Growing Connections:
A Farm-to-Food Bank Toolkit & Resource Guide

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Growing Connections VISTA

A Northwest Harvest Resource
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Communities are using an array of farm-to-food bank (F2FB) strategies to increase the amount of fresh, healthy foods in the hunger relief system. Some agencies solicit donations through plant-a-row programs at local community gardens; some work with farmers to glean their fields after harvest; and others purchase directly from farmers. In some cases, hunger relief agencies are making efforts to do all three. In other cases, there aren’t many farms to partner with and other strategies for getting fresh into the food bank must be employed.

Growing Connections is Northwest Harvest’s farm-to-food bank program. Inaugurated in 2014, the programmatic goals have shifted as we’ve become familiar with some of the constraints that limit food banks. Farm-to-food banking is rarely as simple as putting a food bank manager in the same room as a farmer and watching the magic happen. We’ve learned that there is no “one size fits all” farm-to-food bank initiative, but instead a multitude of options that you can tailor to suit your program. Though you may not have a F2FB program in your food bank (yet!), you are an expert on your community, your food bank, and on what hunger looks like in your region. This knowledge is essential to starting a successful F2FB initiative.

This manual offers best practices of F2FB, innovative ideas, planning timelines, and most of all, suggestions that meet you where you’re at, no matter the capacity of your food bank.

We hope you’ll use this manual as a guide and toolkit. The first section of the manual (Phases 1-3) offer a facilitated process to help you take stock of your food bank, assess what type of F2FB program is right for you, and implement your plans. This section gives guidance and support as you enter the world of F2FB. Two case studies present food banks that faced the challenges of F2FB and built unique programs. The section on Troubleshooting identifies common issues faced by food banks, and offers some practical solutions, in both the short and long-term. The How-To guides in the Appendices give technical step-by-step instructions on starting each type of F2FB strategy, including tips from gleaning coordinators and other F2FB experts. Print them out and use them as check-lists. The other documents in the Appendices are intended as supplemental resources and templates of documents that are useful in F2FB work.

This manual was written with food banks in mind, though we hope it can be a useful tool for other organizations and individuals interested in increasing health in their communities, supporting local agriculture, and creating a more resilient and food secure population.

*A note on terminology: Food bank and food pantry are terms used in different ways depending on geographic location. In much of the United States, a food bank distributes food to food pantries, while a food pantry distributes food to food insecure people. Washington State is an outlier in that food bank is a term used interchangeably with food pantry, and this is how the term is used in this manual.*
What is Farm-to-Food Bank?

We consider farm-to-food bank to be a broad umbrella term that includes many strategies to increase fresh produce in your food bank. These strategies are:

- Grow-A-Row
- Community gardens
- Food bank gardens & farms
- Seed or plant start distributions
- Gleaning
- Farmer’s market recovery
- Donations from growers or gardeners
- Contract or direct purchasing from growers

The term “farm-to-food bank,” then, can be somewhat of a misnomer in this context. Your food bank doesn’t need to be in a rural farming community or even have access to farmers to start a F2FB program. Even if you are located in an urban area, growers truck their produce into the city every week for farmer’s markets or to food hubs. Many city residents have gardens or fruit trees in their backyards. These are terrific potential F2FB partners.

The average citizen’s growing awareness of the broader food movement along with trends like sustainable agriculture, eating local, and better awareness of nutrition can support your goals of increasing fresh produce to your food bank participants. Harness some of the energy behind these food issues to attract volunteers to your F2FB program. See if there are other organizations with a food or health focus that might have overlapping goals with yours.

Why Farm-to-Food Bank?

These strategies are right for your community if:

- You want to increase fresh produce available to your clients;
- Your open hours are such that deliveries from your distributor don’t allow you to receive fresh produce without it spoiling;
- You want to offer diverse produce choices to your clients;
- You are concerned about your clients’ health and nutrition;
- You want to support local agriculture;
- You want to build a stronger community.
Phase 1: Assess and Plan

Start with this phase of F2FB if:

- Your food bank is new;
- Your food bank is long-standing but has few resources (financial, volunteer, cold storage, etc.);
- Your food bank has no F2FB activities.
Step 1: Research

**Timeframe:** Ideally between October and February.

**Checklist:**

☐ Learn about different farm to food bank programs:

☐ Research types of F2FB programs. See How-To Guides, p. 29 in this manual. Contact Northwest Harvest for help if you aren’t sure how to proceed.

☐ Meet with local food banks with F2FB programs. What has worked for them that might also work for your food bank?

  • Think about what resources and organizational infrastructure do the food banks with F2FB programs have that have contributed to their programs’ success? If you lack some of this capacity, see Troubleshooting, p. 21.

☐ Check out Notes from the Field, Northwest Harvest’s growing series of articles and videos highlighting innovative F2FB programs around Washington, for ideas on how other food banks are making F2FB work. See Useful Links, p. 49.

☐ Learn about agriculture in your region:

  • What are farmers growing?
  
  • Where do they market their produce? (CSAs, farmer’s markets, grower’s associations, etc.)
  
  • Are there grower groups in your area?

Note: Grower’s associations, Master Gardeners, and WSU extension agents can be excellent resources, as building healthier communities is often written into their job descriptions or their organization’s mission statements.

“I would encourage people to reach out to those with experience with F2FB for advice on successes and challenges and what to expect. Mentorship can be invaluable.”

- Karen Ullmann,
  Outreach and Education Coordinator,
  Farm to School Program, WSDA
Step 2: Assess Your Food Bank and Community

Timeframe: Ideally in the winter, between November and February.

Checklist:

- Gather a group of interested stakeholders for a meeting. These can be volunteers, board members, farmers, master gardeners, extension agents, food bank workers, and clients. Report on the F2FB research you’ve compiled. Then as a group, work through the following questions:

  - Vision your ideal F2FB strategy:
    - Brainstorm and discuss what a F2FB program could look like in your community.
    - What would your role be in that plan? Have each attendee answer that question.
    - Use our Growing Connections Action Plan Worksheet, p. 42 to help with this process

  - Consider your organizational capacity:
    - What resources might you need for a successful F2FB program?
    - What resources do you currently have to put towards a F2FB program? Volunteers/staff, time, finances, transportation, cold storage? If you don’t have the needed capacity or resources, note these needs. See articles on Troubleshooting, p. 21.
    - What types of roles do you need to be successful with a F2FB program? Some ideas include:
      - Gleaning coordinator. See Volunteer F2FB Coordinator Job Description, p. 45.
      - Gleaning volunteers (should be individuals with the abilities to bend and lift repeatedly)
      - Food runners/drivers to transport food
What type(s) of F2FB program best suits your food bank? Now that you know what programs are out there, this decision should be made based on a number of variables. Consider what you detailed of your organizational capacity. In addition, the following questions should help you determine what kind of F2FB program you start. Alternatively, see Troubleshooting, p. 21, to address capacity issues so that you have more choice in which F2FB strategy you select. Below are a list of examples to assist in your planning.

- What kinds of fresh produce do your clients want to see more of? This planning stage is a good opportunity to assess what kinds of fresh produce your participants need. See Participant Survey, p. 47.

- Do you have a refrigerated vehicle or any vehicle for produce transportation?

- Do you have enough volunteers interested in being involved in F2FB? F2FB can be a great way to attract volunteers and donors to your program.

- Do you have any funds for purchasing fresh produce?

- Do you, your volunteers or staff, community partners, or friends have connections with any farmers? This can be the simplest way to start a relationship.

- How much fresh produce do you have the capacity to accept, and how often? Consider:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No cold storage</th>
<th>Not enough cold storage</th>
<th>Plenty of cold storage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food bank garden (p. 38): Proximity allows you to harvest on the day of distribution.</td>
<td>Community Gardens (p. 37): work out an agreement with your contact at the community garden to deliver only as much produce as you can accept.</td>
<td>Any strategy! Based on your planning and assessment, choose whatever program suits your food bank.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cull Bins (p. 29): Depending on the type of produce, the pick-up schedule, the scale of the farm you’re working with, this program could work for you.</td>
<td>Grow-A-Row (p. 36): Make sure the gardeners know when your distribution hours are, and arrange for drop-offs on the day of distribution.</td>
<td>Consider sharing cold storage space with other food banks in your area.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“The contact person interfacing with the farm is vital... consistency is key. Even if the person picking up food changes from year to year having the same person for contact is a great way to maintain relationships.”

