regional food resources were fully utilized, so the theory goes, many residents wouldn't have to rely on food banks. Oregon counties have been hosting FEASTs and smaller Community Foods Conversations since 2009.

"They've done them all over the state at this point," says Ancel.

FEASTs aren't just producing plans that sit on agencies' shelves. Following a Community Foods Conversation last summer, a west Medford neighborhood became a one-day distribution site for free, locally grown vegetables and freshly prepared food samples. ACCESS has since worked with Jackson County Health & Human Services to obtain grants supporting "corner stores" that provide healthful foods, says Ancel.

"That's one of the most tangible," she says of efforts arising from local FEASTs.

Peach Street Market owner Nancy Murrish hosted the September event because the market's immediate vicinity was identified as a "food desert," meaning healthful, affordable food is difficult to

obtain within a one-mile radius. The term often is assigned to low-income areas and indicates high rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease and cancer among residents.

"This is way bigger than even the project with the Peach Street Market," says Ancel.

About 75 percent of the people ACCESS surveyed at the market received food assistance, says Ancel. Most said they wanted easier access to fresh produce and even space for their own gardens, she says. Of those who sampled a dish prepared that day by Oregon State University Extension volunteers, several told Murrish they made the recipe at home, adds Ancel.

Bringing cooking skills to the wider community has major momentum, with Ashland Food Co-op leading the charge, says Ancel. ACCESS and its partners also are looking at ways to match funds that food-assistance recipients spend at farmers markets. So far, ACCESS has received about \$73,000 in foundation grants, the largest from Meyer Memorial Trust, for FEAST and related work.

The \$20 fee to attend the summit includes lunch made from fresh, local ingredients.

Reach Food Editor Sarah Lemon at 541-776-4487 or email slemon@mailtribune.com.

WALLOWA COUNTY OREGON

Wallowa County Food System Council sets priorities

Written by Katy Nesbitt, The Observer October 15, 2012 02:30 pm



The Magic Garden in Imnaha produced three tons of food this summer. KATY NESBITT - The Observer

In little more than a year's time, a group of local food producers have taken the dream of a sustainable, local food network and are making it a reality.

The Wallowa County Food System Council, a group of gardeners, chefs, ranchers, and community organizers, formed the council over the past year in conjunction with a Community Food Assessment prepared by Josh Russell.

Russell was a resource assistant for rural environments who interviewed dozens of people

involved in food production and retail to determine what we raise, how and where it's sold, and the needs of local consumers. He compiled the information into a document — a map of what is available in the county and what is hoped for in the future.

The council boiled down Russell's work to a short list of priorities on which they will focus in the coming year. Their first priority is strengthening the food production and processing network through collaboration of information, resources, transportation and marketing.

The second priority is to continue the development and expansion of community and school gardens and secure additional funding.

The council's final goal for the coming year is to encourage collaboration among all of the farmers markets and develop a strategic plan.

With the harvest season winding down, the Northeast Oregon Economic Development District invited Sharon Thornberry of the Oregon Food Bank to facilitate a morning of workshops to map out tasks for the coming year.

Each group identified communication as a top priority and tapping into multiple websites from a state-wide food hub site to the Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce's site.

Using the Wallowa County brand on food products was also suggested as a marketing tool. Wallowa County is a recognized name outside the region and beef and produce are already sold in Portland stores and restaurants.

The council's focus is to also increase consumption of local products by local consumers. June Colony, with USDA grant funding, has a pick-up truck and trailer that can be driven into a field where produce can be processed. Up to 32 boxes can be put into a drop-in cooler and transported to a larger cooler on her farm.

Colony's system can process local food and fills a gap for both processing and storage needed in Wallowa County.

Colony started a 4-H gardening club and would like to see each community have one as well, tapping into educational opportunities available through the Wallowa County OSU Extension office. Programs for adults such as Master Gardening and food preservation are also available.

Thornberry said through 4-H there is a framework for tested curriculum and agreed it was an excellent, local resource.

Long-term, members of the workshop would like to see renewable energy folded into the infrastructure of the community gardens, said Jacquie Medina.

