



University of Idaho  
Extension



# A GUIDE TO *developing* FOOD COALITIONS AND FOOD POLICY COUNCILS IN IDAHO

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# A Guide to Developing Food Coalitions and Food-Policy Councils in Idaho

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## Introduction

IN IDAHO, CONSUMER INTEREST AND support for locally grown food is on the rise. From rural and geographically isolated regions to periurban and urban municipalities, Idahoans are looking for opportunities to network, collaborate, and strengthen their community food systems. As interest in local food increases, there is a growing need to develop community initiatives that support local food producers, expand infrastructure and processing facilities, and increase affordable access and equity to local food and farm products. Community-based food coalitions are one innovative tool to help leverage resources to improve local food systems and achieve other shared goals.

These burgeoning efforts in Idaho are relatively new. Nine years after the development of Idaho's first food coalition in 2010, communities around the state established seven more food-system-focused groups. The success of these coalitions has since inspired other Idaho communities to develop additional local food partnerships, including food-policy councils. Thus leaders of these initiatives are on the lookout for successful food-coalition models and for advice about forming a coalition. This research-based publication addresses those needs.

In 2017, a team of three University of Idaho (UI) Extension educators conducted in-depth semistructured interviews with eight existing Idaho food coalitions to answer the following questions:

- How are these groups structured and organized?
- What type of activities and/or policy work are these groups currently doing?
- Do these groups perceive they are making a difference in their local food system? If so, in what ways?

- Do these groups believe that the Idaho food system would benefit from a regional or statewide coalition? If so, why and how?

Each member of the interview team was also highly involved in food coalitions in their locales and used their statewide networks to identify eight Idaho groups that met the definition of a food coalition or food-policy council. The majority of the groups interviewed had some UI Extension involvement and two operated as independent nonprofit organizations. Since the time of the interviews, some groups have continued to grow, while others have disbanded or stalled for various reasons. Informed by the successes, challenges, and lessons learned from each of these groups, this publication provides best management practices for developing and operating Idaho food coalitions. Whether you have already convened a local food group or are in the early stages of development, this bulletin provides the practical steps needed to move forward. In addition, it also covers eight related topics that are key to successfully organizing and operating an Idaho food coalition:

- Idaho’s agricultural landscape
- Food coalition or food policy council
- Why food coalitions form
- Steps for forming a food coalition
- Coalition funding
- The first few years
- Taking action
- Internal and external communication
- Measuring and communicating your coalition’s impacts

## Idaho’s Agricultural Landscape

Idaho’s diverse natural and agricultural landscape reflects Idahoan’s passion for the outdoors and proud agricultural heritage. The state’s landscape encompasses a variety of growing conditions, from high-elevation deserts to microclimates with maritime-like precipitation. These extreme variations allow for the production of a wide variety of crops and livestock—which provides the

**Table 1.** Number of farms in Idaho by size.

Farms by size	2012	2017	+/-	% change
1–9 acres	4861	6673	+1812	+37%
10–49 acres	7031	7337	+306	+4%
50–139 acres	3967	3246	-721	-18%
140–259 acres	2519	1936	-583	-23%
260–999 acres	3920	3371	-549	-14%
1000–1999 acres	1308	1160	-148	-11%
2000–5000 acres or more	1210	1273	+63	+5%
All Farms	24,816	24,996	+180	+1%

Source: 2017 Census of Agriculture, United States Department of Agriculture, National Agriculture Statistics Service

opportunity for Idahoans to source many different food products from local producers. While Idaho is known for its abundant production of cereal grains, potatoes, dairy, and livestock, it also has a growing organic farming industry and a vibrant, small, and diversified farming and ranching sector. Indeed, between 2012 and 2017, the number of Idaho farms under 10 acres increased by 37%, while the number of farms between 1000 and 1999 acres declined by 11% (Table 1).