- Cole Bitzenburg, Community Food Access Coordinator, Skagit Food Distribution Center
PHASE 1: ASSESS AND PLAN

Step 3: Commit to a Plan

**Timeframe:** Ideally before March and the beginning of the growing season.

**Checklist:**

- Form an action committee with the people involved in Step 2 and other interested parties to make a plan. Consider:
  - What kind of leadership structure makes sense to make decisions and keep the program moving forward?
  - How will leadership be transitioned over time?
  - Assign roles and make deadlines.
  - What kind of record-keeping system will you need?
  - Remember that most successful F2FB programs have one dedicated volunteer or staff person to manage the program. See Volunteer F2FB Coordinator Position, p. 45. Identify this person.

- Share resources. If your food bank doesn’t have the staff or volunteer capacity to assign one person to this role, is there another organization in your community with whom you could share this role?
  - Is there another food bank or community garden or health-related organization in your community?
  - See Phase 2 - Section 4 for more ideas.

- Set up monthly conference calls to connect with other organizations with similar missions and stay up to date on food systems work being done in your community.

- Stuck? For additional resources or advice, contact Northwest Harvest as you launch your initiative(s).

“A good records system makes this kind of project substantially easier. Volunteer management, event scheduling, and records keeping tools (preferably all in one place) are a necessary evil in this line of work.”

- Matt Morse, Gleaning Coordinator, HAH VISTA, Providence NEW Hunger Coalition
Step 4: Develop a Program Budget for the First Year

You’ve chosen the F2FB program that best suits your food bank and your needs. What costs/needs are associated with your program? For example:

- Tools for gleaning
- Gas mileage for transporting produce
- Seeds/pots/potting soil for distribution
- Materials for building a food bank garden and associated costs
- Purchasing dollars
- Marketing budget (if any)

Step 5: Kick Off Your Program!

- You have a plan, and you’ve decided on what kind of F2FB initiative suits your food bank. Launch your program!
- Use the How-To guidelines as checklists and templates for starting your own F2FB initiative(s).
- Spread the Word!
  - Tell your local newspaper about the launch of your F2FB program. This is a great opportunity to create some buzz to attract attention to your food bank.
  - Any chance you have, talk about your program! Take advantage of community events to connect with community members and share your mission.

QUICK TIP: Use your Washington State Department of Agriculture’s EFAP dollars to purchase produce from local growers. Even better, pool some of your EFAP dollars with other food banks in the area and contract with a grower to deliver produce over the course of the growing season.
Phase 2: Get Your Ducks in a Row

Start with this phase of F2FB if:

- You have a plan;
- You have a good grasp of the organizational and infrastructural capacity of your food bank;
- You have a newly started F2FB program.
Step 1: Market Your F2FB Program

**Timeframe:** Year-round; with a push in winter, so that by the time the growing season starts your community has been hearing the buzz about your program and how they can participate, whether it is donations (produce or money) or by volunteering.

**Checklist:**

Marketing a F2FB program can be very seasonal:

- **Winter:** Have neighborly conversations with farmers, farmer’s market managers, community members, and local businesses. During those slow winter months, it’s a great time to talk about your F2FB program and build relationships with people who might be able to help you. For more information on how to reach out to farmers and maintain a productive relationship, consult the *Growing Connections Resource Guide* for Farm-to-Food Bank Strategies.

- **Spring:** Now is when you really want to make sure your community knows you accept donations of fresh produce, not just nonperishable items. Continue engaging gardeners, farmers, and growers, by talking to them about what you are looking for. Set up good patterns of communication.

- **Summer:** This is a busy time for farmers and growers, as well as your peak F2FB program activity. There may not be much time to market your program now.

- **Fall:** Now is a great time to thank your volunteers and farmer/grower donors. Keep those relationships strong all year long by letting them know how much you appreciate their participation in your F2FB program.

Once it is up and running, marketing your F2FB program should be ongoing:

- Take lots of photos during gleaning or harvest events, and post these to your website or social media sites, as well as in your food bank. Pictures of happy smiling faces promote your program as successful and fun, and this will attract more volunteers and donors.

- Make sure you keep everyone (volunteers, community partners, growers you work with) updated on the program, how much has been donated, and upcoming events.

- Attend local and regional conferences and events for food banks, farmers, health organizations. These are great ways to engage with growers and other community members whose missions might overlap with yours.

- Consult the *Growing Connections Resource Guide* for Farm-to-Food Bank Strategies for more marketing tips other food banks are making F2FB work.

- Write an op-ed for your local paper about the exciting initiatives happening at your food bank.

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“What worked best for me? Building relationships with growers. I would add a caveat that it really helps to have the person building the relationships be someone with a long-term commitment to the project. By that I mean, someone who’s not just there to serve a term with AmeriCorps VISTA. A member of the community would be far preferable, even if they were less qualified.”

- Matt Morse, Gleaning Coordinator, HAH VISTA, Providence NEW Hunger Coalition
Step 2: Search for Funding

Checklist:

Start within your community:

☐ Give presentations to local civic clubs, such as Rotary or Lions.

☐ Talk to local businesses to see if they can sponsor you, or hold a tool drive, or participate in your program in any other way.

☐ Hold a local fundraiser for your F2FB program. Some ideas:
  
  • Host a fun run for community members.
  
  • Host a dinner and silent auction with items donated by community businesses and local farmers.
  
  • Set up a booth at the farmer’s market with a bucket for donations. This is also a good opportunity to talk about your program and how community members might get involved as donors or volunteers. Take advantage of this opportunity to build relationships with vendors and recover leftover produce. See How To Start a Market Recovery Program, p. 34.

☐ Talk to Northwest Harvest about funding; we can provide helpful tips.

*Did you know you can use your Washington State Department of Agriculture’s (WSDA) EFAP dollars to purchase produce or expand your cold storage?

“When speaking with your farm contact, be sure to convey your appreciation for their contributions to a more nourished community. You know how hard they work to grow this food, and you want to make it easier on them to get the valuable food that is left over into the emergency food systems to nourish more people. Ask your farm contact how you can appreciate/promote them. It’s likely they have an idea you haven’t thought of.”

- Lindsey Robinson, Program Coordinator, Hopelink Harvest
Phase 2: Get Your Ducks in a Row

Step 3: Join Forces - Strength in Numbers

Checklist:

☐ Solicit partnerships within your community. Depending on the F2FB program chosen, look for partnerships with existing coalitions, gleaning organizations, farmers markets, or other food banks.

☐ What organizations exist in your community whose mission might overlap with yours? Even if you may not have enough volunteers, funds, time, or even infrastructure, if you partner with other organizations, your capacity can grow. Consider:

• Hospitals or other public health organizations, whose missions are often to promote health in their community.

• Community gardens: These gardeners often have a lot of excess produce that they would rather not waste.

• Schools/agriculture programs: Often schools have greenhouses or teaching gardens for their agriculture students to learn in. That is another potential source for donations. Though timing can be a little bit tricky, given that schools are not in session during the summer when gardens need the most attention. Other ways that you potentially could partner with schools involve volunteers; often students must perform a certain number of service hours in order to graduate.

• Local food banks: You receive WSDA EFAP dollars every two years; consider pooling a portion of that money in a cooperative with other food banks and collectively purchasing produce from a local grower.

• WSU Extension

• WA Department of Health and other public health organizations

☐ Use free conference call software (available online) to arrange logistics of distribution throughout the season and to stay in touch with food banks and growers. This is an especially effective communication tool for communities spread across a large distance. Consult the Quick Tips on the Growing Connections webpage.

