

Food Education and School Garden Initiative

Action Plan

2016-2017

The Foothills Community Food Partnership was formed in 2014 by a group of Foothills community members and agency representatives who share the vision of a healthy, integrated food system for the Foothills region. In April of 2015, the FCFP released the Foothills Food Access Plan, a framework for community action to help improve food access in East Whatcom County.

The Food Education and School Garden Action Plan was developed in partnership with the Mount Baker School District, and other community stakeholders. The Plan represents our collective vision for leveraging school-based opportunities to support our community's children and families with good nutrition and food security.

Strategies

1. **Implement** school gardens, garden and food-based after-school enrichment opportunities, and integrated food education at Kendall, Acme, and Harmony Elementary Schools.
2. **Support and connect** the Mount Baker FFA with emerging Food Education and School Garden efforts.
3. **Enhance** "Back-to-School Nights" with locally grown food, food education, and fun for families.
4. **Connect** with the community to expand outreach and engagement for the Summer Feeding Program.
5. **Expand** and sustain the Winter and Spring Pantry Program.
6. **Increase** students' consumption of healthy food through the School Meal Program.
7. **Improve efficiency** in delivering school-based food and garden education through increased communication and collaboration between partners.

"All Foothills residents are fed, nourished, and have the resources to access the food they need" – Foothills Community Food Partnership vision

Food Access in East Whatcom County

The Mount Baker Foothills region refers to a large region of East Whatcom County that is home to an estimated 9,049 people. The Foothills region spans an area of approximately 620 square miles, roughly aligning with the boundaries of the Mount Baker School District. The area is considered a “food desert;” limited grocery options, geographic isolation, and high rates of poverty make accessing fresh foods difficult for many residents.

The Mount Baker School District serves over 2,000 students and their families. The District has three elementary schools, one high school, one junior high school, and an educational resource centers. The percentage of students who qualify for the Free and Reduced-Price Meal program makes up 55% of the District’s student body.

We believe:

- No student should go hungry.
- Eating habits established at a young age continue through life.
- Students can be empowered to live healthier lives when they understand how to grow, prepare, and make informed decisions about the food they eat.

We acknowledge that the definition of “healthy” is subjective and many variations of this definition exist, however for the purpose of our work we define “healthy eating” as a diet high in fresh fruits and vegetables, low-fat proteins, and whole grains; and low in refined sugars and saturated fats.

Initiative Members

- Mount Baker School District
- Foothills community members and parent volunteers
- Common Threads
- WSU Whatcom County SNAP-Ed
- Foothills Food Bank
- Local Food Works
- Whatcom County Health Department
- Northwest Agriculture Business Center



Strategy 1:

Implement school gardens, garden and food-based after-school enrichment opportunities, and integrated food education at Kendall, Acme, and Harmony Elementary Schools.

Research shows that children are more likely to develop healthy eating habits when engaged in growing and preparing their own foods. These food choices can have a lasting impact on health and development, and have been shown to reduce hunger, obesity, and other food-related health issues.

Parent volunteers are working with the support of Common Threads to support school gardens, cooking and gardening education, and an after-school cooking club and farm stand at Kendall Elementary. Our goal is to expand similar opportunities to Harmony and Acme Elementary Schools.



Student making a sale at the Kendall after-school Farm Stand

1-2 Year Objectives:

- Build shared community vision of how food/food education can support academic priorities
- Establish specific targets for evaluation
- Build a network of community support and increase volunteer participation
- Establish a plan for all three elementary schools to have school gardens and garden champions
- Develop a system for organizing and coordinating between gardens and food educators
- Deliver six “Choose Health: Food Fun and Fitness” (CHFFF) lessons for all 4th graders district-wide
- Explore opportunities for integrated nutrition education across the district

Strategy 2:

Support awareness and connection between Food Access, Food Education, School Gardens, and the Mount Baker FFA program

1-2 Year Objectives:

- Build mutual awareness of activities and resources
- Cross-advertise activities and events where appropriate
- Explore opportunities for collaboration among food education partners inside and outside the district

The Mount Baker FFA is an intra-curricular student organization that provides students with skills and leadership experience in agriculture.