Finishing its second season, The Magic Garden, the brain child of Robin Martin and the Joseph

Methodist Church, has grown exponentially and the need has arisen to hire a paid intern.

The garden grows food in Joseph and Imnaha for the Joseph and Enterprise schools and donates to the Community Connection food bank. Last month Slow Food of the Wallows hosted a fundraiser and brought in \$2,400 to support the intern's salary.

Martin said three tons of food was grown in the Imnaha garden and another 100x100 garden plot has been donated by Janie and Doug Tippet.

For the last two years the Joseph and Enterprise farmers' markets have promoted the use of Electronic Benefit Transfer cards that Thornberry said help both consumers and producers. She said new machines are available to process the cards through the Oregon Food Bank.

Ideas for the future of the farmers markets is expanding gardens in Imnaha and Troy where there are longer growing seasons and having shared booths for small producers.

Farmers' market organizers envision a winter market with at least 10 vendors selling winter produce and other hand-made products. They would like to attract people who have not been involved in any of the markets in hopes to expand interest and products.

At harvest's end, several activities are planned to celebrate.

Saturday is the final Joseph Farmers' Market and cider press.

Lostine Harvest Days starts Oct. 19 at M. Crow and Co. with soup and Lathrop Country wine tasting, a biggest potato contest. A cider press will be in action at June's Local Market as well as many other craft and food items available throughout the weekend.

On Oct. 20 at the Tamkaliks Pow wow Grounds in Wallowa there will be a pumpkin patch and activities for families and a cider press.

Most of the work of the council and the other producers is about growing and selling delicious food, Thornberry said it is also about food security and ending hunger.

"We can't end hunger through emergency food supplies, we need long-term solutions to rebuilding community food supplies," said Thornberry.

To find out how to get involved in the burgeoning local food movement in Wallowa County, call Northeast Oregon Economic Development District at 541-426-3598.

LINN COUNTY OREGON

Volunteer gets the word out on local foods

December 27, 2010 7:30 am • By Alex Paul, Albany Democrat-Herald



Spencer Masterson helps with the cabbage harvest at Open Oak Farm near Crawfordsville, where he is living during his stint as an AmeriCorps/RARE volunteer. (Provided photo)

TANGENT — Linn County residents who want to know more about where they can find locally grown foods now have a resource at the Ten Rivers Food Web website, www.tenriversfoodweb.org.

Chicago area native Spencer Masterson, who is spending 11 months in the area as an AmeriCorps RARE volunteer, is writing a blog dedicated to connecting farmers with consumers.

According to its website, the “Ten Rivers Food Web supports, educates and organizes farmers, processors, buyers, retailers and individuals to increase and diversify local food acreage, promote local food processing and expand access to affordable and nutritious foods.”

“What I’m hearing is that folks in Sweet Home don’t know what’s going on in Brownsville, or people in Halsey don’t know what’s going on in Lebanon in terms of local food resources,” Masterson said.

Masterson said he is completing a Community Food Assessment with guidance from the Oregon Food Bank as part of his work here.

“There are a lot of people in the area who want a common source to go to when it comes to local food availability,” Masterson said. “They want to learn what’s going on in their area. I hope to update the blog weekly, but I’m not sure if I will get that done.”

Masterson recently volunteered to help when the YMCA in Albany added a community garden. He posted a photo and story about the event.

“I want to write some profiles about local farmers,” Masterson said.

Masterson, 24, has a degree in agriculture and consumer economics from the University of Illinois-Urbana; he spent a semester in Thailand.

“We did a lot of service learning work with farmers,” Masterson said. “I learned a lot about environmental issues and development and realized that I knew more about Thailand than I did about some areas of my own country. I realized I wanted to learn more about the issues facing disadvantaged folks in my country and that’s why I turned toward AmeriCorps.”

Masterson also spent a couple months working with the Worldwide Organization of Organic Farmers in Chile and Brazil.

"The program places volunteers with farmers who need some help in return for room and board," Masterson said.

"I worked in the fruit and vegetable processing company. I went to area farms to talk to encourage them to use good farm practices such only using correct amounts of fertilizer, or to ensure they treat employees correctly."

Masterson came to Oregon in September.