☐ Cultivate those partnerships within your community. In addition to being potential sources for donors and volunteers, evidence of these partnerships also strengthen a grant proposal. If you do decide to apply for a grant, funders look for evidence of strong collaboration and partnerships.

☐ Use our sample worksheets (Appendix A, p. 42) to help build and transform your program.

“In some communities, gleaning groups already exist that would be willing to work with a food pantry. There’s a group called the NEW Gleaners in this area. They are supposed to donate 50% of their recovered produce (they keep the rest for themselves), but they rarely end up giving that to food pantries because they aren’t open at the right times.”

- Matt Morse, Gleaning Coordinator, HAH VISTA, Providence NEW Hunger Coalition
Phase 3: Strengthen and Grow

Start with this phase of F2FB if:

- You have been using F2FB strategies for a while now but you could be doing more;
- You have strong community partnerships;
- You want to create a F2FB program that is more targeted to your community’s needs.

Step 1: Start a Nutrition Education Program

Checklist:

□ Hold listening sessions or utilize participant surveys to really pinpoint what kind of produce your participants want and need. See Participant Survey, p. 47.

□ Do a little research on what kind of nutrition education would best suit your program:
  - Consult Northwest Harvest’s Making the Healthier Choice the Easier Choice guide found on the Growing Connections webpage.
  - Consult Northwest Harvest’s Promoting Healthy Foods Guidebook found on the Growing Connections webpage.
  - Browse the SNAP-Ed website: https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/
  - Connect with your local WSU extension. Do you have a WSU Food $ense coordinator in your community? Often they will work with your food bank to rearrange food to spotlight healthy foods and encourage participants to choose healthier options.

"Find volunteers interested in sampling unfamiliar produce to food bank clients, or doing simple demonstrations at the food bank showing ways to cook with fresh produce. Most people will overlook produce that is unfamiliar, so getting them to try it brings it into their comfort zone and makes it more likely that they will take it. Providing simple recipes is another excellent way to encourage clients to feel more comfortable taking fresh produce home. They are looking for ways to feed their family, so try to provide recipes that are economical and use common food bank items."

- Lindsey Robinson, Program Coordinator, Hopelink Harvest
Phase 3: Strengthen and Grow

Step 2: Strengthen Collaborations

Checklist:

- Continue to engage with community and local growers. Hand out your card to anyone who exhibits interest in your F2FB program; you never know who might be a future partner or volunteer!

- Work together with other food banks in the area. Collectively you have more power:
  - Pool funds to contract purchase from local growers – again, this would be a great use of WSDA EFAP dollars!
  - Consider starting a gleaning group with volunteers from several different organizations.
  - Put together a booklet of food bank hours, locations, donation times, and what produce you can most use. Distribute this widely in the community and surrounding communities. Remember to go to places where gardeners and growers congregate: garden centers, feed stores, nurseries, co-ops, etc.
  - Communicate with other local food banks about who is contacting which local grower (so as not to incur donor fatigue).
  - Set up monthly conference calls with other food banks and community members to share grower information and successes and challenges.
  - Consider starting a coalition, or broadening your current one, to work on other projects in cooperation. Chelan-Douglas County has a new coalition called the Healthy Living Wenatchee Valley Coalition which convenes diverse stakeholders interested in promoting health in different ways in their community.

- Develop and strengthen your volunteer program. Your volunteers are your lifeblood. Consider:
  - How can you make volunteer time most meaningful? Get to know your volunteers. What are their interests? How might their experience and skills benefit your organization?
  - As always, make sure you take every opportunity to thank them! Volunteer appreciation events can be as simple as making a pot of soup and inviting volunteers to dinner, or as elaborate as holding a banquet with food from local growers to thank and spotlight all your grower donors as well as volunteer support.


Quick Tip: We found that inviting community members such as WSU extension agents, health care professionals, master gardeners, community gardeners, and farmer’s market managers to our workshops and conference calls made the conversations richer and offered a broader scope for collaboration and partnership.
Step 3: Look to the Future

Checklist:

☐ Convene your group of interested stakeholders, volunteers, board members, etc. Do a little visioning and strategizing. Consider:

• Where do you see your food bank in five years?
• How does your F2FB program fit into that vision?
• What might your F2FB program look like with a little water, sunshine, and weeding? I.e. how can you help it grow?
Regional Case Study: Okanogan County

Okanogan County has a high level of hunger. As a Phase 2-3 region, the folks invested in F2FB in Okanogan County have vision, organizational strength, and partnerships that have yielded many fruits.

Challenges:

- Large county, food banks located far from each other
- Food banks pick up from local distributor
- Food banks lack cold storage capacity
- No coalition or frequent meeting point

Keys to Okanogan’s Success:

- A core group of leaders and organizations committed to collaboration in order to realize their vision that both supplies food banks with fresh produce and supports local agriculture.
- Okanogan County Community Action Council has been a site for Rotary First Harvest and WSDA’s Farm-to-Food Pantry program for two years, which means they received purchasing dollars for fresh produce.
- Growing Connections workshops provided a space for community communication, connection, visioning, and action.
- Catholic Charities Spokane is committed to investment in systems solutions and supporting local agriculture.

What Okanogan’s Solution Looks Like:

Okanogan is in the process of creating a county-wide F2FB system. Their initiative is gradually growing from a basic direct purchase program post-farmer’s market, with distribution to the closest food banks, to a sophisticated regional system with equitable distribution. This is largely the result of food banks working together over a number of years to create a community-wide solution to distribution and logistical challenges, as well as partners investing in capacity infrastructure.

- Year one: Small-scale produce purchasing from farmer’s markets with Farm-to-Food Pantry dollars, and an Americorps VISTA distributing produce in personal vehicle.
- Year two: Small-scale produce purchasing from farmer’s markets with Farm-to-Food Pantry dollars and Catholic Charity purchasing dollars, and an Americorps VISTA distributing produce in personal vehicle.
- Proposed year three: At the time of this printing, Okanogan has just begun year three. They are looking at contract purchasing from local growers before the season begins. A refrigerated drop site will be placed at a strategic location so that farmers can drop produce off and food banks can pick it up. At a planning meeting in the spring of 2016, food bank open hours were considered for coordinated produce drops.

How Okanogan Constructed this Solution:

The foundations of this solution were laid by the Farm-to-Food Pantry program; however this highlighted the difficulty of distributing to some of the further flung food banks who didn’t then receive any fresh produce to distribute. Other food banks couldn’t accept any produce except on their days of distribution due to their lack of refrigeration. These capacity issues were discussed at three workshops held by Northwest Harvest’s Growing Connections program, which provided food banks and partners with time for visioning and planning.
Often significant obstacles stand in the way of developing a robust F2FB program, and unfortunately many of the obstacles overlap and build off each other into a perfect storm of impossibility. Some of the main constraints for food banks as they consider how to start a F2FB program include:

- **Transportation of produce**: Growers don’t have the time, staff, or extra cash for mileage to transport food to the food bank, and often neither do food banks.

- **Communication between food banks and growers or gardeners**: Food banks often don’t know how to reach out to growers or are concerned that other food banks have already contacted this grower. Once a communication channel is established, it must be maintained for the relationship to work. Many crops have a small window of viability. To capture this window of time, communication must be timely.

- **Cold storage capacity**: Even if food bank staff arrange for a donation of fresh produce, many food banks have such limited cold storage that they would have no way of keeping it until their next distribution.

- **Volunteer capacity**: Without a trusty corps of volunteers to glean or pick up produce and transport it, a farm to food bank program can’t happen.

- **Funds or fundraising capacity**: Though many F2FB programs can be carried out with little to no money, as you grow your program and look at new ways of increasing fresh produce at your food bank, often a little bit of money can go a long way for purchasing produce, increasing your cold storage capacity, or offering cooking classes or nutrition information to your clients.

