

PUGET SOUND FOOD PROJECT
FINAL REPORT
DECEMBER 2008

Cascade Harvest Coalition (CHC), in partnership with the Northwest Agriculture Business Center (NABC) and an advisory team of local food system professionals, applied for and received funding from the Carolyn Foundation in August 2007 to undertake the first comprehensive analysis of the Puget Sound food system. The primary goals of the Puget Sound Food Project (PSFP) were to: (1) develop a strategic planning process to bring together producers, food buyers, business leaders and local decision makers; and (2) assess the feasibility of a multi-purpose agricultural production center for local Puget Sound producers.

Many producers attending PSFP meetings and/or responding to project surveys said they would produce more food if there were more processing services available closer to their production—a fact underscored by survey results shared later in this report. Producers throughout the region are currently sending their products long distances, even out of state, for processing. Many producers complain that existing processing resources are continually eroding, as commercial processors cease doing business in the area and/or become inaccessible to local producers.

In each county visited, there exists a patchwork of infrastructure for local food production and distribution. The reality, however, is that the region's decades-long reliance on non-local food sources has contributed to the neglect and dysfunction of the local food system. To quote a State Department of Agriculture official, restoring the regional food system infrastructure will “essentially mean starting over.”

Obviously, a regional food system will effectively and efficiently deliver safe, fresh, nutritious food to the region's families only if the food system components are sound and working together. The Puget Sound food system is by no means unique in its disarray—local food systems throughout the country have been neglected and allowed to become dysfunctional as people have become increasingly dependent on non-local food. The national average is discomfiting: only about 2% of the food produced locally goes to feed local residents. A key goal of the continuing project initiated with Carolyn Foundation funding is to significantly increase production and consumption of locally produced food.

Public awareness of local food concerns is increasing. Many agricultural, consumer, health, environmental, and regulatory groups have begun discussions about the benefits of a more localized food system. The PSFP has been welcomed by producers and key decision makers in the Puget Sound region as a much-needed resource. Maintaining communication and networking with these food system stakeholders will be a key to affecting positive change in the regional food system now and into the future. The initial Carolyn Foundation investment will pay dividends in the region for many years to come.

As outlined in this final report, we have been able to compile a substantial base of information related to the local food system, including producer, buyer and processing resources; build a much stronger network of farmers, producers, processors, distributors and other food system stakeholders; initiate new projects delivering local value-added products to area consumers; and

lay the foundation for additional value-added processing facilities to serve the region's producers, including post-harvest handling, bottling, poultry processing and other enterprises.

Key conclusions to be drawn from the Project include:

- There is inadequate food processing and related infrastructure available in close proximity to farming operations throughout the Puget Sound region.
- The vast majority of farmers in the region would increase food production if there were nearby processing available.
- With increasing public demand for locally produced food—and with more than five million consumers in the Puget Sound region, there is a clear market for more local food throughout the region.
- There is sufficient demand, both for co-pack processing facilities and commercial kitchen rental space, to support the creation and operation of additional facilities throughout the region.
- A regional, pasture-raised poultry business is feasible and potential producer leads are being explored.
- A regional processing facility is feasible on Port of Skagit property and business funding opportunities are being explored.

I. PROJECT SUMMARY

A. Phase I

During the first phase of the Puget Sound Food Project, the Steering Committee — drawn from a broad representation of farming, processing, food preparation, distribution, retail and local government and educational interests— was created and convened. A smaller subcommittee was created to hire a project manager, which was accomplished in September 2007. The first major task of the project manager was gathering relevant information on stakeholders and demand/interest for processing facilities in the 12-county Puget Sound region.

The purpose of the meetings was to gather local food system stakeholders and introduce them to the Puget Sound Food Project (PSFP), help inventory local food system activities and resources, survey local opportunities and obstacles faced by producers, and identify key local stakeholders willing to participate in the PSFP strategic planning process.