As the number of small farms have increased, so have the number of farmers markets, farm-to-table restaurants, and retailers selling local food and farm products. Yet the mountainous landscape and rural geography of Idaho limit the ease of local food distribution, as well as cost-effective local processing. Structural, political, and social factors additionally contribute to inequitable food access and distribution. The local food market is not necessarily affordable or accessible for all consumers. Therefore, Idaho has an opportunity to expand the availability, access, and affordability of the abundance of local food produced within the state. The state’s prospects

are driving the development of community-based food coalitions, inspiring them to strengthen local food systems and make local food more equitable for and available to all community members.

## The Guide

### Food Coalition or Food-Policy Council?

Local food collaborative efforts can go by several names depending on their mission and unique sociocultural and geographic area. A **food coalition** is an alliance of organizations and individuals in the food system who come together to achieve a common vision, purpose, or goal. Generally, the effort affects change across multiple food-system sectors, which strengthens the community system’s resiliency. A **food-policy council** is a group of stakeholders from the food system that develops strategies (policy) that create both a forum for food issues and a platform for coordinated change (Winne 2016).

Food policy describes the laws and regulations that inform how, why, and when food is produced, transported, distributed, and disposed. Food-policy councils can influence guidelines that govern equity, access, health, and sustainability. Like food coalitions, they also coordinate the efforts of food-system stakeholders within a specific geography or jurisdiction. Both food coalitions and councils are comprised of representatives from multiple food-system sectors, including security, hunger relief, health, education, natural resources, farming and ranching, and others (Figure 1).

How a group self-identifies, such as whether they call themselves a coalition, council, network, or collaborative, is an important distinction that ultimately affects its goals, actions, and perceptions (Figure 2). Many food-system groups in Idaho focus on education, networking, and relationship-building across the food system and seek to avoid political divisions. As such, in 2017, most Idaho food groups identified themselves as food coalitions—with one group identifying as a “food policy council” and another as a “network.” Figure 3 shows the eight groups in Idaho we interviewed, with their distinct name choice, logo, and mission statement.



**Figure 1.** Community Food System Sectors. A community food system is a highly complex, dynamic, and adaptive system that includes the people, land, infrastructure, and interdependent processes of food from farm to table to waste management.



**Figure 2.** Food-coalition names, logos, and mission statements are important for conveying the value and purpose of a coalition to a community.



Figure 3. Idaho food-coalition mission and purpose statements.

If you are in the beginning stages of forming a group, consider your short- and long-term goals and mission to guide the naming of your group. For the remainder of this publication, we use “food coalition” as an umbrella term, one that encompasses policy councils, networks, and other forms of community food-system collaborations.

## Why Food Coalitions Form

Most of Idaho’s food coalitions are relatively new and have formed around collaborative events or group initiatives. Many have formed in areas throughout the state where farmers markets, farmer-to-consumer direct-marketing channels, value-added agriculture, and education on buying local products are growing. Other Idaho coalitions have formed in communities with the potential to integrate local food into existing health, elder, and youth education programs.

Food has the unique ability to build a bridge between people of varying backgrounds and upbringings. Across Idaho, food coalitions have formed to strengthen networks, coordination, and collaboration among groups and individuals already working on food-system projects. In rural areas, strength in numbers and sharing resources can create broader impact, reduce duplication of services, and aid organizations that are new or resource-scarce. For example, one Idaho food-coalition leader noted that their organization formed to unite multiple working groups because “there were a lot of other groups that were working on local food issues. We started meeting because we felt like we didn’t want to compete with grant funding.” Another noted that they “look at projects from a very high view—the 30,000 square foot level—to ascertain if a particular issue is missing something that we could provide. We always like to work in partnerships. In fact, we rarely just do something all by ourselves. We’re always working with someone else in an effort to not only meet their goals, but to meet the higher goals of some kind of food-systems work.”

As a community leader, you may decide to help start a food coalition as a means of enhancing the resiliency of your local and regional food system or “foodshed.” Initially, the work of your food coalition may center on a shared project or event (e.g., farm tours, local food and farm guide, food summit, food insecurity and inequity, etc.). If your focus is the link between health and local food, perhaps your group will explore institutional policies that support farm-to-cafeteria initiatives. Your group may also work on land-use issues such as the development of zoning exemptions or allowances for urban agricultural enterprises such as raising backyard chickens or honeybees, installing temporary agriculture structures such as a shed, greenhouse, or hoop house, and/or market garden sales in residential areas.