"From a consumer's standpoint, I hope we can improve access to healthy foods grown locally, especially for low-income families," Masterson said.

Masterson's effort will be focused on Linn County. Another volunteer is working on a similar project in Lincoln County.

Masterson, who is working out of the USDA office in Tangent, hopes to host a community food workshop in January or February and welcomes input from the public.

Local food facts help make a FEAST

March 20, 2011 9:30 am • [By AnneMarie Knepper](#)



Cynthia Kapple of Midway Farms in Albany has her husband Rob taste the duck soup being prepared for the Food Education Agriculture Solutions Together workshop at the Linn County Armory Building Saturday afternoon. (Jesse Skoubo/Democrat-Herald)

Local farmers grow healthy food. Local people want to buy the food, and they want their kids to eat it at school.

Making this happen is more difficult than one might think.

Discussing how to build a healthier, more equitable and resilient local food system was the goal of the Albany FEAST event, which stands for Food, Education, Agriculture, Solutions, Together.

Community leaders and interested individuals met Saturday at the Linn County Armory Building for presentations, discussion and a shared bowl of "stone" soup, made from ingredients brought by various contributors. The contributions produced a rich vegetable soup and a duck-based soup.

Organizer Sharon Thornberry, Community Resource Developer at the Oregon Food Bank, was pleased with the turnout of about 35 people.

Speakers included producers Cynthia and Rob Kapple of Midway Farms and Mary Ann Jasper of Stalford Seed Farms, Albany Mayor Sharon Konopa, Annette Hobbs of Fish of Albany, Randy Glaser of Helping Hands Garden and Janice Gregg of the Oregon State University Extension Service.

Sharon Short, the nutrition director for the Greater Albany Public Schools, said the district's food service providers strive to make healthy choices available to kids. For example, fish and turkey burgers were added this year and pizza was reduced to a once-a-week offering. The pizza is made with whole wheat crust, low-fat cheese and turkey sausage.

Mary Ann Jasper of Stalford Seed Farms in Tangent outlined some of the challenges of producing, processing and selling organic wheat flour.

Annette Hobbs of Fish of Albany and Randy Glaser of Helping Hands Garden spoke about the value of making local, nutritionally sound food available to the hungry.

"I was pleased to see the organized effort to gather the local food growers together and seek to strengthen their market," Konopa said after the workshop.

Similar FEAST workshop locations include Lebanon, Cannon Beach, Enterprise and Ontario, but this was the first FEAST event in Albany. Corvallis hosted a FEAST workshop in January, and another Corvallis workshop to address nutritional topics of Hispanic residents is scheduled for April.

Ideas and action plans gleaned from the event are to be posted to the Ten Rivers Food Web, a website dedicated to education, organization and promotion of the local food movement in the mid-Willamette Valley. See www.tenriversfoodweb.org.

Thornberry said she hopes these meetings will organize residents to "re-grow the local food system." "Historically, that's what this region is all about," she said.

Write to the author at annemarie.knepper@lee.net

Street-wise gardener

August 29, 2011 6:30 am • [By Cathy Ingalls, Albany Democrat-Herald](#)



Karen Morrison tends to her sidewalk garden with her chicken, Carrie, close by Sunday afternoon in Albany. (Ethan Erickson/Democrat-Herald)

Master Gardener Karen Morrison of Albany is on a mission to show families from all walks of life

how easy and inexpensive it is to grow fruit and vegetables in small areas, particularly the grassy rights of way between a sidewalk and a city street.

She ought to know, because she's in her second year of producing food for passersby and for the people in her neighborhood who don't have gardening experience or think they can't afford to prepare and plant a garden.

Morrison received permission from the city of Albany before starting her Feed Thy Neighbor project.

Morrison explains she is taking the community garden concept and making it more personal by going street by street to help families grow their own food. She got the idea after attending a Food Education Agriculture Solutions Together (FEAST) meeting in Albany held under the auspices of the Oregon Food Bank.

At the session, she learned that many people in Albany and Linn County never have enough to eat or eat the wrong things.