Food producers attended these meetings routinely articulated a long list of **obstacles hindering food production** in the region, including:

- Difficulty in finding reliable and/or affordable processing, packaging, and storage facilities located within a reasonable distance from farming areas
- Lack of uniform health department regulations or differing interpretations and/or enforcement of health regulations from jurisdiction to jurisdiction
- Lack of health department resources identifying the availability of licensed “community kitchens”
- Lack of “one-stop shopping” for business development resources relevant to the availability of food production tools

- Lack of financial incentives for food producers considering expansion of food production
- No effective method of linking large numbers of consumers and producers and identifying opportunities for increasing supply/demand for local products
- Inefficient transportation and distribution serving local producers
- Lack of product development resources
- Insufficient capital for growth of producers and required infrastructure
- Lack of resources for a coordinated consumer awareness program
- Inadequate local product identification-labeling (such as Puget Sound Fresh or Puget Sound Grown) and
- A challenging regulatory environment

More than a dozen meetings were held with producers, buyers and other agriculture interests. The result of that data gathering effort identified the following processing needs:

- Post harvest handling
- Drying/Dehydrating
- Freezing
- Central distribution/storage
- Co-packing
- Poultry processing
- Livestock processing

B. Phase II

The second phase of data collection began in November 2007 and focused on assessing the need for each of these types of facilities in more detail. Potential buyers throughout the region – including retail grocers, restaurants, hospitals, school districts, manufacturers, cooperatives and others – were identified. A short survey was developed to assess their needs/wants related to local agricultural products, what they were currently buying, in what form, what they could buy in the future, and some assessment of their commitment to local products.

A total of 30 interviews were conducted and are broken out as follows: Food banks – 1, Retail Grocers – 1, Food Cooperatives – 2, Home Delivery Services – 2, Restaurants – 2, Specialty Retailers – 2, Hospitals – 3, Manufacturer – 4, Wholesale / Distributors – 5, School District – 7.

The results of the survey identified a number of factors affecting local purchasing decisions, including quantity available/seasonality, quality, price, logistical considerations and others. Overall, however, the respondents indicated a desire for local fresh and processed fruits and vegetables, juices and meat products.

In early 2008, NABC began an inventory to identify product development and incubation services, small-scale processing centers, co-packing facilities and processing facilities devoted to specific functions. Funds from the Carolyn Foundation were used to extend/leverage NABC's existing funding to expand the facilities inventory to include the additional seven Puget Sound counties that were identified as part of the PSFP (those outside the 5-county focus of NABC).

Specific processing needs identified from the stakeholder and purchaser interviews included:

- Processing produce for fresh market

- Processing fresh fruits and vegetables into ready-to-eat products
- Processing fruit for puree and juices
- Freezing fruits and vegetables
- Formulating, jarring and pasteurizing
- USDA inspected meat and poultry slaughter and cut and wrap facilities
- Warehousing for dry, fresh, and frozen products
- Distribution methods that support smaller producers

Some of these functions would not be compatible in the same facility. Individual functions could be developed at separate locations, or in separate facilities at the same location. For that reason, the focus of the first co-pack facility will be processing for compatible products such as pickles and relish, apple and berry products (including juice), and baby food.

C. Phase III

The third phase of the Puget Sound Food Project provided a feasibility assessment to determine and document the viability of: 1) a regional, multi-purpose processing center providing post-harvest handling and custom co-packing facilities; and 2) a regional pastured poultry facility.

A key element of the feasibility assessment was the creation and dissemination of several surveys, primarily focused on food producers and processors.

1. Farmer Surveys

This collaborative survey effort included participation of NABC, CHC, and multiple organizations throughout the region, including but not limited to:

Skagit County: Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland, Washington State University (WSU) Extension Skagit County, Skagit County Agricultural Advisory Board

San Juan County: San Juan Island Conservation District, Agriculture Resource Committee of San Juan County, WSU Extension San Juan County

Island County: WSU Extension Island County

King County: King County DNRP, WSU Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources, King County Agriculture Commission, WSU Extension King County

Clallam County: WSU Extension Clallam County, Nash's Organic Produce, Clallam County Agriculture Advisory Committee

Jefferson County: WSU Extension Jefferson County

Mason County: WSU Extension Mason County

Kitsap County: Washington State Farmers' Market Association, WSU Extension Kitsap County, Kitsap Community and Agriculture Alliance

Thurston County: WSU Extension Thurston County, Evergreen State University Organic Farm Program, WSDA Small Farm and Direct Marketing Program, Olympia Farmers Market, Thurston Agriculture Advisory Committee