- **Produce Variety**: Donations are often of less mainstream produce, as this is what customers at farmer’s markets like, and growers try to meet this demand, but food bank clients are not always as familiar with these types.
Transportation of Produce

Food banks have told us they deal with the following issues:

- Not enough volunteers, cash for gas, or time to go pick up produce from local growers.
- Food bank open hours don’t coincide with times when growers can most easily drop produce off at your food bank (on the weekends after farmer’s markets).
- Remote and isolated location of food bank

Short-Term Fixes:

- Food banks only have as much capacity as their volunteers bring to them. Work to increase your volunteer capacity by advertising specifically for volunteers who have their own vehicles and are willing to use them to pick up produce from growers. See Volunteer Troubleshooting, p. 26.
- Have a frank conversation with the grower you are working with regarding your transportation limitations. Perhaps a solution can be found. Do they make trips into town for whatever reason? Could they bring a donation along and drop it off at the food bank?
- **Ride-sharing for produce.** Do you know anyone who is making frequent or regular trips from point A to point B who might be able to pick up donations from a grower and drop them off at the food bank? This solution will require you to be somewhat flexible about food bank open hours or times when you are willing to accept donations. Some food banks have solved this problem by creating a call list of staff and volunteers who live near the food bank and are available to accept produce when a donation is made.
- **Food Cowboy.** This is a mobile phone app that routes food donors, growers, and truckers to the nearest charity that accepts food donations. This solution requires you to be somewhat flexible about food bank open hours or times when you are willing to accept donations. [www.foodcowboy.com](http://www.foodcowboy.com)

Long-Term Fixes:

- Search for a donated vehicle for your food bank.
- Raise funds for a vehicle for your food bank.Hold fundraisers. Make sure the community knows that this vehicle will help feed the hungry in your community. One food bank had a vehicle donated from across the state when a larger food bank knew they were looking for a vehicle. Publicize your need with the Washington Food Coalition or Northwest Harvest.
- Raise funds for a staff person or volunteer who will coordinate transportation of donations in your region. If you do not have enough funds or work for this individual, consider sharing staff time among several food banks in your region. This person could coordinate distribution and gleans.
  - Consider applying for an Americorps VISTA (see Useful Links, p. 49).
  - Check out the Volunteer F2FB Coordinator job description (Appendix B, p. 45).

“Regional and local car dealers often donate or sell vehicles at reduced rates, especially if the gift is donated in the community. Also, county transit authorities have donated passenger vans to our gleaning projects in the past.”

   - Ben Rasmus, Harvest Against Hunger Program Director, Rotary First Harvest
Communication

Food banks have expressed frustration about communication on several levels:

- Coordinating efforts with other food banks in the area: There simply aren’t enough opportunities for networking or open streams of communication. Everyone is busy, and it’s easy to just keep working away at what has to be done, instead of planning ahead for your F2FB program coordination.
- The initial outreach to growers: Food banks don’t know how to make contact with growers or which growers to reach out to. Growers also don’t always know what food banks to reach out to with donations.
- Communication with volunteers: It can be challenging to maintain good communication with volunteers if they work different shifts, and a lot of pertinent information about day to day operations at the food bank can be lost in the shift changes.

Fixes:

- If you want to coordinate F2FB efforts with food banks in your area, but live too far away to meet regularly, try a regularly scheduled conference call. Free conference call software is available online. This is a technique we at Growing Connections utilize with success.
- To find growers in your area:
  - Consult USDA Small Farmers search.
  - Go to your local farmer’s market.
  - Do some research – is there a grower’s cooperative in your area?
  - Activate your networks. Ask around at church, at work, at social events to see if any of your contacts know any farmers they could introduce you to.
  - Call your local extension office.
- Collaborate with other food banks in the region to create a flyer to publicize food bank open hours, locations and contact information. Make sure to post these in places where growers congregate (feed stores, garden supply stores, hardware stores). See the Whitman County Fresh Food Donation Guide, p. 48, as an example.
- To maintain great communication with your volunteers try:
  - Using a free online service like Mailchimp to send weekly emails (or as needed) to your list with updates on volunteer opportunities or pertinent information to their work.
  - At some central location in your food bank, keep a notebook/communication log where volunteers can write how their shift went and information to share with other volunteers so everyone is on the same page.
Cold Storage Capacity

Short-Term / Small-Scale Fixes:
Additional cold storage is needed mostly during the summer months when the growing season is in full swing and donations are streaming in.

- Where in your community might you find cold storage that you could share/rent cheaply during those months? Some ideas include:
  - Local schools or universities
  - Processing or packing plants
  - Community kitchens

- Research basic do-it-yourself ideas for keeping produce fresh, such as storing certain kinds of produce in different areas, and temperature and humidity considerations.

- Develop guidelines on what produce requires cold storage versus what doesn’t, and then time your donations/gleans of particular produce accordingly.

- If you have a chest freezer or can get your hands on a donated one, you can attach a device to turn it into a refrigeration unit. Since cold air sinks, and will stay in the unit when you open the door, it is more energy efficient than a standard refrigeration unit. Search on eBay or Amazon for a Johnson Controls A19AAT-2C Freezer Temperature Controller.
  - Cost: $50-$75.

Long-Term / Large-Scale Fixes:
If you have a little bit of cash and/or some space at your food bank, consider these options:

- **CoolBots**: CoolBots are devices that trick an air conditioner unit into dropping temps as low as 34 degrees, which can turn a sealed, insulated room into a walk-in cooler. This website is a great resource that will walk you through how to build your own CoolBot and help you consider whether a CoolBot is right for you or not: http://storeitcold.com/.
  - Cost: Around $315 for the CoolBot controller. You also need an air conditioning unit.

- **Mobile cold storage trailer**: Pallet-sized cold storage trailer using CoolBot technology that can be hitched behind any standard vehicle. You can remove it from the trailer frame with a forklift to use as a stationary unit in a warehouse. Build your own or purchase one from HarvestScape. See insert on ‘Mobile Cold-Storage: “Pup Trailers”’.
  - Cost: approx. $4,000 for a build it yourself version (not including labor), $7,000 - $9,000 for a fully-assembled trailer.
Long-Term / Large-Scale Fixes cont.:

- **Pac-Van Shipping containers**: Pac-Van sells shipping containers in several sizes. They can be either dry, refrigerated, or freezer storage. Northwest Harvest’s Yakima warehouse uses this company to expand freezer space.
  - Cost: Call Pac-Van for more details, current option packages, and pricing

- **HarvestScape HarvestNodes**: Upcycled shipping container turned into a storage and processing facility. Due to the costs, this would be an appropriate shared community resource. Could rent out the facility to recoup some of the cost, as this is a great space for farmers/growers, restauranteurs, as well as food banks.
  - Cost: around $50,000.

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**Mobile-Cold Storage: “Pup Trailers”**

Nils Johnson is the Ag Program Coordinator for WSU Extension in Stevens County and has worked closely with the Harvest Against Hunger program in eastern and central Washington.

His work with food pantries and small-scale growers led him to a key insight: the volume of produce being transported from farms to food banks was often small enough to fit in the back of a Subaru. These “Pup Trailers” would enable decentralized sourcing and distribution of fresh produce, creating more targeted and nimble connections between growers and customers.

In partnership with HarvestScape, Catholic Charities Spokane, and Northwest Farm Credit Services, Nils designed and built a refrigerated trailer using readily available and inexpensive materials and parts that fits a pallet’s worth of produce and that can be easily towed behind a passenger vehicle. Nils is working to make plans for how to build your own refrigerated trailer available to the public; however, at the time of this publication, no official plans are available for dissemination. A pre-built trailer will be available from HarvestScape in the near future. Contact them for more information.
Volunteer Capacity

Volunteers equal time, they equal knowledge and passion, and they equal program capacity. Without them, you have none of these essential qualities which drive your program forward. Your goals then, are to find people who have time to volunteer at your food bank, ideally on a regular basis, who have the interest, skills, and passion to run your F2FB program.