Coalitions working on joint projects often identify weak links in the food system that are best addressed by institutional and/or government policies. When these situations arise, coalitions can engage in activities that inform local decision makers or request policy changes that strengthen the local food system (Fitzgerald and Morgan 2014). Conversely, beginning with project-based work allows time to

build understanding and relationships between diverse stakeholders. As relationships deepen and a shared vision emerges, the transition to policy-related work can transcend traditional political divisions.

An example of innovative food-system policy was the development of a farm-to-preschool program in south-central Idaho. The Blaine County Food Council, UI Extension, and Idaho Health and Welfare collaborated to develop a pilot program, Farm to Early Care and Education (Farm to ECE), linked to a nationwide effort to address childhood obesity and diabetes. The program brought locally sourced foods, school gardens, and food and agriculture education to preschool-age youth with the aim of forming healthy eating habits at a young age. The program serves as a model for other health districts in the state to adopt for early childhood education.

## Steps for Forming a Food Coalition

The initial idea to form a food coalition or council can arise from a variety of places. In Idaho, groups have arisen from the following scenarios: conversations between colleagues working in the areas of local food, economic development, and small farms; a grant opportunity; a local food or community assessment process; or the initiative of an enthusiastic individual. Elsewhere across the United States, food coalitions have formed in similar ways. However, unique geographic, cultural, sociopolitical, demographic, and environmental factors will ultimately influence a group's goals. For instance, in comparison to food-policy councils in more urban areas of the United States, Idaho coalitions tend to focus less on food policy and more on nonpartisan, collaborative food-system projects—this is why most Idaho groups identify themselves as “coalitions.” Although each Idaho food coalition is unique and different, each intends to create opportunities for networking, education, and resource acquisition to improve local and regional food systems.

One unique example is the West Central Mountains Food Coalition, whose formation was sparked by participating in the America's Best Communities contest, a national competition aimed at inspiring small towns and cities to pursue innovative solutions for revitalization. For this challenge, community

leaders and UI Extension gathered to discuss what makes their community “awesome.” One of the initiatives they agreed on was a food coalition whose goal is to “make food accessible through the cultivation and promotion of local quality producers and products.” A coalition leader elaborated further, saying that their “goal is to strengthen knowledge and networking surrounding the local food system in the West Central Mountains” and to bring “people together . . . and share information.”

Another example of Idaho's coalition diversity is the Teton Food and Farm Coalition, which formed from grassroots meetings in 2016 with chefs, farmers, and eaters initially interested in developing farm-to-table events and a local food directory in Teton Valley. Now facilitated by UI Extension faculty, its leaders have broadened its focus by coordinating local food-system efforts outside the valley proper, in the Teton “foodshed” (Teton Valley, Idaho, and Jackson Hole, Wyoming).

Regardless of what inspires the organization and mission of your group, the first steps should focus on identifying the potential for collaboration and the value of working across food-system sectors; developing initial leadership; building participation; and clearly identifying the organization's purpose.

### *Step 1: Identify Interest in Networking and Collaboration*

The first step in developing a food coalition or council is to identify your community's interest in networking and collaboration around your local food system. Whether you are an individual, group, or organization, exploring your ideas to form a food coalition with community leaders engaged in the food system is a good place to start. You might begin by making a list of all the individual and organizational stakeholders working in different food-system sectors. Then determine who and what organizations might benefit from increased collaboration. Schedule a time to talk with people on your list about the work they are doing, ask them what they need to be more successful, and explore their interest in collaborating with others. Raise the idea of forming a food coalition and gather their input. Take notes!

## Step 2: Explore the Value of Working Together

If your initial conversations indicate there is interest in increased networking and/or collaboration, the next step is to organize an initial meeting. There are numerous resources for running more effective meetings, such as *Robert's Rules of Order* (the most current update available is the 12th edition, 2020); or you could rotate and delegate facilitation duties, like note-taking. Schedule the meeting on a time and day that works best for your invitees. If the majority work in an organization or agency with a Monday–Friday daytime schedule, consider a lunchtime brown-bag meeting or using a free online-scheduling program, such as Doodle.com to set a time that works best. Ask participants to bring a brown-bag lunch and make sure there is ample parking near your meeting location, so participants have ease of access and departure. If you are working primarily with individuals who have nonfood system–related professions, you might consider holding your initial meeting in the evening or on a weekend.