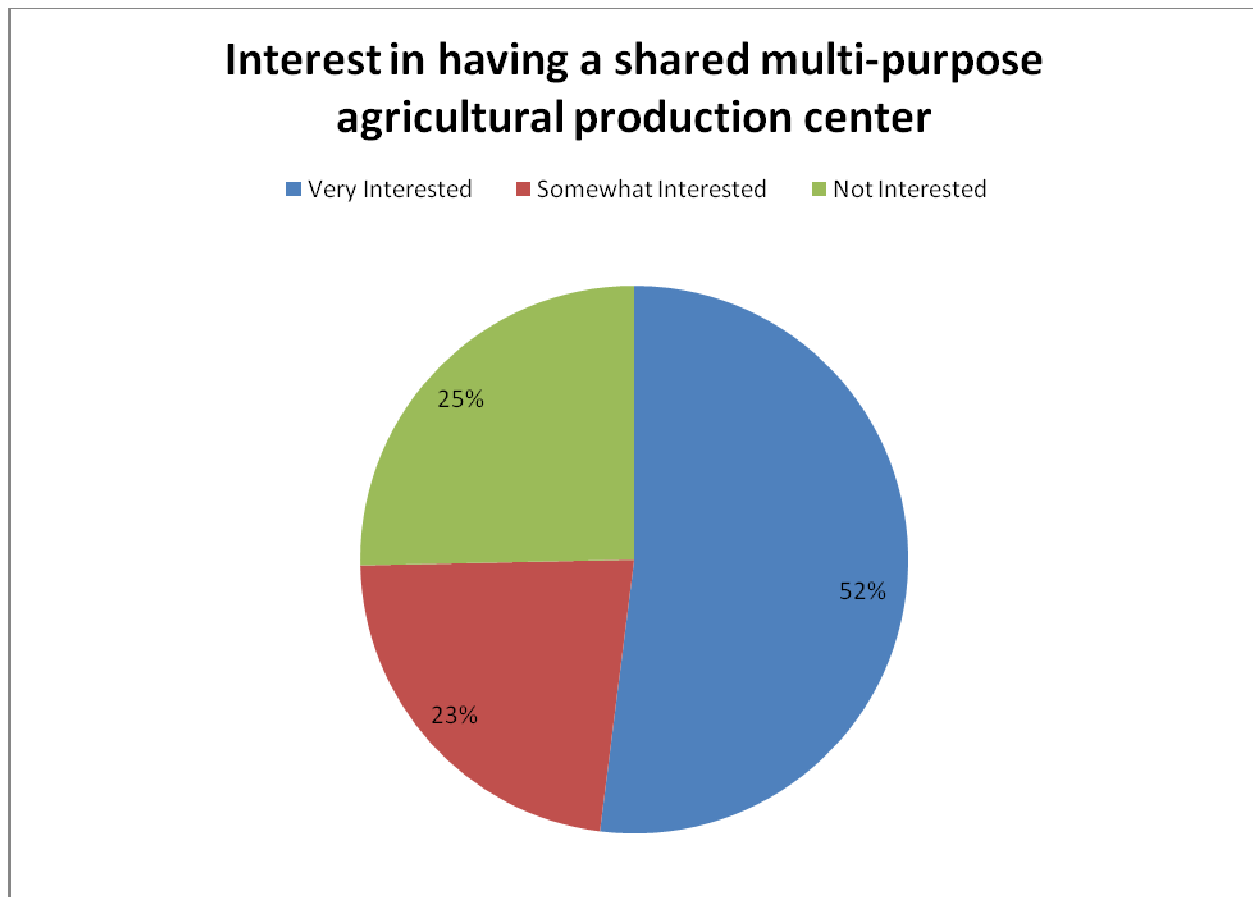
Pierce County: Pierce County Conservation District, Pierce County Farmbudsman, Pierce County FARM Board

Snohomish County: WSU Extension Snohomish County, Snohomish County Economic Development Department, Snohomish County Agricultural Advisory Board

Whatcom County: Sustainable Connections, Whatcom County Government, Whatcom County Agricultural Advisory Commission

The farmer survey was mailed, emailed, or personally delivered to approximately 6,000 farmers in the region, resulting in the gathering of valuable information.

- 70.3% of the farmers who responded own the land they farm.
- 72.3% of those farmers live on the land they farm.
- 42.6% said they do have access to additional acreage (ranging from one acre to 1,000 acres) they could farm if demand for their product were greater.
- 91.1% of the farmers responding to date do not know of a processing center that is under-utilized or that could be expanded.
- 74.7% of the farmers said they are interested in having a shared multi-purpose agricultural production center near their farm—52% saying they are “very interested” and 22.7% indicating they are “somewhat interested.” Only 25.3% said they are not interested.