"There's so much junk food out there that I want to show kids and their parents that it is fun and easy to grow your own food. It's less expensive and tastes better than what you buy at the store, especially the cucumbers," she said while pulling weeds from her garden strip at Fifth Avenue and Thurston Street.

Keeping an eye on her was Carrie, her year-old Buff Orpington hen. The bird isn't allowed inside the garden because she pulls up the plants and eats the blueberries.

In her garden patch are tomatoes, cucumbers, potatoes, herbs, table grapes, strawberries, green and Walla Walla onions, and sunflower seeds for the birds. She planted lettuce in an old wheelbarrow.

"I'm trying to be as sustainable and organic as I can be," she said of how she manages her garden.

She killed the grass in the strip using unfolded pizza boxes held down by rocks, bark or any other heavy object.

As the leaves fell, she spread them over the tops of the boxes. The winter rains reduced the boxes to mush, and then in the spring she put garden soil over everything and turned it into the ground for planting.

Rather than buy a fence to keep animals from getting into the garden, she uses sticks she finds on her property and she is training her grape vines to grow horizontally.

Morrison is encouraging other Master Gardeners to contact her and get involved in her program.

Anyone who wants to get help starting a garden in a small space can contact her at 541-704-0593 or by email at somethingwonderful24u@yahoo.com.

LINCOLN COUNTY

Community Food Workshop Serves Up Potential Partnerships

April 4, 2011

An effort to forge links between local food producers and consumers made progress at the Lincoln County Community FEAST (Food-Education-Agriculture-Solutions-Together) Workshop April 2. But judging from the comments of many panelists and participants, there is a long way to go. The desire is there, but the organization is not. "Information sharing is very important...but relationship-building is equally important," said Chloe Rico, coordinator with [Ten Rivers Food Web](#). "I think people realized that our community has many passionate and motivated people who are working on a variety of projects related to food and they were able to connect with others to make their ideas possible."

Much of the discussion centered around a desire to increase the amount of healthy, locally-produced foods available to food share clients, and WIC (Women, Infant and Children) and SNAP (food stamp) recipients. Joyce Thompson Graham of Lincoln County Food Share said her organization handles supermarket-sized loads of food annually – nearly one million pounds a year in about 10 percent of Lincoln County homes. Not only is the market there among those populations, but there is big money involved. Sharon Thornberry, Oregon Food Bank Community Resources Manager, said there are more than 1,500 low-income [WIC recipients](#) in Lincoln County, representing an economic value of \$875 thousand a year. "Farmers' market vouchers are also available," for them she said, and represent a growing opportunity for people to make healthier choices.

But there are big obstacles to making changes. [Randy Walker](#), a Siletz farmer, said Lincoln County has about 16 thousand acres of arable land, but is last in Oregon in salable food production. He said infrastructure is important to change that. "I would love to see cold storage, with a huge commercial kitchen where people can process things." Walker said this would increase the ability for local producers to sell locally.

Jeff Feldner of [OSU Extension](#) agreed. Feldner started fishing commercially in 1972, when almost all fish went directly to processors. Now, he said, there is an growing interest in purchasing directly from the fleet, with "direct sales of albacore in Newport alone (over) 240 thousand pounds" in 2008. The difficulty with direct fish marketing, Feldner said, is that "it is seasonal and very perishable, and when it comes in it needs to be sold. You also need communication," he said. "The fisherman is not a retailer or a marketer, so there needs to be a communication link, and that's been really challenging."

Also growing is interest in local food in schools. Cheryl Schriver, who runs food service at Siletz Valley Schools, withdrew from the School District food system entirely two years ago. She sources local food as much as possible, and is also trying to get a farm-to-school program and a school garden underway. "I do have some pre-made items," Schriver said, "but the students tend to choose the homemade items instead of the processed items. My choice is to have good food in schools again, and I'm going to see to it," Schriver said.

Schriver said. The Lincoln County School District's food service provider, Sodexo, announced in January it too has increased the amount of locally produced foods in school cafeterias this. The goal is to support

the local economy while teaching children where their food comes from. "We live in a commercial fishing haven and our inland areas support a variety of small farms, so it makes sense that we look closer to home for some of our food supplies," said Steve Kappler, Sodexo food service director.