Many fine resources exist surrounding volunteer recruitment and retention. A few of these include:

- **Rotary First Harvest’s Resource Guide**: Rotary First Harvest’s program, Harvest Against Hunger, places Americorps VISTAs around Washington state as gleaning coordinators who work with food banks to arrange donations and produce purchasing projects. Every year, these VISTAs impart their knowledge in a series of articles that they write about topics ranging from volunteer coordination to building farmer relationships to how to set up a farmer’s market produce recovery program.
- **Idealist.org**: This is a searchable database of nonprofit jobs and volunteer opportunities by region. You can post a job/volunteer position and people in your region can connect with you.
- **Volunteer Match**: This is similar to Idealist.org but focuses only on volunteer opportunities rather than paid work.
  - [https://www.volunteermatch.org/](https://www.volunteermatch.org/)
- **Americorps VISTA**: These are volunteers who are placed around the country in positions with nonprofits combatting poverty in some way. You can have a VISTA project for three years.
Troubleshooting

Produce Variety

Short-Term Fixes:
- Suggest that volunteers offer ideas for how to cook specialty produce as clients go through the line. If they push the produce it will be more likely to be taken.
- Make up simple recipes to pass out with the produce. Find ideas for recipes on Northwest Harvest’s Partner’s Portal.

Long-Term Fixes:
- With a bit of fundraising, or pooling of your WSDA EFAP dollars, contract with local growers to grow food that clients request. See Growing Connections Resource Guide for Farm-to-Food Bank Strategies for more information about contract growing.
- Develop a nutrition education program at your food bank to encourage clients to select nutritious food. See Northwest Harvest’s Promoting Healthy Foods Guide, as well as USDA’s SNAP-Ed resources. These fixes can include rearranging your food bank so that healthy produce is spotlighted, offering nutrition information about different products, and cooking demonstrations for clients.
  - https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/
Food Bank Case Study: Othello Food Bank

Othello Food Bank is a Phase 2-3 food bank. Othello is the largest city in Adams County, where there is a population density of 8 people per square mile. It is home to about 7,600 people. Despite the low population, the Othello Food Bank offered 23,754 services to people in 2014.

Challenges:
- How to attract more produce donations
- No coalition/frequent meeting point
- Cold storage
- Small community without a lot of resources

Keys to Othello’s Success:
- Energetic leadership and persistence
- Pursuit of multiple avenues of donations
- Rich agricultural region
- Growing Connections workshops – space for communication, connection, visioning, and action.

What Othello’s Solution Looks Like:
Executive Director Sharon Mobley implemented a multi-faceted approach to farm-to-food bank. She is always juggling a list of contacts in her head. She has approached local growers, a nearby international juicing company, public schools, community gardens, vendors at farmer’s markets, even the mayor of Othello. Her strategy is to activate her community, let them know how they can help, and then she is always on call and available to receive produce donations.

How Othello Constructed This Solution:
Sharon has worked at increasing both fresh produce and funding from many different sources, which is a great tactic for a small food bank to take.
- Over the course of several growing seasons, she has increased her number of contacts with growers, and formed relationships with community members and companies who participate in her program in various ways, from home gardeners who donate produce, to farmers she calls if she’s short on something, to a berry grower who donates leftover berries after farmer’s markets.
- For funding, she met with the Othello city mayor to explain the city utilities donation option. House Bill 1211, which passed in 2011, permits municipal utility providers to include a donation option on bills so that community members can donate to hunger relief agencies. The city council approved the donation collection.

How to replicate:
Take an energetic approach to marketing your food bank. Pass out your cards to your board members at the beginning of the season, so that they can distribute your information to their networks. Send letters to local businesses explaining your program, the role it plays in the community, and offer specific ways they can help you. Many businesses (both local and chain) are committed to being active in their communities, and you can leverage this civic-minded trend to your advantage. Create a reputation in your region for being open and active, and above all, make those personal connections with your community members.
How to Start a Produce Recovery Program

Typically, produce recovery programs require inputs of volunteers, time, vehicles to transport produce, and some cold storage capacity. An additional excellent resource for starting a produce recovery program is Rotary First Harvest’s Resource Guide. Find it here: http://rfhresourceguide.org/.

Types of Recovery Programs:

- Cull Bins
- On-Farm Gleaning
- Farmer’s Market Recovery / Gleans

Cull Bins

Some produce is not market quality because of size or blemishes. Farmers sort these culls into bins, which the food bank picks up each week. This program is flexible and can potentially provide a range of produce quantities, depending on the scale of the grower you work with.

Requires: Bins, volunteer time, vehicles with enough capacity to transport boxes of produce.

Ideally: Your volunteer(s) would commit to a regular shift of driving to pick up cull boxes. Also key to making this program work is a reliable food bank point person who calls the grower every week to discuss product availability.

Steps to start program:

1. Make contact with a grower in your area (see Growing Connections Resource Guide). The success of a gleaning program is proportional to the strength of the relationships you build with your grower contacts.

2. Go out to the farm to meet with the grower. This meeting is ideal for you to offer information about your program. Offer a packet with this information and explain:
   - How you are fighting hunger in your community.
   - How the culls donated by the grower could make a difference to hungry people.
   - The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Donations Act (see Useful Links, p. 49) and that the grower isn’t liable
   - Listen to concerns the grower may have and find productive ways of addressing them.
   - Emphasize that gleaning events won’t interfere with their bottom line, their business models or practices.

3. Recruit volunteers. These folks will be responsible for driving out to the farms and collecting the bins of culls. You will also need a point person to call the grower each week to make sure there is produce to pick up.
4. Work out a schedule with the grower to go out and pick up culls on a weekly basis (if your food bank can accept this volume of additional produce).

5. Keep track of the additional produce picked up.

6. Don’t forget to thank growers and volunteers who have generously donated product and time to you! Ideas for appreciation include:
   - Hand-written thank-you notes;
   - A donor/volunteer appreciation event (harvest dinner, community meet your farmer event, etc.);
   - Post photos of cull pick-ups on to your Facebook page or website and name the farm/grower and volunteers with a thank you for their generosity.
   - Year-end thank-you letters detailing program numbers (how much produce the program as a whole gleaned, how much produce the individual grower donated, how many hungry people were served with that food, etc.). Year-end thank-you letters, detailing program numbers (how much produce the program as a whole gleaned, how much produce the individual grower donated, how many hungry people were served with that food, etc.).

Note: If you are a small food bank without the resources to start a program like this, could you team up with another food bank in your area to share responsibilities and capacity (and produce!)? This would mean a slightly higher level of coordination.

“Sometimes folks in the nonprofit world don’t always appreciate the for-profit model and how hard it is for growers and farmers to turn a profit. Work with the grower to find ways so that the produce recovery/gleaning process will have minimal impact on the farm.”

- Ben Rasmus, Harvest Against Hunger Program Director, Rotary First Harvest
On-Farm Gleaning

Food pantries establish a relationship with a farmer and work out an arrangement to bring volunteers to harvest produce from the farm. This can be on a time frame suitable to both food bank and grower (weekly, monthly, or as needed).

Requires: Boxes or bins, a gleaning/volunteer coordinator, vehicles to transport boxes of produce, at least 2-3 volunteers, flexibility and a good amount of coordination.

Ideally: A point person at the food bank would call the grower every week to check in and talk about what crops might be ready that week, and what day and time works for a glean.