- Asked how far farmers would be willing to transport their produce to a processing center, responses ranged from 2 to 200 miles with most preferring no more than 30 miles.

- 31% of the farmers responded in the affirmative when asked if having a processing facility within reasonable distance would encourage them to grow other crops or start other farm enterprises.

2. Licensed Processor Survey

As part of the effort to assess processing facility needs in the region, a survey was mailed during April and May of 2008 to 1,748 licensed food processors in the 12-county Puget Sound region. Of the surveys mailed, about 13% (approximately 225) were returned because the processing facility had moved or gone out of business. Follow up confirmed that the vast majority of these 225 processors were no longer in business—adding further evidence that food producers’ access to processing facilities in the region has decreased significantly in recent years.

At the time of the last Progress Report, approximately 60 survey recipients had returned completed questionnaires, providing details about the types and volumes of food being processed at those facilities. To reach more of the 1,523 licensed processors believed to still be in business, NABC and CHC staff teamed up during the month of August to call all of the processors who had not responded to the mailed surveys.

Even with the concerted follow-up telephone canvassing, for a variety of reasons it was difficult to get most State-licensed processors to complete the survey. Generally, the vast majority of companies licensed by the State as “processors” either are not truly food processors (instead engaged in warehousing, distribution, or operating small businesses such as food co-ops, retail grocery sales, food banks, etc.) or are licensed simply to process their own food product and lack either the space or the interest to open their facility to other producers.

When asked on the phone why they had not responded to the survey received in the mail, many licensed processors said they felt the survey and its goal — to identify potential co-pack facilities capable of processing for other producers — was not relevant to them. That reality further validates the original assumption—namely, that very few processing facilities capable of or receptive to serving food producers in the region exist today.

3. Pasture-Raised Poultry Production and Processing Feasibility

As part of the initial work of the Puget Sound Food Project, the Cascade Harvest Coalition held discussions with farmers and food buyers representing retail grocers and restaurants. All of these groups consider the absence of poultry processing facilities in the region to be the principal barrier they face in offering pasture-raised poultry to their customers. There was considerable anecdotal evidence for a strong market demand for pasture-raised poultry. In this study we used survey instruments to obtain quantitative information about the size of this market from restaurant and grocery store poultry buyers. This market information was then utilized to evaluate the financial feasibility of a pasture-poultry business, which would process and distribute locally raised poultry to stores and restaurant customers in the Puget Sound region.

Based on the analysis detailed in the attached report, we believe that a pasture poultry business is feasible given the following:

1. The processing facility infrastructure can be developed in partnership with a larger agricultural processing facility;
2. The business operates with seasonal production and processing during the initial years;
3. Sufficient numbers of poultry producers can be interested in participating and a program of producer education be implemented;
4. Producers form a purchasing “cooperative” that enables the cost effective procurement of feed and other inputs; and
5. An individual or other entity will come forward to own and operate the processing and distribution portion of the enterprise.

All of these conditions are possible and there are a number of organizations in the Puget Sound Region available to assist an entrepreneur in this type of project. The economic potential for local producers and input suppliers is well in excess of one million dollars per year in primary wealth creation and employment opportunities. For the full analysis, see the attached report “Pasture Poultry Production & Processing: Feasibility in the Puget Sound Region.”

We recently identified a number of local producers interested in exploring the potential for developing a poultry processing facility. PSFP staff and collaborators will meet with this group of producers in late January 2009.

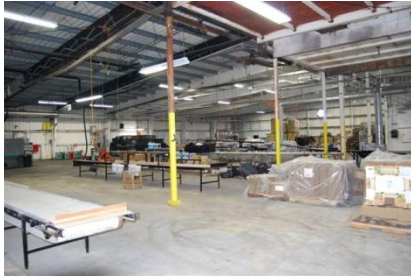
II. PROMISING LEADS DEVELOPED

A. Processing Facilities

While many respondents operate small-scale facilities designed to simply process their own value-added products, the surveys revealed the existence of at least three relatively large processing facilities with real potential for custom- or co-packing services for other producers.