Chloe Rico said "The meeting achieved the goals I had set for it. (Toledo) Councilwoman Jill Lyon put it best when she said many of us need to communicate more," Rico said. Several smaller groups intend to meet again to continue their work, and Rico said she hopes to keep connecting people to "make things happen." She will also incorporate ideas from the FEAST event into the Lincoln County Community Food Assessment that she is writing as part of her work for Ten Rivers Food Web.

Attending the all-day workshop were about 50 Lincoln County farmers, fishermen and other food producers; food retailers; restaurateurs; volunteer groups; farmers market representatives, educators and others. The event was funded primarily by [Oregon Food Bank](#). Panelists included Liz Olsen ([Lincoln County Master Gardeners](#)), Randy Walker (Walker Farms of Siletz), Jeff Feldner (Oregon Sea Grant), Cheryl Schriver (Siletz Valley Schools), Joyce Thompson Graham ([Food Share of Lincoln County](#)), Joelle Archibald ([Lincoln County Health Department](#)) and Andy Morgan (Kenny's IGA).

KLAMATH BASIN

[Klamath Falls Herald and News: Helping the basin find food](#)

August 24, 2011 **Author:** Shelby King, Herald and News

Rich farmland and productive ranches abound in Klamath and Lake counties, and yet many people here go hungry.

One in five Klamath County residents is considered to be "food insecure" - meaning they have "limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods," according to the United States Department of Agriculture.

Roopika Subramanian came to Klamath Falls to help fix that problem.

As an AmeriCorps volunteer, Subramanian was assigned here through the University of Oregon's Resource Assistance for Rural Environments program. Her assignment: to research and publish a food assessment that could help improve food availability to low-income residents while helping to make organic and regionally produced foods available to everyone.

What is a food assessment?

Subramanian looked at all aspects of the local food system, including production, distribution, supply, consumption and disposal.

"We were interested in seeing how communities can come together to improve the quality of food in

general, not just in the food banks," Subramanian said. "The Oregon Food Bank believes a regional food system is a good way to improve access to fresh food."

Her published assessment concentrated on three main points.

- Food accessibility: How and when people are able to access food and what barriers rural and low-income residents face when trying to access healthy food.
- Overall community health: How having limited access to healthy food affects the health of people within a community.
- County food systems: A look at how food is being grown, processed and distributed locally.

Subramanian traveled throughout both Klamath and Lake counties, stopping to ask residents in rural communities what is lacking in their food system and how it can be improved.

"I talked to grocers, farmers, ranchers and regular citizens," Subramanian said. "It was easy to engage people in talking about this because it's of such common interest to everyone."

OUTSIDE OREGON

LOCAL FOOD NEWS: Community FEAST Event

Community Organizes Around Healthy Food: Brown County Hosts FEAST Event



Participants in the Brown County FEAST shared information about local food issues.

by Chhaya Kolavilli & Cole Cottin

On Monday, September 24, 2012, over 70 people gathered at Highland Community College's historic Klinefelter Barn to engage in Kansas' first ever "Community FEAST." FEAST (Food, Education, Agriculture Solutions Together) is a model for community organizing created by the Oregon Food Bank to help involve people in addressing regional food systems issues.

According to the Brown County Healthy Foods Coalition (BCHFC), the primary goal of Brown County Community FEAST was to unite a broad range of community members under one roof to discuss challenges to and opportunities for responding to regional health issues and food access needs.

FEAST participants included: local farmers, school workers, food business owners, tribal representatives, government employees, and food bank staff members.

With one of the highest food insecurity rates in Kansas and a health status ranking of 89 out of 100 Kansas counties, the Brown County Healthy Food Coalition identified FEAST as a tool to generate greater community involvement in improving the availability of and access to healthy foods. It was supported by a grant from the Kansas Health Foundation to the Community Foundation of Northeast Kansas.

FEASTs held elsewhere in the nation have resulted in increased nutrition education efforts, farm-to-school partnerships, local food hubs, new farmers markets, food producer networking groups, community gardens, food policy councils, and more.