Steps to start program:
1. Make contact with a grower in your area (see Growing Connections Resource Guide). The success of a gleaning program is proportional to the strength of the relationship you build with your grower contacts.
2. Go out to the farm to meet with the grower. This meeting is ideal for you to offer information about your program. Offer a packet with this information, and explain:
   • How you are fighting hunger in your community.
   • How the gleans donated by the grower make a difference to hungry people.
   • The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Donations Act (see Useful Links, p. 49) and that the grower isn’t liable.
   • Emphasize that gleaning events won’t interfere with their bottom line, their business models, or practices.
3. Ask the grower:
   • What kind of training would the farmer like the volunteers to undergo before setting foot on farm? Take detailed notes so you can convey this information to volunteers later.
   • What kinds of tools are needed for different produce gleans?
   • Listen to concerns the grower may have and find productive ways of addressing them.
4. Recruit volunteers (see Volunteer F2FB Coordinator Job Description, p. 45). These folks will be responsible for gleaning on the farm. This will require volunteers with flexible schedules, as gleans may be arranged only a few days in advance, due to crop ripeness.
5. Train volunteers prior to gleans. This includes:
   • Food handling safety rules.
   • Conveying any information the grower wants you to pass along to the volunteers.
   • For a detailed and excellent overview of on-farm food safety handling, gleaning tips, and gleaning supplies needed, see Rotary First Harvest’s Resource Guide: http://rfhresourceguide.org/Article/235.
6. Work out a schedule with the grower to go out and glean on a weekly basis. This depends on the season, the grower’s crops, and if your food bank can accept this volume of additional produce. Call the grower each week at a set time to confer about gleans. Some growers prefer text messaging. During this call or text exchange, discuss:
   • What kind of produce you’ll likely be gleaning
   • How to harvest this crop and what kinds of tools you’ll need
   • Parking
   • If a wash station will be needed and if so, training for its use
   • Best time for gleaners to come to farm
   • How many gleaners will be needed to harvest

7. Keep track of the additional produce. Use a spreadsheet to keep organized.

8. Don’t forget to thank growers and volunteers who have generously donated product and time to you! Ideas for appreciation include:
   • Hand-written thank-you notes;
   • A donor/volunteer appreciation event (harvest dinner, community meet your farmer event, etc.);
   • Post photos of cull pick-ups on to your Facebook page or website and name the farm/grower and volunteers with a thank you for their generosity.
   • Year-end thank-you letters, detailing program numbers (how much produce the program as a whole gleaned, how much produce the individual grower donated, how many hungry people were served with that food, etc.).

“Consider Farm Type. Different types of farms present different opportunities for gleaning. Larger farms usually operate with machinery and don’t have to leave much produce behind unless Mother Nature throws them a curve ball (like last summer with the drought). So, many scenarios can lead to farmers choosing to till produce under if it is not perfect for their consumers.”

- Sarah Gordon, formerly of Project Harvest, Volunteers of America, Everett
HOW TO START A F2FB PROGRAM

Some variations on this program:

- Are any of your food bank participants interested in gleaning? Train them as well, and allow them to keep a portion of the gleaned food.
- Work out a system with a local pig producer to get rid of your food bank food waste. In return, perhaps the farmer would consider the donation of an animal to your food bank. Turn waste into protein!

Note: If you are a small food bank without the resources to start a program like this, could you team up with another food bank in your area to share responsibilities (and produce!)? This would mean a slightly higher level of coordination.

“When you schedule gleans, consider how quickly the produce will be used at the food bank and what kind of storage options you have. This will enable the produce to be used at its peak freshness.”

- Lindsey Robinson, Program Coordinator, Hopelink Harvest

“Grower appreciation parties are very useful. I have attended the one in Carnation and the growers find it very compelling if it strikes the right tone.”

- Ben Rasmus, Harvest Against Hunger Program Director, Rotary First Harvest
How to Start a F2FB Program

**Farmer’s Market Recovery/Gleans**

Food pantries can establish a relationship with growers at farmer’s markets and work out an arrangement to pick up unsold produce at the close of the market. This is ideal if the grower doesn’t want to bring produce all the way back to the farms. However, if there is another farmer’s market the next day, it won’t make sense for the grower to give produce away. Alternatively, the grower drops off unsold produce at the food bank on their way out of town after the farmer’s market. This is a great way to build relationships with growers, and may lead to regular donations in the future.

**Requires:** Boxes or bins, a dedicated volunteer or two on market days, a cart or dolly to transport boxes of produce to the vehicle, a vehicle to transport goods, open hours at your food bank that are within a few days of the farmer’s market so that produce won’t spoil.

**Ideally:** You will have access either to a facility with a cooler or your food bank facility will be open and have enough cold storage space to store gleaned market food for several days.

**Steps to start program:**

1. Make contact with your farmer’s market coordinator. Explain your program and your goals. Ask if they will put out feelers to the vendors to see if anyone is interested in donating leftover produce. Offer a letter or post card for distribution to growers to introduce yourself and your program.

2. Visit the farmer’s market and talk with the growers. Explain your program and goals; see if they are interested in participating in your program.
   
   - Note: If your town has two farmer’s markets, on Saturday and Sunday, it’s most likely you’ll receive donations on the Sunday market, as growers who attend both will want to try to sell product on Sunday that they didn’t sell on Saturday.

3. Train volunteers:
   
   - Basic food safety/handling.
   - Expectations for the day.

4. Market Glean:
   
   - On market day, volunteers arrive around 30 minutes before the end of the market.
   - Distribute boxes to the growers who have agreed to participate in the program.
   - Tracking sheets allow you to keep record of how many pounds of produce was donated, by which grower, what types of produce, and on what date, number of volunteers, and how many volunteer hours were used. This will be useful for your own programming record keeping, and so you can send donors records of their donations so they can write it off in their taxes.
   - Collect the boxes after the market is over.
5. Don’t forget to thank growers and volunteers who have generously donated product and time to you! Options for appreciation include:

- Hand-written thank-you notes;
- A donor/volunteer appreciation event (harvest dinner, community meet your farmer event, etc.);
- Post photos of cull pick-ups on to your Facebook page or website and name the farm/grower and volunteers with a thank you for their generosity;
- Year-end thank-you letters, detailing program numbers (how much produce the program as a whole gleaned, how much produce the individual grower donated, how many hungry people were served with that food, etc.).

Variations on this program:

- Set up a tent/table at the market to distribute information about the food bank and your F2FB program, and solicit donations of either money or produce during regular market hours.
- If you have funds to purchase food, contract with several vendors to buy (at a discounted rate, ideally) leftover produce. It’s great to support your local farmers!
- Partner with one or more other food pantries in the area if you do not have enough staff/volunteers to commit to every weekend pick-ups from the farmer’s markets.


“If your organization has in-kind donation sheets, plan to offer this to your donors after gleans/donations and know when and how you can get it to them (at the time of donation, by mail, or at your next regular visit). You can do this as part of a monthly thank you letter system as well. If they don’t want receipts, still provide them information on the number of pounds gleaned/donated – everyone wants to know!”

- Lindsey Robinson, Program Coordinator, Hopelink Harvest
How to Start a Garden F2FB Program

Typically, produce recovery programs require inputs of volunteers, time, vehicles to transport produce, and some cold storage capacity. An additional excellent resource for starting a produce recovery program is Rotary First Harvest’s Resource Guide. Find it here: http://rfhresourceguide.org/.

Types of Gardening Programs:

- Grow-a-Row
- Community Gardens
- Food Bank Gardens
- Seed/Start Distribution

This type of F2FB program is suitable for a food bank without much time, volunteer capacity, or funds. A little bit of time can reap large produce returns.

Grow-a-Row

Local gardeners dedicate a row in their garden or a tree in their orchard to the food bank and donate all the produce from that row to the food bank. This is a program started by the Garden Writers Association, and they offer great resources and assistance.

Requires: Marketing to promote your program, enough cooler space to accept an undetermined amount of product, as you may not know exactly how many gardeners are participating, but you can work with gardeners on this if you have limited storage.

Ideally: You will have a Master Gardener’s Program and/or community garden in your community.

Steps to start program:

1. Check out the Garden Writers Association website and download their brochure (http://www.gardenwriters.org/gwa.php?p=par/index.html) or dial their hotline at PAR Hotline 1-877-492-2727.
2. Market your program. Tell the local newspaper and radio station about your Grow-a-Row campaign. Advertise on your social media outlets.
3. Put up fliers advertising your program in plant nurseries, garden stores, feed stores, and other places where gardeners are likely to congregate. Try putting them up in local churches as well, or other central gathering places. Table at the farmer’s market with information about Plant a Row. Hand out row signs to interested participants. Make sure they have information about where to donate the produce from their row.
4. Reach out to your local gardening communities. In late winter, meet with Master Gardeners, community gardens, or other gardening groups in your community. Explain the success of the program, that it’s nation-wide, how much of a difference fresh produce makes to your clients, and how easy it would be to simply plant an extra row to donate to your food bank. Talk about details such as what types of produce you are interested in increasing in your food bank, drop off times, and contact people on either side.
5. Pass out signs and row sticks to participating gardeners to advertise that they have planted a row for the hungry.
6. Keep track of produce donated over the growing season. At the end of the season, announce totals to the local newspaper, radio, and on social media. Celebrate the donors – thank them for their support.
Community Gardens

Neighbors come together to manage an open space. People pay a fee for individual plots, and often community organizations or clubs have plots and grow food for food banks.