MBSD has a strong, well-organized FFA that uses the school greenhouse to grow vegetable starts with 'Local Food Works' for the Food Bank, and also provides some tomatoes and herbs for the high school meal program.

The FFA is a strong asset in our District for increasing student learning around food, while also working to improve community food access.

Strategy 3:

Use school and community food events as opportunities to build community around food, by featuring locally grown food, food education, and fun for families.

Community support and engagement is crucial to the success of the MBSD. Back-to-School Nights offer one important opportunity to build community around food.

In addition to Back-to-School nights, we have other potential opportunities to connect families with healthy and locally grown food, build awareness of food access resources, mobilize interested parents to action, and promote a culture of healthy eating within the entire school community.

1-2 Year Objectives:

- Serve school-grown and locally-sourced food at Back-to-School Nights
- Use Back-to-School Night opportunities to share information about food access and food education
- Bring lively and engaging activities to school food events that help folks make an emotional connection with the FCFP vision
- Increase parent, family, and community participation in community meals.

Strategy 4:

Connect with the community to expand outreach and engagement for the Summer Meal Program.

1-2 Year Objectives:

- Maintain and expand close collaboration with the Opportunity Council and other partners to ensure complementary programming
- Distribute Summer Meal flyers and brochures at community venues
- Outreach/market to pantry program participants
- Develop a communication plan and FAQ to help

The Summer Meal Program serves any community member between the age of 1-18 with two meals a day, four days a week. While this program helps many Foothills families, it is under-utilized and has capacity to feed more children. By engaging with community partners and expanding outreach, we can reach more families and increase participation. Additionally, the Summer Meal Program provides an opportunity to connect people to other services and fun activities for kids, making the meal sites a one-stop shop for families to access the resources they need.

Strategy 5:

Expand and sustain the Winter and Spring Pantry Program.

Participation in the Winter and Spring Pantry Program has more than doubled in 2014-2015, and now serves students at all three MBSD elementary schools and the Educational Resource Center. Our next goal is to improve the quality of the food provided by exploring partnerships with local retailers and farmers, and ensuring that the program is well-supported and sustained by the community. There is also the potential to expand the Pantry Program to complement the Summer Meal Program, so that no child goes hungry during school breaks.



1-2 Year Objectives:

- Increase year-round community support for Program
- Increase integration with the Foothills Food Bank
- Increase self-sustainability of Program through diversified funding
- Increase amount of fresh food offered in boxes
- Explore cooking/self-reliance education opportunities

Strategy 6:

Increase students' consumption of healthy food through the School Meal Program.

1-2 Year Objectives:

- Increase family participation in School Meal Program
- Expand community outreach and marketing for School Meal Program
- Explore options for how to increase time during school day for lunch
- Increase nutrition of school meals being served
- Reduce food waste
- Survey parents to find out more about their family food needs and preferences

Research has shown that students who eat nutritious meals tend to perform better in school. The School Meal Program helps ensure that all students have access to a lunch, and MBSD Child Nutrition Services continues to steadily increase its capacity to serve fresh, locally-sourced, and healthy options. To support these efforts, we aim to increase participation in the School Meal Program through marketing and community outreach, while jointly promoting healthier options in the cafeteria.

Strategy 7:

Improve efficiency in delivering school-based food and garden education through increased communication and collaboration between partners.

Continued communication between partners is essential to the success of this Action Plan. We will accomplish this by establishing regular Initiative meetings and nurturing community partnerships. By creating space for collaboration, we can reduce duplication of services and increase our effectiveness in promoting healthy eating for all Foothills children and families.

1-2 Year Objectives:

- Establish an ongoing group of Initiative partners that meets regularly to support implementation of this Action Plan
- Create a contact list to facilitate connections for collaboration
- Develop a system for frequent, regular updates and opportunities for the school community
- Hold an annual forum open to all MBSD school community members to build awareness and knowledge of current efforts
- Develop a common system for recruiting and engaging volunteers interested in food access, food education, and school/community garden projects

For more information or to get involved, please contact foothillsfoodpartnership@gmail.com