After attending a FEAST Facilitator's Training, held at Kansas State University (K-State) in June, BCHFC partnered with the Kansas Rural Center, K-State's Center for Engagement and Community Development (CECD), Kansas Farm Bureau, and Glacial Hills Resource and Conservation Development (RC&D) to make this event happen.

The evening featured presentations from local and state agencies, plus small group discussions. Karla Harter, of the Brown County Health Department, kicked off the evening with a presentation on the challenges to community health in the area.

Just four grocery stores serve all of Brown County's predominantly rural population. Harter asked participants: "What do you do when you can't even afford to get to the grocery store? Then, if you do get there, the only food you can afford is highly processed, high sodium, calorie dense, and nutritionally poor." In order for healthy food to become a regular part of residents' lives, Harter says it must be available, reachable, affordable, and prepare-able. "The days of grandma in the kitchen teaching you how to prepare wholesome foods are gone, folks," she emphasized – pointing to the need to educate people about healthy foods identification and use.

Next up, from the Kansas Department of Education, Cheryl Johnson and Barb Depew shared information on the many programs public schools can choose to offer to respond to issues of access and education. Often, they said, healthy eating "starts with the kids." Just getting kids excited about different types of healthy foods can have a great impact on how families eat.

"October is national Farm-to-School Month," they pointed out, "We hope Brown County will be a shining example for the state!" In fact, later that evening, connections were made between farmers and school food service directors interested in purchasing healthy, local food for their schools.

Other speakers included: Matt Young, Brown County Extension Agent, who encouraged participants to use his office as a resource for increasing the local food supply. Brown County farmers, Mark Ward and Jake Johannes, emphasized the economic potential of marketing farm products locally and regionally.

Annarose Hart, Agribusiness Development and Farmers Market Specialist for the Kansas Department of Agriculture, spoke about creative models for improving food access in communities. Hart pointed out that programs like Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT), which facilitates vision card (food stamp) and credit card sales at

farmers markets, have doubled the income of some farmers markets: “It’s a huge way to be able to capture the food dollar, to help make sure that farmers can keep farming and that people can have access to healthy foods.”

After the presentations, participants enjoyed a locally-sourced meal followed by small group discussions on a variety of topics, which included access, education, production, and distribution of healthy foods in Brown County. Driven by the premise that sustainable solutions to community challenges must be community-based, the groups submitted their ideas to the Brown County Healthy Food Coalition with a list of allies and resources that might be useful for addressing different areas of concern.

Some of these ideas included “mobile food trucks” as a solution to the challenge of physical access to food. “Brown County has limited grocery stores and only one farmers market,” they said, “but a mobile food truck operation, perhaps run through a local grocery store and in collaboration with area farmers, could deliver food to outlying communities.” Others suggested that a virtual food store, in which customers order food online and receive a delivery to their door, could increase food accessibility.

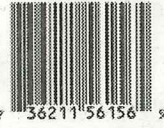
In his closing speech BCHFC Chair, Steve Smith, addressed the FEAST participants: “The things we are discussing tonight are not easy fixes. They are total societal changes. We have a lot in front of us.” His sentiments echoed Harter’s opening statement, “We can change history. We can change the course of Brown County.”

For photos and story about the Brown County FEAST, visit [here](#) for more.

The Humboldt Sun

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Winnemucca, Nevada

Feb. 1 - 4, 2013

VOLUME 44, ISSUE 10



JESSICA POWELL • The Humboldt Sun

Winnemucca Community Garden Director Amanda Hoffer (right) and Lyndsey Langsdale (left), who does food systems development for the Northern Nevada Food Bank, organize participants' interests/concerns into groups before splitting them into separate brainstorming pods.

FEAST sparks discussion on need for local food, community sustainability

By Jessica Powell

The Humboldt Sun

WINNEMUCCA — Concerned residents came together at the Community Garden's FEAST event on Jan. 19 and determined that the community needs more local food and less waste, and that education is the key to beginning the process.

Among the most important issues, as outlined by event attendees, was the need to grow and sell produce locally and the need for a

local meat processing facility.

The event began with presentations by several community members in local food related industries.

John Shank, who owns Double Tree Ranch in Lovelock and runs several farmers markets in northern Nevada (including one at the Winner's parking lot), kicked off the discussion by explaining some of the difficulties and rewards of growing local produce and selling it to the community.