Shawn’s Produce is located in south Everett just minutes from I-5 and other major highways. The facility boasts 44,500 square feet—half of which is presently unused. In excellent condition, the plant includes cold and warm storage as well as lots of space for custom-packing of fresh produce. The husband-wife ownership team at Shawn’s Produce has 30 years’ experience in food processing and is anxious to more fully utilize its facility. Purchase of additional processing equipment and cold storage will be required as demand increases.





With even more square footage than Shawn’s Produce, the **National Frozen Foods** facility in Burlington is also about 50% unused. Half the space is leased by producers of pumpkins and other local products, and by a commercial kitchen operator specializing in gluten-free foods. Both the facility owners and kitchen operators are receptive to accommodating additional producers.

Another “discovery” is **Hendrickson Farms dba Pacific Pre-Pak**—a 16,000 square foot family-owned and -operated processing facility in Marysville, about 50 miles north of Seattle. Pacific Pre-Pak is owned and operated by Mike and Emily Bennett. While the previous owner chose to operate “under the radar” and not expand the business, the Bennett’s have invested in new equipment and are actively looking for food producers in need of processing services. The new equipment allows Pacific Pre-Pak to custom cut virtually any produce—including fruits and vegetables for schools as well as retail and food service.



Because of Carolyn Foundation funding efforts, Pacific Pre-Pak is now discussing with World Baby Foods and local apple growers the feasibility of pureeing apples at the Marysville facility. Mike Bennett has located the necessary equipment, and project staff members are helping expedite the process for the organic certification Pacific Pre-Pak will need to process for World Baby Foods.

The Pacific Pre-Pak facility has room for additional expansion and the Bennetts are receptive to devoting space to a commercial kitchen that would be available for area producers of value-added products. The facility has loading docks, multiple coolers for cold storage, and a fleet of refrigerated vehicles.



Geographically, the National Frozen Food plant in Burlington, Pacific Pre-Pak in Marysville, and Shawn’s Produce in Everett are strategically spaced ideally for producers in that northeast portion of the Puget Sound region. NABC staff members will continue to search for additional processing resources in the region, but the “discovery” of these three very promising facilities is already benefitting local food producers.

Country Charm Dairy Facility Transitioning to Community Ag Center

An NBC project linked to Carolyn Foundation funding involves helping transition the old Country Charm Dairy—located just north of Marysville in Arlington—into a community ag and economic development center featuring processing and commercial kitchen facilities as well as a center for Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) drop off and pick up.



The Graafstra Center will provide approximately 8,000 square feet of processing, commercial kitchen, storage, and store-front space just outside Arlington city limits.

With the existing facility and some 15 acres of beautiful riverfront, rich soil that the City of Arlington wants to convert to recreational and community gardening uses, this property is of significant potential value to Carolyn Foundation-funded efforts to strengthen the regional food system.



B. Commercial Kitchens

In collaboration with CHC and other partner organizations, NABC has sought to identify and interview operators of commercial kitchens in the region. It is clear that there is a severe lack of commercial kitchen space available, negatively impacting food production in the area. Despite the glaring lack of commercial kitchens, survey efforts have “discovered” several promising commercial kitchens scattered throughout the region.



In the small town of Clinton, On Whidbey Island, the **Clinton Community Hall** offers food producers a 900 s.f. commercial kitchen with two stoves, cooler and refrigerator, and microwaves. The kitchen rents for \$75 for a full day.



The Farm Kitchen, located on an 18-acre organic farm in Poulsbo in the West Sound area near Seattle, offers a fully equipped commercial kitchen for rent to caterers, wholesale food producers, and bakers.





The Farm Kitchen features gas ranges, convection ovens, stone deck ovens, and accessories galore with mixers, scales, sheet pans, walk-in fridge and freezer storage as well as dry storage. The kitchen is designed to accommodate baking, cooking, canning, and catering.

Rental fees for caterers and food producers are \$15 per person for the first 20 hours in a month and \$10 per person after 20 hours. Bakers are charged \$13 for the first 20 hours and \$10 per hour for longer.



Cookspace-Commercial Kitchens for Culinary Entrepreneurs, is a 4,300 s.f. shared kitchen space in lower Queen Anne in Seattle. In business for nearly four years, Cookspace offers renters two six-burner ranges, six conventional and six convection ovens (four for savory items and four for pastries), five commercial mixers, commercial dishwashers, and multiple



sinks. Recognized as a “green company” for its composting efforts, Cookspace rents its kitchen for \$20 an hour or for a minimum of \$600 a month (for 15 hours a week).