The focus and agenda for the meeting will be informed by the initial conversations that occurred while carrying out step 1. It is important to build an agenda that provides time for participants to introduce themselves and discuss how increased collaboration and/or how a local food coalition or council could benefit their work (Table 2). Often, in these initial meetings the most valuable outcomes for participants include meeting new people and an increased understanding of what type or degree of food-system work is taking place in their community or region.

It is helpful to come into the meeting having identified some potential next steps, such as a date, location, and time for a second meeting. If there is interest in reconvening, the prep work will facilitate a speedy and efficient end to the first one. Provide a sign-in sheet with participants' contact information, so it is easy to follow-up with them. Write-on name tags can be helpful if participants are likely to be meeting for the first time. Be prepared to suggest dates and times to meet again or a process for setting the next date and time. Offer a plan for following-up with participants and sharing notes from the

meeting. Also, make sure to allow time to identify who else ought to be invited to a next meeting. Strive to create inclusivity among age, race, gender, and ethnicity within the group and thoughtfully reach out to those who may be underserved (Figure 4).

## Step 3: Develop Leadership

Forming and incubating a food coalition requires a significant amount of time and energy. In the beginning, leadership is shaped by available human capital and funding—which is often limited. Having initial leaders with strong facilitation skills and who can incorporate coalition work into their day job provides a stable foundation that allows the coalition to focus on meaningful and engaging project work. Indeed, many Idaho coalitions started with a UI Extension educator who organized and facilitated group meetings early on. In other cases, a nonprofit or other community champions are promising as candidates to fill the roles of convener and group leader.

Even when forming a coalition is part of an individual's professional plan of work, it may be difficult for one person to provide all the leadership required. When possible, formation of an initial three to four–person leadership team or steering committee is recommended. The role of that team is

**Table 2.** Sample one-hour initial meeting agenda.

Time	Task
12:00 pm	Welcome and Purpose of the Meeting
12:10	Introductions: name, organization/business, work you do, why you came
12:30	Short presentation summarizing interview findings: the need/interest in networking, increased collaboration, and/or forming a food coalition
12:40	Group discussion
12:50	Round-robin to identify interest in continuing the conversation
12:55	Identify next meeting date/time and who else to invite
1:00 pm	Adjourn

to provide the structure necessary for the group to convene, build relationships, set direction, and build cohesion between food-system sectors.

The leadership team also needs to meet separately from the main group, perhaps by phone or video conference, to plan coalition meetings and set meeting agendas. And, at least initially, it will need to facilitate coalition meetings, take notes, recruit participants, ensure inclusivity, and manage discussions between coalition members and the larger community.

Securing funds for paid leadership may be essential to prevent both membership and leadership burnout and for the long-term sustainability of the coalition. Existing Idaho food coalitions have found that having at least two paid members to share the leadership role is more sustainable than relying on one paid person to lead all efforts. Because coalition members primarily serve on a voluntary basis, having dedicated staff conduct meetings, communicate information among members, and manage group initiatives provides the seamless structure needed to keep volunteers engaged and enthused (volunteer members are often willing and able to lead ad hoc and standing committees). Finding leaders with volunteer management skills is thus a bonus.

#### ***Step 4: Broaden Participation***

Membership is the next important consideration. Engaged and committed human capital is critical to doing the work of food coalitions and councils. One key to success of any food-system group is an open structure that encourages participation across multiple food-system perspectives. Encouraging group participation in meetings may require personal follow-up to invitations and/or hosting special events that raise the visibility of the network or coalition.

As your group evolves, participation can often feel fluid, with a core group of people attending most meetings and a wider number of people participating less consistently. Don't be discouraged—this is okay! Some coalition members may find the most value in receiving meeting notes, following the group on social media, or attending an occasional meeting to share information on an upcoming program or to solicit input on a project. It is important to identify

## MEETING TIPS

Monthly meetings with a consistent day and time work best to keep the movement alive.