According to Shank, bringing healthy, locally grown food to Winnemuccans is a priority; however, it's not for everyone. Shank said that while the work is rewarding, it is not easy to make a profit.

"For me to load my trailer, come up here and set it up, I need to make at least \$800," he said. "I have not drawn a profit in over two years."

He said he feels that marketing is key and it is important to

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FEAST

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know your customers: what they want/need and how much they are willing to spend on it.

While a home gardening/farmer's market venture can be pricey to get off the ground, Jamie Flanagan, branch manager at the Nevada State Bank Winnemucca branch, said that financing options are available. Whether customers want a small home garden or plan to have a large farm or ranch, Flanagan said something customized can be found for each person.

Despite the hardships of growing and selling locally, Shank did say that it is something he feels is important.

"We want the economy to stay in our backyard," he said. "We want it to stay local."

Barbara Sealy, director of the Winnemucca Food Bank, agreed that local food is vital to the community.

"Our dream is for more home gardens," she said.

Because the food bank has its own set of guidelines for what foods can be accepted, donors do not have to be USDA certified in order to donate fresh produce that they have grown. The only problem

is that not all clients can or know how to cook.

Sharon Thornberry, the community food systems manager at the Oregon Food Bank, facilitated the event and said that the problem extends beyond the food bank clientele.

"Our culture as a whole does not know how to cook," she said; "The values of family and food are something we've forgotten."

Louis Mendiola, wellness coordinator at Humboldt General Hospital, comes from a family that values food and coming together to enjoy it. According to Mendiola, a local food system is achievable in our community and would positively impact it.

"Although we do face challenges," he said, "it can be done, and it will have an overall impact on community health."

One of those challenges is the lack of a meat processing facility in Humboldt County or nearby.

Debbie Hummel and her husband Mel Hummel are local grass-fed beef ranchers, but for the most part their meat isn't seen or eaten in Humboldt County. Instead, the beef is put on a truck and taken elsewhere to be processed and then sold.

"We don't have a means of selling to the local market," Hummel said. "(There are) no local facilities that can take beef and process it."

According to Cindy Ulch with the Nevada State Health Division, the closest processing facility is in Battle Mountain, but even it does not have the ability to slaughter on-site.

"It all comes down to money for the USDA to come out and build a facility," she said.

According to Thornberry, meat processing is the number one issue that she encounters in communities, "especially in terms of doing it locally."

It is Hummel's belief that people will pay more for a natural, locally raised product, but without the necessary USDA certification and facility, residents here won't have that option.

One group that split off during the brainstorming portion of the afternoon focused its efforts solely on the processing aspect of a local food system. Three other groups formed to discuss education, local food production, and food waste management.

Teresa Howell, who took the leadership position for the processing group, said that she and her

group members would like to see a meat processing facility in the community; however, because of the stringent USDA certifications involved, that is not an easy task.

The group decided that the next steps to take would be to talk to local producers, consumers, community supported agriculture (CSAs), the garden, and to create an online presence.

The three other groups that split off during the brainstorming portion of the event focused on topics of their own: local food supply, education, and food waste.

The local food supply group, led by the community garden's director Amanda Hoffer, came to the consensus that it is important for the community to "increase the ability of produce and meat sellers to reach out to the community."

The problem they found: people don't know where to start.

Hoffer said that the key is to start with education, possibly with some sort of online forum that provides interested community members with resources and information. Her group decided that the most efficient way to get something accomplished is to partner with a group that is already established, so they made a plan to get in

touch with community leaders in hopes of securing a connection.

The education group, led by Nevada Outdoor School Executive Director Andy Hart, had similar ideas: education is where the process needs to begin. According to Hart, "every aspect (of local food systems) could use more education."

Hart, however, feels that there are already a decent amount of educational resources out there for community members to utilize. Unfortunately, people aren't taking advantage of them.

"What we need to know is how to engage people," he said. "There is some great education available in this community, but no one shows up."

Hart said that the real hurdle will be inspiring people and getting them out of their routine.