Goit House Natural Foods, LLC, in Bellingham, is the “birthplace” of the Belly Timber energy bar discussed briefly in this report under “New Products.” Approximately 1,000 s.f., this commercial kitchen facility offers cold storage, ovens, fridges, blenders, sinks, mixers, baking racks, steel tables, and much more for bakery items of any kind (no meat). Rental rate is \$20 an hour—on a wooded, beautiful five-acre property minutes from I-5.

Some commercial kitchens, including the company known as GlutenFreeda that operates out of leased space in the old National Frozen Foods plant in Burlington, have become victims of the economic calamity and have gone out of business. Although the gluten-free products were selling very well both in the U.S. and Canada, the company’s private investors were not able to honor their original commitments and income from sales is not yet strong enough to support the two-year-old company. **(Update:** We are happy to report that GlutenFreeda managed to attract new investors and is still in business and expanding!)

Generally, the demand for commercial kitchens in the region far outpaces the supply. Research has discovered two smaller commercial kitchens being developed in the area—one in Snohomish and one in Carnation—but the availability of kitchen space is woefully inadequate and will become even more so as the demand for local value-added food products increases.

C. New Food Products on the Market

Carolyn Foundation funding has directly or indirectly facilitated the introduction of several new NABC-marketed food products to the Puget Sound region.



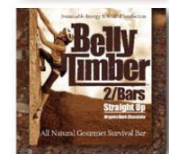
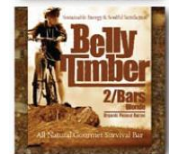
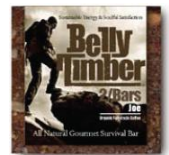
Dr. Susanna's **World Baby Foods**, LLC offers organic and nutritionally balanced baby foods based on the cuisines of the world. The baby foods are preservative free, designed by physicians, and favor local farmers. Diverse multicultural flavors helps babies develop into healthier, happier and better eaters! World Baby Foods was released to market in June 2007. World Baby Foods can be found at more than 50 independent grocery stores on the west coast including many Whole Foods Markets locations, Haggen grocery stores, TOP Foods markets, and select Thriftways.

The processing feasibility study will ultimately help create a facility that could provide the increased capacity needed for World Baby Foods. This will allow World Baby Foods to increase the amount of fresh fruit and vegetables being purchased from Northwest Washington farmers.



Belly Timber energy bars are snacks on the go for folks with active, healthy lifestyles since they are a category-leading 4.8 ounce bar (they fill you up instead of leaving you hungry), they're 85% organic, they taste good, and they have catchy labels (have you ever seen a label featuring a roller derby girl before?). They come in six different flavors.

They have become a favorite in Bellingham and can be found in numerous retail outlets including Mt. Baker ski area. NABC is working with Goit House to expand their reach throughout the northwest. Outside of Bellingham they can be found in Seattle area Metropolitan Markets stores, Haggen stores, TOP Foods, and many independent natural foods stores.



Whidbey Island Ice Cream Company makes delicious frozen treats. Everything about



their product is extraordinary—even in the Pacific Northwest where we’re used to great food. The ice cream base is a delicious high butterfat mixture of cream and milk from hormone-free and antibiotic-free cows, organic sugar, egg yolks, and natural plant-based stabilizers. Flavors range from authentic classics to unique creations. Product is available in pints, 1 gallon containers, and 3 gallon containers. All flavors are also available in bars dipped in Guittard chocolate and individually wrapped.

Whidbey Island Ice Cream is available at over 50 locations on and near Whidbey Island. Off the island, the company sends five carts out to numerous farmers markets and festivals throughout the region. The product can regularly be found at several of the metro Seattle Farmers' Markets and Snohomish Farmers' Markets including Wallingford on Wednesday afternoon/evenings, Lake Stevens on Thursday afternoon/evenings, Madison Madrona on Friday afternoon/evenings, and Ballard on Sundays. NABC is working with Whidbey Island Ice Cream Company to get their product into retail grocery stores in the greater Seattle area.