Use a consistent agenda template so that members know the general structure of each meeting.

Be clear about meeting priorities and allot ample time for discussion and decision making.

During the summer, many groups reduce the number of meetings to accommodate busy summer schedules.

**Figure 4.** Well-planned and facilitated meetings are essential for keeping community members engaged in a coalition and its work.

how the coalition can support local food-system projects, participant engagement, and to build a model of shared leadership and decision making.

#### ***Step 5: Solidify the Coalition's Purpose and Goals***

Within the first six months to a year of formation, it is important to solidify the group's purpose and value to participants and the wider community. As mentioned before, for some Idaho food coalitions the most impactful goals have been networking and increased awareness of the food-system work that individuals and organizations are undertaking in the region. As conversations continue and relationships are built, the value of the coalition will become clearer. Groups will want to identify a name and develop a purpose or mission statement to inform the larger community about what the group does and why others might want to be involved. Coalition names and purpose statements often include reference to the geographic region being served (Figure 2). Once the coalition has finalized its name and purpose, elevating the visibility of the coalition with a logo or brand can be helpful.



## Coalition Funding

Most food-policy councils or coalitions operate on an extremely limited budget for the first few years. Given that their primary purpose is to foster collaboration across the food system, coalitions often utilize a nonprofit fiscal sponsor, rather than becoming an independent nonprofit organization. With a nonprofit fiscal sponsor, coalitions can receive donations and apply for grant funding. It is not uncommon for Idaho coalitions to operate for one to two years before seeking funding to support collaborative projects.

While a small budget does not necessarily inhibit a coalition's growth and impact, the amount of funding likely determines the number of programs offered and initiatives pursued. Food coalitions generally need to pursue multiple funding streams to support their work. Sources of funds might include corporate and organizational sponsorships, cash and in-kind donations, government grants, and private foundations. Other income sources include membership fees and income from coalition-created products, services, and events.

At times, organizations participating in the coalition, such as Extension, tribal programs, and nonprofits, provide paid support for the coalition through staff, internships, or hosting of an AmeriCorps VISTA member. Interns and AmeriCorps VISTA members can take on a variety of roles to support the coalition—from membership recruitment at community events to creating a food directory, managing a farmers market, or organizing and taking notes at meetings.

Idaho food councils and coalitions have also identified that partnering with other community groups helps funds go further. This is true when Idaho groups pursue local grants—collaborating with other community groups rather than competing for the same grant has proven to be successful in these smaller communities.

## The First Few Years

One thing that newly formed Idaho food groups have in common is an early period of evolution, when they define and often redefine group structure, coordination, and leadership. It is not uncommon for the early stages of organization to be a multiyear

process, before getting to the stage of conducting programs, shaping policy, and evaluating community impact. Although members and leaders are often excited to tackle issues and make changes in their community, these early stages are best spent securing sound leadership necessary for making the group sustainable over the long-term. Developing effective leadership affects the direction of projects or activities, problem solving, meeting management, communication, and the ability to mobilize actions (Moore and Rudd 2004).

Many of Idaho's food coalitions still feel relatively "young," even five years after inception. In the case of the PCFC, one of Idaho's oldest food coalitions, leaders still define their group as "in-process." The PCFC has experienced ebbs and flows in participation, equated to changes in leadership, members, and priorities. All of this is normal. Enthusiasm and the mission of the group are shaped by both the leaders and the members. As people join and leave a coalition, the group needs to continually review their mission, goals, and capacity. Focusing on mission and *SMART goals* helps the coalition prioritize its activities, engage members and volunteers, and achieve measurable results.

Setting *SMART goals* allows good ideas to become attainable outcomes. A goal is considered SMART if it is:

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**ttainable
- **R**elevant
- **T**ime-based

## Taking Action

Food councils and coalitions conduct activities that generally fall into four functions:

- Serve as a forum for discussing and providing education about local food issues.
- Coordinate and foster connections between different sectors and groups within the food system.
- Help to identify and develop programs and initiatives.
- Inform local food-system policy.