Another group broke off to focus their discussion on food waste management within the community and determined that the first step is to reach out to local business owners, restaurants, and farms to see what is currently being done with waste. Once they have a better idea of those practices, it will be necessary to promote ways to facilitate food waste management and recycling.

Hart raised the issue of reducing the amount of waste that is created to begin with.

The group felt that there needs to be some sort of organization within the community in order to deal with the problem on both ends. Their plan for the immediate future is to start researching and see what their options are.

Each of the groups discussed a potential follow-up meeting in February, but after all groups had presented, the general consensus was that it would be more beneficial and effective for the group to meet back together as a whole in a month or so.

Several participants raised the concern that as small, dispersed groups it might be harder to get things accomplished; whereas with a larger group, potentially with sub-committees, the focus would be more concentrated and efforts would not overlap.

Thornberry, who has facilitated FEASTS in over 40 communities, said that she has high hopes for the future of our community in regard to local foods systems and that the group was off to a great start.

"There is a lot of potential here and a lot of energy," she said. "I can listen to a room and tell when it's going to be successful."

Once a date is set, all participants in the event (and even those who couldn't make it but are interested in the topic) are invited to come back together and discuss what research has been done, what avenues have been explored, and any other ideas that have been thought of since the original event date. From there the group will determine the necessary actions to create the local foods system that the community has the potential to sustain.

The Humboldt Sun

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Winnemucca, Nevada

Jan. 15 - 17, 2013

VOLUME 44, ISSUE 5

Community invited to discuss local food systems, FEAST on local food

By Jessica Powell
The Humboldt Sun

WINNEMUCCA — The Winnemucca Community Garden, in conjunction with community members and the Food Bank of Northern Nevada, is hosting a FEAST (food, education, agriculture, solutions, together) to “engage community members to discuss our local foods systems and what that means for Winnemucca and the surrounding area,” according to the garden’s director, Amanda Hoffer.

The event, based on a model

developed by the Oregon Food Bank and organized locally by a steering committee, will consist of presentations by community members, brainstorming and planning, group sessions, and a local foods meal.

“We want to get ideas together and see what makes sense for Winnemucca,” Hoffer said, “to see what is more feasible and what we need.”

The event was originally proposed to the community garden by Kristi Jamason and Lydnsey Langsdale from the Food Bank of Northern Nevada; they thought

that Winnemucca was a prime location to host a FEAST because of the community garden and apparent community interest in the local foods topic.

FEAST registration will begin at 1:30 p.m. on Saturday; introductions and an agenda review will begin at 2 p.m.

Directly following introductions, several local speakers will present on topics related to local food systems: John Shank, of Double Tree Ranch in Lovelock; Barbara Sealy, director of the Winnemucca Food Bank; Jamie

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FOOD

(Cont. from Page One)

Flanagan, from the Nevada State Bank; Debbie Hummel, a local rancher; and Louis Mendiola, Humboldt General Hospital wellness coordinator.

In addition, Sharon Thornberry, who helped develop FEASTs at the Oregon Food Bank, will present and help facilitate the event.

FEAST participants will break into groups following the speaker presentations and Thornberry will help lead conversations and pose questions for discussion related to creating local food systems in our community. According to Hoffer, the groups will form based on interest area (ie., hunting, hoop houses, local business).

“The hope is for the groups to continue to meet after the FEAST and see what can be accomplished,” she said. “Hopefully, we will be pleasantly surprised that people are really interested in this.”

Because this is the first FEAST

that will be held in the area, Hoffer and steering committee member Teresa Howell said they are not sure what the outcome of the group discussions will be, but the idea is to get people involved and talking.

“With luck, what will come out of this is a variety of ideas,” Howell said.

Once group discussions have come to an end and plans are made for the future, a local foods meal will be served to participants. Steering committee members have arranged to serve local potatoes with toppings made here in Winnemucca and acquired from local sources.

Participation in the event is free, but donations are accepted to help offset food and venue costs. Event organizers ask that those interested RSVP. The event will be held on Jan. 19, from 2 — 6 p.m. For more information or to reserve a spot please contact the community garden at (775) 623-2333 or send an email to winngarden@yahoo.com.