Pleasant Valley Farms is a ten year old food processing company operating out of Mt. Vernon, WA. They’re a northwest business and intend to stay that way, even as the competition moves overseas in order to cut costs. They make a variety of pickled cucumber products and sauerkraut. They’ve had great success in the foodservice business by providing the highest quality product at a competitive price. NABC is helping Pleasant Valley Farms to expand into the retail environment. The initial focus will be on the Fairhaven Farms brand sauerkraut since it is a very profitable product for Pleasant Valley Farms.

Pleasant Valley Farms has also fine-tuned the production of fresh Organic pickling cucumbers and kraut cabbage, becoming the only significant supplier in the United States. Because of this expertise, it is natural for PVF to produce a line of Organic pickle and sauerkraut products.

Pleasant Valley Farms packages and markets their products for food service accounts, primarily in 1, 2 and 5 gallon containers. A retail packaging line would allow PVF to market to retail accounts throughout the United States. Additional acreage of cucumbers and cabbage could be produced in Northwest Washington, resulting in additional revenue for PVF. Retail packaging capability for Pleasant Valley Farms is a key component of this project.

Trilby’s Kitchen has the taste of a champion. They are the two-time BBQ sauce champion of the La Salle County, Texas Wild Pig Cook-off. They were awarded “Best BBQ sauce” and “People’s choice” at the Nooksack River Casino's Best of the Pacific Northwest BBQ Cookoff 2006. Three flavors are available—mild, marionberry, and spicy. They are available in 16oz jars and gallon-sized jugs. Trilby’s is based out of Ferndale, WA. NABC is helping Trilby’s to expand their retail reach. Trilby’s barbecue sauces can be found in Haggen grocery stores, TOP Foods Markets, QFC grocery stores, Metropolitan Markets, Red Apple Markets, and more.



Skagit Fresh Beverage



FROM OUR FARMS TO YOU

REAL FRUIT
100% NATURAL
REAL GOOD

SKAGIT FRESH

NATURAL SPARKLING JUICES

Our pristine valley, located in the Northwest corner of Washington State is known for nurturing some of the world's finest fruits and berries. Some say it's the rich alluvial soil. Others believe our cool, maritime climate gives the crops extra time to slow ripen for maximum flavor. Whatever the reason, we think you'll agree that nothing is more natural or flavorful than the great taste of Skagit Fresh.

Owned and operated by Skagit Valley Farmers. Your purchase supports local agriculture in Washington State.

Try All Four Flavors:

- BODACIOUS BLUEBERRY
- BIG BAD BLACKBERRY
- SASSY STRAWBERRY
- RAMBLIN' RASPBERRY

SKAGIT FRESH NATURAL BEVERAGE COMPANY www.skagitfresh.com

Skagit Fresh, an all-natural carbonated fruit drink comprised primarily of locally grown apples with a touch of one of four different berries, is proving to be a hit with local buyers. The very promising new drink is a joint venture of NABC and the Skagit Apple Growers Association.

In just the first two months of exposure—in October and November of '08—Skagit Fresh sales generated significant new income for Skagit Valley apple growers. In the coming months, NABC staff members will be hosting “taste demos” at retail outlets throughout the Puget Sound region to increase Skagit Fresh familiarity and sales.

Available already at Whole Foods, Metropolitan Markets, several food co-ops, and other key retail outlets, Skagit Fresh will soon be on the shelves at 32 Haggen Food & Pharmacy /Top Food & Drug stores and the six Central Market stores of Town & Country Markets, Inc.

As promising as this product is, the fuel-consuming, profit-diminishing obstacles involved in getting it to market underscore the need for local processing facilities. The local apples were trucked to Sunnyside (eastern Washington) to be juiced; the berries were trucked to Canada for processing; the apple juice and the berry concentrate was shipped to Portland (Oregon) for carbonation and bottling, and then the finished product was trucked back to Skagit County. NABC is exploring opportunities to create facilities that would do the juicing, carbonating, concentrating, and bottling required to prepare the Skagit Valley apples for market without leaving northwest Washington. The ultimate goal, of course, is more profit to local farmers and, ultimately, more farmland preserved.



III. PUGET SOUND FOOD PROJECT SUPPORTS COMPLIMENTARY EFFORTS

A. Feasibility Study for Port of Skagit County

Because it is economically prohibitive for every small producer to build, equip, and operate a packing facility, project participants are exploring the creation of co-packing facilities throughout the region. One promising study funded in part by the Carolyn Foundation and in part by the Washington State Community Economic Revitalization Board (CERB) would facilitate development of a regional processing facility, most likely in Skagit County.