## Impact Story: Funding the Palouse-Clearwater Food Summit



**Figure 5.** Volunteers attending the Palouse-Clearwater Food Coalition's Annual Food Summit.

The Palouse-Clearwater Food Coalition (PCFC), established in 2011, serves a rural, nine-county region of north-central Idaho and southeast Washington. This region is defined geographically by the fertile loess hills of the Palouse and the Clearwater River drainage, traditional homelands of the Coeur d'Alene, Nez Perce, and Palouse tribes. The coalition's goal is to strengthen the health and vibrancy of the Palouse-Clearwater food system and increase the production, distribution, and consumption of locally grown food and agricultural products.

PCFC's annual one-day food summit (Figure 5) is the coalition's major initiative and brings

together over one hundred community members working in local food systems. Each year, PCFC members use previous summit evaluations and current issues to identify the food summit theme and brainstorm potential speakers during spring coalition meetings. Special attention is given to representing the diversity of the regional food system and honoring and including presenters from Native American tribes whose traditional lands are encompassed by the Palouse-Clearwater region. By early summer, the planning of the summit is handed over to an 8–10-person planning committee that finalizes the summit agenda, invites speakers, recruits volunteers, and solicits cash and in-kind donations.

The total cash budget for the event is about \$5,000. Approximately half of the food summit funding comes from corporate and organizational sponsorships and half from sliding scale registration fees ranging from \$15 to \$200 per person. Local businesses provide in-kind support such as lodging for keynote speakers and donated refreshments. The cash sponsorships and the optional higher per-person registrations help offset food summit expenses, allowing for low general registration fees, full scholarships for people with limited incomes, and a local, seasonal meal. Food summit evaluations reveal that annually held events increase participants' understanding of the regional food system, inspire new food-systems initiatives, and foster new relationships among food-system practitioners.

By just meeting, your group is already on its way to providing an important function in your community. Beyond meetings, there are endless examples of ways in which your group can conduct these four functions. Table 3 highlights examples of activities that Idaho food coalitions have undertaken to educate the community about local food, support local farmers, raise money for program initiatives or support staff, promote a community presence, and influence policy.

### Internal and External Communication

Communication is key to maintaining and growing interest and involvement in your coalition. This

includes internal communication between coalition members at and between coalition meetings, as well as external communication with stakeholders and other interested parties within your region. At coalition meetings, open and respectful communication are paramount to building the group's integrity. Having a trained meeting facilitator is extremely helpful. The majority of Idaho food coalitions look to Extension to provide this service. Differing opinions, and at times conflict, are inherent to this work. Thus, it is important for coalition leadership to foster healthy debate while working toward agreement. Diversity of perspectives and experiences are the strengths of coalition work.

**Table 3.** Examples of actions taken by Idaho food coalitions.

<b>Educational Events</b>
Annual Food Summit
Book clubs and film series
Youth farmers market camp
Free community events featuring local producer panels
Cooking classes
Annual fall networking dinner
Seed exchange party
Hosting a website, Facebook page, and/or email newsletter
<b>Policy-Related Work</b>
Assist city council in planning a farmers market location, its permitting, and any signage
Conduct a community food assessment
Develop a pilot farm-to-day care program to guide statewide early care and education curriculum
<b>Increase Access to Locally Produced Food</b>
Create a food and farm directory
Create and manage a community garden
Coordinate a farmers market

Agendas need to be designed to allow ample time for discussion and group decision making.

Initial internal communications between meetings may be as simple as a large group email to meeting participants regarding meeting dates and times, agendas, and notes. As the coalition expands, such emails often become unwieldy and interested persons may be inadvertently left off emails or excluded from replies. At this point, many Idaho food coalitions have established an email Listserve or Facebook group hosted by a leadership team member (example: <https://www.facebook.com/treasurevalleyfoodcoalition/>). To limit the number of emails sent to their Listserve, the PCFC partners with UI Extension to host a bimonthly e-newsletter that highlights upcoming community programs and local and national resources and includes a food-system community calendar.