Requires: Volunteer time to coordinate efforts, enough cooler space to accept additional produce. If space is limited or you don’t have cold storage, coordinate alternatives with gardeners ahead of time.

Ideally: You will have a contact person at the community garden who coordinates drop-offs/donation boxes.

Steps to start program:

1. Make a contact at your community garden in February or March if possible, but even later can still work. Explain the work you do at your food bank and how you are trying to offer increased options of fresh produce for your clients. Establish lines of communication and point people at the food bank and community garden. The community garden point person will talk with the other community gardeners and assess interest in participation.

2. If there is enough interest, convene a meeting of the gardeners. See if you can attend the community garden kick-off as a presenter. Talk to them about your program and what produce is most asked for by clients at your food bank (if need be, use a client survey to gather this information (see Participant Survey, p. 47)). Discuss logistics as a group, namely distribution and what works best for everyone (who drops off/picks up, when, etc). Ideally the community garden will select a food bank garden coordinator.
   - This person will:
     - Organize all other plots.
     - There may be a designated community garden plot, and all of the produce grown there will be donated. The coordinator organizes the labor needed to work this plot.
     - Drop off produce at the food bank weekly. Ideally this time will coincide with food bank distribution hours.

3. Check in with point person over the growing season to make sure everything is going smoothly and to iron out bumps as they arise.

4. Track produce amounts over the course of the season.

5. Hold a thank you event for the community garden donors at the end of the growing season.

Variations on this program:

- Are there several food banks in your community? (see Northwest Harvest’s statewide map of partners to locate other food banks at http://www.northwestharvest.org/statewide-network) If the community gardens you are working with are large enough, consider creating a flier/brochure of all the food banks in your area with their open hours, when they accept donations, and what kind of produce they most could use. This way the gardeners can harvest when produce is ready and then drop it off at the food bank whose distribution hours best coincide with the harvest time.
Food Bank Gardens
Raised beds or gardens on site at the food bank. Many opportunities exist for involving volunteers and introducing nutrition education.

Requires: Time, materials, space on your property, dedicated volunteers with knowledge or interest in gardening, or a community space, maybe at a local school. This could be linked to school curriculum during the school year.

Ideally: If you have a spot that might make a good garden plot, ideally you’ll be screening volunteers for interest in spearheading a garden project.

Steps to start program:
1. Identify your volunteers. This will require a weekly commitment of time throughout the growing/harvest season.
2. Make a garden plan – what is both easiest to grow for your zone and most wanted by your clients? If you aren’t sure what food your clients want more of, use a survey to assess needs (See Participant Survey, p. 47).
3. Work with your volunteers to find materials: soil, compost, seeds, starts, gardening tools. These can either be purchased or try approaching plant nurseries and garden stores for donations of last year’s seeds and other materials.
4. Plant your garden. Reap the rewards of having fresh produce on site, so you can harvest just before distribution and offer clients the freshest possible produce.

Variations on this Program:
- If you don’t have the time or abilities to create a food bank garden, try contacting Lowes or Home Depot or other garden/hardware stores. They often have annual employee volunteer projects, and this would be a great project for a group of handy volunteers.
- If your volunteers are elderly, consider building raised beds or using old apple bins as raised beds, so they don’t need to stoop to weed and harvest.

Ways to Expand this Program:
- You now have this lovely resource at your food bank that is prime to be used as an educational resource for your clients. Organize gardening classes for your clients. Partner with your local WSU extension, Master Gardeners, etc.
- If you have the facilities, take your educational component a step further and offer cooking and preserving classes to your clients. Again, partner with WSU extension or other parties interested in nutrition education.
Seed/Start Distribution

Seed companies and plant nurseries donate last year’s seeds or unsold starts to food banks. Food banks distribute these to participants or the community, who then donate food grown from these seeds back to the food bank.

Requires: A little time to generate seed/start donations, some volunteer time, enough space to care for plant starts donations.

Ideally: You will start searching for seed donations in the winter.

Steps to start program:
1. For Seed Donations: In late fall or early winter, solicit both local and national seed companies for seed donations. Explain in your letter that you are a food bank and 501C-3, and what you intend to do with the seeds. These companies usually can’t sell last years’ seeds and often have seed donation programs. Find a list of seed companies to contact on p. 46.
2. For Plant Starts: Talk to local plant nurseries, garden stores, or high school agriculture programs to see if they will donate any unsold leftover plant starts to you.
3. Organize volunteers to sort seeds, and if needed, attach growing instructions to them.
4. In the spring, distribute plant starts and seeds to your clients. Make sure you also distribute growing instructions. If possible, see if a Master Gardener will set up a table on the day when you pass out seeds and starts to offer growing suggestions and tips to your clients.
5. Suggest to your clients that if they grow too much produce, that they donate some of it back to the food bank.

Interested in starting a seed library? See Rotary First Harvest’s article here: http://rfhresourceguide.org/Article/184
How to Start a Purchasing Program

We have not gone into very much detail here, as a step-by-step guide to direct purchasing and contract purchasing already exist in the Growing Connections Resource Guide for Farm-to-Food Bank Strategies. However, direct and contract purchasing are powerful strategies for procuring high quality produce and promoting a strong local economy. Below are resources already available that are highly suggested.

Types of Purchasing Programs:

- **Direct Purchasing**: Food banks work with growers and vendors to purchase produce at, or below, market rates.
- **Contract Purchasing**: Food banks contract with growers for particular crops, to be delivered at prearranged times throughout the season

Northwest Harvest’s report, *Growing Connections: A Resource Guide on Farm-to-Food Bank Strategies*, presents strategies and case studies in working with growers and initiating a purchasing program to source fresh produce for your food bank. Resources available in the resource guide include:

- Guide to Building Farmer Relationships
- Guide to Direct Purchasing
- Sample Purchasing Contract
- Key strategies and factors for success in Farm-to-Food Bank

Rotary First Harvest’s online resource guide, [http://rfhresourceguide.org/](http://rfhresourceguide.org/), contains articles with helpful tips and insights into Farm-to-Food Bank strategies from programs throughout the state.

See also Rotary First Harvest’s *Farm to Food Bank Report* in collaboration with WSDA at [http://rfhresourceguide.org/Page/Farm-to-Food-Bank-Project](http://rfhresourceguide.org/Page/Farm-to-Food-Bank-Project).


“I’ve found that being knowledgeable about extended resources can help food bank representatives relate to farmers and actively show invested interest in a mutual relationship.”

- Karen Ullmann, Outreach and Education Coordinator, Farm to School Program, WSDA
Appendices

Appendix A: Resources to Facilitate Organizational Capacity
- Growing Connections Workshop Action Plan Worksheet
- Assessing Strengths and Challenges Worksheet

Appendix B: Volunteer Job Descriptions
- Volunteer F2FB Coordinator Position

Appendix C: F2FB Resources
- Seed Companies to Contact
- Participant Survey
- Whitman County Fresh Produce Donation Guide

Appendix D: Useful Links
Appendix A: Growing Connections Workshop Action Plan Worksheet

Growing Connections Workshop Handout

Identify your top 1-3 goals in F2FB work.
_____________________________________________________________________________
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_____________________________________________________________________________
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_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
2. Define 1-2 strategies that need to be employed to reach your goal. You are here and want to be there (your goal).
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3. What information is needed to move forward a F2FB program? What information do you need?
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
Appendix A: Growing Connections Workshop Action Plan Worksheet

4. What steps do you need to take in one month, two months and three months? Outline in as much detail as possible. This step creates a beginning work plan for your strategies.