The Port of Skagit County has been identified as a potential site for a multi-purpose processing facility. Information gathered from the PSFP has supported this analysis. Analysis of the distribution network in the Puget Sound region is also of vital importance to the success of all these related projects. Dr. Héctor Sáez from the WSU Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources has received a grant to look at the effectiveness of various distribution models. NABC was awarded federal funds to look more directly at distribution issues. These two projects will be complementary and will both be supported by information developed as part of the PSFP.

B. San Juan County Processing Site Analysis

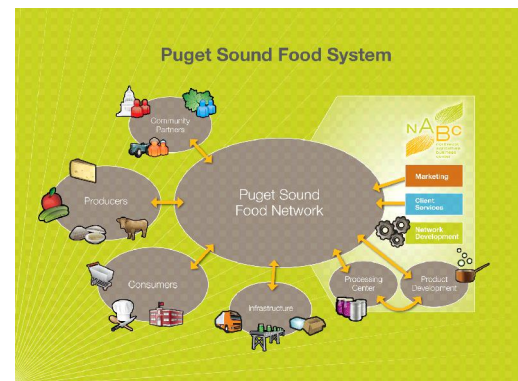
Washington State Community and Economic Development (CTED) funds, matched by NABC, are financing a study in San Juan County to assess the feasibility of a year-round farmers market that would include cold storage, a commercial kitchen, and processing facilities. The site analysis will be completed by February 2009.

C. Puget Sound Food Network

With federal funding via a Congressional Earmark Grant, NABC is working with CHC and other partner organizations throughout the Puget Sound Region to create a web-based tool that will enable real-time communication between food producers, consumers, and other participants in the regional food system and facilitate on-line food-related transactions. A Puget Sound Food Network Advisory Committee comprised of some of the regional food system's

brightest participants convened on November 14 at the University Center in Everett to help direct the project. NABC staff members are travelling throughout the Puget Sound Region to inform people of the Food Network, solicit input, and encourage participation. The goal is to have gathered input from potential Network "owners"—food system participants who will actually be using the on-line tool on a daily basis—by Spring of '09 and have the Network up and running by the end of the year.

Carolyn Foundation funding helped in the development of the Puget Sound Food Network and other complementary efforts highlighted in this report.



IV. CONCLUSIONS

All participants are pleased to report that although ambitious, the Puget Sound Food Project has been very successful and has produced findings and results of real value to those involved in efforts to improve the Puget Sound regional food system and enhance its ability to deliver safe, nutritious food to the region's 4 million-plus residents. The results of the PSFP represent progress that would not have been achieved were it not for funding provided by the Carolyn Foundation.

Accomplishment Highlights

- Identified and enlisted the participation of key stakeholders in the regional food system
- Created, disseminated, and analyzed surveys for farmers, producers, processors, and owners/operators of commercial kitchens
- Using Freedom of Information Act, obtained State list of some 1,800 licensed processors
- Mailed food processor survey to 1,748 licensed processors
- Followed up with phone calls to more than 1,000 processors
- Gained a much clearer picture of food processing resources in the region
- “Discovered” some very important potential and/or under-utilized processing resources in the region (the old National Frozen Foods plant in Burlington, Shawn’s Produce, Pacific Pre-Pak, Country Charm Dairy-Graafstra Center, and more)
- Emailed and/or mailed to approximately 6,000 farmers in the region
- Received valuable responses from farmers, particularly with regard to regional interest in strategically located shared multi-purpose ag processing facilities
- Have more clearly quantified the need for processing resources in the region
- Have made progress in collaboration with the Port of Skagit County and Washington State University conducting site and market feasibility studies related to creation of a multi-purpose processing facility
- Have conducted and produced a regional pastured poultry study
- Have achieved several “networking” success stories getting producers working with processors and distributors to increase food production and availability in the region
- Have helped create new food products and introduced them to the regional market with very positive results
- Have launched and made significant progress in development of a web-based platform or “tool” to help increase food production, improve networking and communications, and facilitate on-line food-related transactions to increase availability and consumption of locally produced food
- Have helped move agricultural community centers, such as the Graafstra Center, from the concept stage to reality