External communication of the coalition's purpose and activities is also important. Most Idaho food

coalitions employ diverse external communication strategies. In some communities, the most effective way to raise awareness is through print media, posters, organizational newsletters, and/or radio coverage. For others, it may be the use of social media, especially Facebook. Over time, a coalition may decide to expand its visibility and social media presence by creating a website (example: <http://wcmfoodcoalition.com/>) or adding an Instagram account. When this happens, it is important to be clear about the expectations and responsibilities assumed as a communications host. One option for sharing communication responsibilities is for the leadership team to develop a simple communication plan that clearly identifies the purpose of each communication platform, how hosting fees will be paid, who manages the platform, how often communications are sent, and who develops the content.

## Measuring and Communicating Your Coalition's Impacts

Understanding the impact of your coalition and its activities can be important for measuring your group's progress and how well it is fulfilling its mission. The amount of time and energy dedicated to measuring impacts varies depending upon the skills and resources available. However, without evaluation it may be difficult to continue to move forward effectively, respond to community needs, and improve your overall ability to positively impact your local food system.

One of the most useful ways coalitions can measure their short-term impacts is to implement post event evaluations (Figure 6). Generally, one page or less in length, feedback helps coalitions to understand the impact of their events—especially for how well it has improved participants' knowledge and understanding of the food system, expanded their connections and contacts, and strengthened their motivation to take future action. Post event evaluations are also an opportunity to ask participants about other topics they would like to learn about, skills they want to develop, and preferred places, times, and formats for future programs.



# FOOD SUMMIT 2019

## Resilience and Regeneration

January 25, 2019 | Latah County Fairgrounds & Events Center, Moscow ID

### -- EVALUATION FORM --

Thank you for giving us feedback about your experience and participation in the Food Summit.

Feel free to use the back of this page for longer responses.

**Gaining New Knowledge:** Has your knowledge increased in relation to the following? Rate from 1 – 5; with 1 being “no change” and 5 being “increased a great deal”. (circle one)

Crop & specialty food production in our region	1	2	3	4	5
The power of storytelling to inspire action	1	2	3	4	5
Ways local food builds community connections	1	2	3	4	5
Ways food assessments inform community action	1	2	3	4	5
Ways stories build understanding & relationships	1	2	3	4	5
Opportunities to bolster our local food system	1	2	3	4	5

**Making Connections:** (circle one)

Increased my opportunities to network with others:	YES	NO	N/A
I made beneficial connections during the food summit:	YES	NO	N/A

**Future Involvement:** (circle one)

I will continue to work on projects that will benefit / strengthen our regional food system.

Highly likely      Likely      Not very likely      N/A

I will attend a future Food Summit to keep updated on food systems related activities.

Highly likely      Likely      Not very likely      N/A

I will commit to/ continue being part of a food coalition, group or council in my region.

Highly likely      Likely      Not very likely      N/A

I will become a member /renew my membership with the Palouse-Clearwater Food Coalition and pledge to make a difference (see [www.pcfoodcoalition.org/membership](http://www.pcfoodcoalition.org/membership) for pledge ideas)

Highly likely      Likely      Not very likely      N/A

Figure 6. The Palouse-Clearwater Food Coalition uses event evaluations to measure short-term outcomes and identify future priorities.

# Impact Story: Teton Food and Farm Coalition Ripple Effects

## Mapping Evaluation

The Teton Food and Farm Coalition (TFFC) formed as result of numerous grassroots meetings that began in 2016 with chefs, farmers, and others initially interested in hosting farm-to-table events and compiling a local food directory in Teton Valley, Idaho. Since then, the organization has broadened its efforts by including the Teton “foodshed” (Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and Teton Valley, Idaho). The expansion thus links their regional efforts with food coalitions and policy councils throughout Wyoming and Idaho. As a coalition of like-minded businesses, farmers/ranchers, nonprofits, and other individuals, there is strength in numbers—leading to positive social and economic capital.

