Building Grower Relationships

A foundational strategy to developing any F2FB program includes a focused effort on building mutually beneficial relationships with growers in your community!

**Step 1: Learn about your farming community**
Prior to contacting growers it is helpful to understand the types of farming, the crops being grown, and the size of operations in your local area. This will help you to design a program that most efficiently meets your needs and theirs.

- Are local farmers selling primarily through direct marketing at farmers markets, community supported agriculture (CSA) shares, or farm stands? Do they sell to wholesalers? Do they have facilities to clean and pack? If they pack, what are the volumes—cases or large totes? Are they able to transport and deliver?
- Contact your local agricultural extension agent and other farm-related organizations such as farmers market associations, cooperatives, or commodity commissions to find out who is farming in your community and what they grow.
- **WSU Small Farm Team website** provides a farm finder directory. With over 40 county extensions and partners, they will be able to offer guidance on where to find farmers in your region. www.smallfarms.wsu.edu
- Attend farming related events, such as conferences, coalition meetings, and trade shows.

**Step 2: Recruiting Growers**
Once you know who and where farmers are, be prepared to talk to them about what you do and how you would like to partner, and don’t hesitate to make first contact.

- Consider the season when reaching out to them: Summer is not ideal for making first contact.
- Attend your local farmer’s market and meet your local growers. Contact the market manager to access grower information. Be sensitive to when and how long you stop by their stall so as to not disrupt sales.
- Contact the grower!
  - Call or write them. Set up an appointment and bring a letter introducing your food bank.
  - Research and have information on what they grow; know what produce, and how much, you would like and what they can provide.
  - Be respectful of their time.
- **Be consistent** in your communication with the grower. Having a designated contact person can give stability.
- **Be accountable** - make sure you show up when you say you will. Some food banks establish a once a week call to check in and see if there is any extra food available for glean or donation.
- **Be helpful** – offer to help pack or wash, clean equipment, or complete paperwork. Make it easy for them to be involved.

For more information about starting or developing your farm-to-food bank initiative, please email growingconnections@northwestharvest.org, or contact Laura Titzer at 206.923.7423