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5. What might you need from the larger group?

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Appendix A: Assessing Strengths and Challenges Worksheet

CURRENT PROGRAM

STRENGTHS

HOW WILL YOU USE YOUR STRENGTHS TO OVERCOME YOUR CHALLENGES

CHALLENGES

ARE THERE ANY CHALLENGES YOU CANNOT OVERCOME WITH YOUR CURRENT STRENGTHS?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES NEEDED

NO

GOAL

YES

Source: Mother Hubbard's Cupboard
Appendix B: Volunteer Job Descriptions - F2FB Coordinator Position

Volunteer Farm to Food Pantry Coordinator Description

Brief Description Help increase access to healthy food in our community! Do you have an interest in gardening, local agriculture, or nutrition? Are you creative and flexible and interested in helping Your Local Food Pantry create a farm to food pantry program? Your role will be to start and grow our farm to food pantry program. This may include volunteer wrapping, coordinating with local growers, and transporting produce. This position is ideal for someone who has a very flexible schedule during the summer. This is a five month position.

Purpose of Assignment Supply food bank clients with fresh produce.

Outline of Responsibilities
• Establish great lines of communication with growers to determine each week what needs to be pick up and how the grower wants volunteers to do so.
• Coordinating efforts and communication between local food pantries and growers. Includes email and phone calls about donation opportunities.
• Send out a weekly email to volunteers about gleaning opportunities.
• Conduct on-farm volunteer trainings, as needed.
• Load produce donations from local farmers into your vehicle.
• Transport produce to Your Local Food Pantry.

Skills or Qualifications
• Ability to physically lift up to 40lbs
• Driver’s license
• Must be willing to use personal vehicle to transport produce
• Flexible schedule
• Gardening/Farming experience

Benefits
• Promote food security and health in your community
• Learn about local agriculture
• Take home some gleaned produce each week
• Have fun and meet people!

Training and Support Training will be required before starting volunteer commitment.

Time Commitment 5-10 hours/week.

Work Site: Your Local Food Pantry. Local farms and orchards.

Application Process Register as a volunteer on our website or by calling 222.333.4444
Appendix C: F2FB Resources - Seed Companies to Contact

Seed Companies to Contact

If you are interested in distributing seeds to your clients (ideally along with growing instructions and Master Gardeners available to answer questions), here are some possible companies from whom to request a donation of last years’ seeds. Tell them about your program, and how their seeds can make a difference for your clients.

Start Local:
- Plant nurseries or garden supply stores, local supermarkets, or big box stores like Walmart that have garden departments.

Washington/Oregon Seed Companies:
- Irish Eyes Garden Seeds, Ellensburg. - http://irisheyesgardenseeds.com/

Other Seed Companies:
- Botanical Interests - https://www.botanicalinterests.com/
- Hudson Valley Seed Library - http://www.seedlibrary.org/
- The Living Seed Company - https://www.livingseedcompany.com/
**Appendix C: F2FB Resources - Food Bank Client Survey**

## Bringing you more of the produce you want!

### 1) Your Five Favorite Salad Vegetables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Package Type</th>
<th>Fresh</th>
<th>Frozen</th>
<th>Jars</th>
<th>Other</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cabbage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carrots</td>
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<tr>
<td>Celery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cucumbers</td>
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<td>Kale</td>
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<td>Kohlrabi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lettuce</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mushrooms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mustard Greens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Onions</td>
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<td>Peas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peppers (Hot)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peppers (Sweet)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Radishes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spinach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer Squash</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tomatoes</td>
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</table>

### 2) Your Five Favorite Cooking Vegetables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Package Type</th>
<th>Fresh</th>
<th>Frozen</th>
<th>Jars</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asparagus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beans (Snap, Green)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beets</td>
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<tr>
<td>Broccoli</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brussels Sprouts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bok Choy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cauliflower</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collard Greens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Corn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eggplants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Garlic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parsnips</td>
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<td>Pumpkins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rutabagas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swiss Chard</td>
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<td>Tomatillos</td>
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<td>Turnips</td>
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<tr>
<td>Winter Squash</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baby</td>
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<td>Baker type</td>
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<td>Red</td>
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<td>White/Yellow</td>
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</table>

### 3) Your Five Favorite Fruits & Berries

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<tr>
<th>Package Type</th>
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<th>Frozen</th>
<th>Jars</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apples</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apricots</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blackberries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blueberries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cherries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Currants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gooseberries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grapes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Huckleberries</td>
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<td>Melons</td>
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<td>Nectaries</td>
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<td>Peaches</td>
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<td>Pears</td>
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<td>Plums</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raspberries</td>
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<td>Rhubarb</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strawberries</td>
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### 4) Jar Preferences

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<th>Other</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fruit /Berries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fruit /Berries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fruit /Berries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vegetable</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vegetable</td>
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**Providence N.E.W. Hunger Coalition**

**Community Agriculture Development Center**

**Tri County Economic Development District**

**Washington State University**

**Stevens County Extension**

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Appendix C: Whitman County Fresh Produce Donation Guide

WHITMAN COUNTY
FRESH FOOD DONATION GUIDE
PALOUSE FRESH FOOD PROJECT

Below, you will find a list of Whitman County food pantries that accept fresh food donations, the best times to drop off produce, and who you should contact before dropping off items.

ALBION FOOD PANTRY
Starr Cathey
509.332.5095
townofalbion@palouse.com

BEST DONATION TIMES
Monday – Thursday 9 AM – 3 PM
City Hall, 310 E Street, Albion

COFLAX FOOD PANTRY
Paige Collins
509.397.4305
pcollinscoa@gmail.com

Monday 9 AM – 4 PM
& Tuesday 9 AM – 11 AM
121 N Main Street, Colfax

COLTON/UNIONTOWN FOOD PANTRY
Debbie Niehenke
509.229.3703
patndeb5@gmail.com
206 Montgomery Street, Uniontown

Wednesday & Thursday
1 PM – 2 PM & After 4:30 PM

ENDICOTT FOOD PANTRY
David Gilman
509.657.3823

Fourth Wednesday of Month 10 AM – 12 PM
City Hall, 201 C Street, Endicott

GARFIELD/FARMINGTON/BELMONT FOOD PANTRY
Penny Martinez
509.635.0150
Grange Hall, 211 E Main Street, Garfield

Call for Best Times

LACROSSE FOOD PANTRY
Wayne Miller
509.330.6635

Call for Best Times
131 N Main Street, LaCrosse

MALDEN/PINE CITY FOOD PANTRY
Herb Bacon
509.569.2006
or Lori Dickinson
509.869.8782
lrdickinson123@yahoo.com

Available Anytime
Malden City Hall,
18 W Moreland Avenue, Malden

OAKESDALE FOOD PANTRY
Patty Johnson
509.285.4303
maxi_n_sox@yahoo.com

Last Thursday of Month 9 AM
Oakesdale First Baptist Church,
209 W Bartlett Street, Oakesdale
Appendix D: Useful Links

Useful Links

Northwest Harvest Growing Connections:
http://www.northwestharvest.org/growing-connections

Notes from the Field:
http://www.northwestharvest.org/notes-from-the-field

Rotary First Harvest Resource Guide:
http://rfhresourceguide.org/

Washington State Department of Agriculture Food Assistance Programs:
http://agr.wa.gov/FoodProg/

United States Department of Agriculture SNAP-Ed:
https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/

How to Apply for an Americorps VISTA:
http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/americorps/americorps-vista/sponsor-vista-project

Gleanweb:

Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Donations Act:
http://www.foodtodonate.com/Fdcmain/LegalLiabilities.aspx
https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/42/1791
For more information about Growing Connections, please contact:

Laura Titzer at 206.923.7423 or LauraT@northwestharvest.org.

Discover more at northwestharvest.org