In October 2018, the coalition’s core leadership and representatives from the main partnership organizations conducted a Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) evaluation, followed immediately by a strategic planning session. REM evaluation is a group process that brings together participants to discuss the positive effects of a program through the process of storytelling and conversation. The motivation for using an REM evaluation is to articulate the positive ripple effects of a group’s formation, partnerships, and projects. TFFC’s use of REM was also the first formal evaluation of the coalition. Additionally, due to the fluid and unilateral leadership structure, the young group used REM evaluation to create a strategic plan aimed at reenergizing and reengaging group members.

REM results identified numerous ripple effects from coalition activities, most notably, an increase in awareness of local food-system activities and increased collaboration among nonprofits and government organizations (Figure 7). For example, several local nonprofit organizations now hold farm-to-table fundraiser events utilizing locally grown produce, bread, dairy, and meat products. A local food directory was also developed for the region. Farmers and nonprofit organizations thus collaborate more by creating new avenues for farmers to direct-market their goods to consumers. Lastly, national and local grant applications were created over a two-year period. Overall, REM provided a positive venue to identify ripples that wouldn’t have been captured in a traditional paper or online survey. Following the REM session, participants were energized to tackle new strategic planning goals and activities (Figure 8).

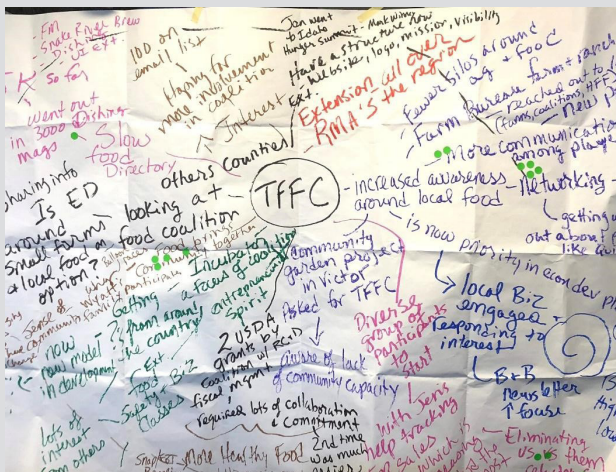


Figure 7. The initial REM evaluation notes taken by the TFFC.



Figure 8. TFFC members participate in the 2018 REM evaluation at the UI Extension office in Teton County.

## Conclusion

For many Idaho food coalitions, creating change on the policy level is a long-term goal (Figure 9). While there is no single ideal model for a food coalition's structure, leadership, and programming, many groups starting out in Idaho initially find energy and engagement in their work by tackling feasible projects that can be accomplished in their local community. With primarily volunteer membership and a diversity of political views, food-system policy is usually not prioritized in the early stages. As coalitions grow and evolve, however, consensus around issues may lead to the group deciding to actively inform local, regional, or state policy makers.

In 2017, there was a broad consensus among leadership of existing Idaho food coalitions that a statewide "Idaho Food Coalition" would be beneficial to not only increase communication and networking opportunities, but to also tackle Idaho statewide policies that directly impact the sustainability and resiliency of local food systems. For instance, a statewide food coalition could coordinate efforts to implement policies that are more inclusive and equitable for underserved, marginalized, and minority Idahoans. Additionally, a statewide coalition could help address the shared challenges of food-access and -distribution networks, access to livestock and poultry processing, and support for farm-to-school and other procurement initiatives.

Developing a statewide food coalition will require creating and managing regular networking opportunities such as email Listserves, social media platforms, monthly or quarterly coalition-leadership online meetings or conference calls, and annual/biennial in-person meetings, conferences, or food summits. With intentional leadership and the right champions or coordinators guiding the statewide group, the opportunities are vast and promising



Figure 9. Summing it all up: a food-coalition checklist.

given Idaho's growing interest in local food systems and food security. With a network of food-system professionals already working on statewide educational programs, UI Extension is a resource for initial meetings facilitation, mentorships, and leadership as coalitions form and grow. If food policy and other similar advocacy work become a priority, food coalitions will benefit from governance by a nonprofit organization or trade associations that emphasize local or regional food and agriculture issues. Using this publication to develop more Idaho coalitions and councils is a pivotal step toward supporting food systems and informing food policy at the state level in Idaho.

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