



FOOD TO BANK ON 2021 -- INTRODUCTION

***Note: the following is a description of the program as it has been run in the past. Due to COVID-19, there will likely be changes such as online workshops, webinars, and other accommodations to keep participants and staff safe. Changes will be based on Health Department recommendations as conditions change. ***

Thank you for your interest in participating in Food to Bank On, a beginning farmer business training project organized by Sustainable Connections' Food & Farming Program. Please take a moment to review the following description to see if Food to Bank On is a good fit for you and your farm.

Food to Bank On serves to grow successful new farms in Whatcom County that will feed our community long into the future. Participating farms receive market support, business planning training, farming workshops, and mentorship while they supply fresh food to Whatcom County's hungry. Food to Bank On supports new, innovative, sustainable farms in developing economically-viable, locally-based, environmentally-sound enterprises that are responsive to the needs of our community. Beginning farms benefit from the project's services for three years as they grow their business. 2021 will be the 17th season of Food to Bank On!

There will be 8 beginning farmers continuing in the project this year, and we are seeking 3-4 new farms to join the project in 2021 season. Workshops run January through April.*

BENEFITS & SERVICES FOR PARTICIPATING BEGINNING FARMS:

TRAINING:

- **Farmers receive support in creating & revising business plans** through bi-monthly cohort meetings from January-April. Most meetings are potlucks at various farmers' homes with a mentor farmer and/or business expert presenting on the topic. Examples of topics include: strategic business planning, online marketing and brand development, cash flow and budgeting, insurance and taxes, farm efficiency and record keeping, and more.*
- **Access to regional agricultural information, news and resources** through Sustainable Connections' Food & Farming Program's staff, regular email updates, member-to-member communications, and valuable resources for farms on our website and Whatcom Farmers' listserv.
- **Food to Bank On Education Fund** for beginning farmers to attend workshops, trainings, and conferences, and to make farm specific educational purchases (books, subscriptions, workshops, etc.) that are valuable to the development of their businesses.

MENTORSHIP:

- **Each beginning farmer is paired with an experienced mentor farmer** of their choice who is available throughout the season for questions and exchanging farm visits. This along with the peer cohort experience has proven to be one of the most valuable components of the project, as participants learn a huge amount from Food to Bank On's very skilled and generous mentor farmers. Our 2020 mentor farmers included:
 - Mike Finger of Cedarville Farm
 - Tom Thornton of Cloud Mountain Farm Center
 - Roslyn McNicholl of Rabbit Fields Farm
 - Anna Martin of Osprey Hill Farm
 - Melissa Moeller of Misty Meadows Farm

- Harley & Susan Soltes of Bow Hill Blueberries

If you have a specific Farmer in the area that would suit your needs best, please let us know. We're happy to reach out about mentorship for Food to Bank On.

MARKET SUPPORT:

- **We pay farmers wholesale prices to grow food for a partner food bank or hunger relief agency of their choosing.** In 2021 Sustainable Connections will reimburse \$1200 of donations from each farm to hunger relief agencies in Whatcom and Skagit counties. The food banks, shelters & soup kitchens are substantial and consistent customers, though they are not intended to be a farm's *only* customer or form of income for the season. We provide guidelines to be followed on industry standards, use the Community Food Co-op's wholesale prices, and ask beginning farms to give us a well-considered projection of the season's deliveries (crops, quantities, dates, and probable invoice amounts) prior to the season's start. This provides the baseline for a valuable learning experience.
- **Farmers can connect with new markets** through free access to the resources of Sustainable Connections' Food & Farming Program, including free listing in the Whatcom Food & Farm Finder and many other opportunities.
- **Beginning farmers are featured in media, print publications, and marketing tools** in connection with the Food to Bank On project, bringing exposure to both the project and individual farms.

RESPONSIBILITIES & AGREEMENTS OF PARTICIPATING BEGINNING FARMS:

- Full and timely participation in Food to Bank On, with attendance of at least 6 out of 8 trainings and meetings throughout the year. Meetings are held every other Tuesday evening from January through April from 5:30-8:30pm.*
- Timely completion and submission of project assignments associated with business planning workshops.
- Submit and present an updated farm business plan each April, reflecting changes in products & markets targeted. This completed plan is required to receive payments for food bank deliveries.
- Proactive, respectful use of your mentor farmer within the parameters of your individualized agreement. This will include exchanging site visits with a mentor farmer over the course of the program.
- Good faith effort to deliver to food banks according to schedule to the very best of your ability.
- Obtain or maintain a business license
- Provide input and feedback on the project and its direction through an annual project evaluation
- Maintain a collaborative, friendly and open-minded attitude of sharing and learning!
- Produce food sustainably and in accordance with the Organic regulations (see next section).

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE & ORGANIC CROP PRODUCTION

Sustainable Connections and the Food to Bank On project promote a strong commitment to environmentally, economically and socially sustainable agricultural practices. Therefore, **all beginning Food to Bank On farms must be committed to following the guidelines of organic agriculture**, though certification will not be required. We recognize that "Organic" alone does not encompass all elements of sustainable farming, but it is one essential component. Please review the description below of "Organic crop production" to ensure that your operation can and will meet each of these requirements, and be able to verify your use of them. Sustainable Connections is not an enforcing agency, so we rely on your good-faith promise to abide by these Organic standards.

***Organic crop production** is a farming system that is managed in accordance with National Organic Standards in response to site-specific conditions. An organic farm integrates cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that foster the cycling of resources, promote ecological balance and conserve biodiversity. Organic crop production standards require:*

- The use of **organic seeds** when commercially available.
- Use of **organic seedlings and transplants** for annual crops.

- Soil-building **crop rotation** and the use of **cover crops**.
- **Conservation measures** and practices that enhance or maintain a farm's natural resources.
- **Environmentally sound weed, disease, and pest management practices**.
- Harvest and packing practices that **prevent co-mingling with or contamination** by prohibited materials.
- Maintenance of **buffer zones**, depending on risk of contamination.
- The use only of **approved materials** for organic production. These can be listed by the WSDA or the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI)
- Verification that **no prohibited materials** or practices were applied to a site for at least 36-months prior to certification (no synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, or GMOs) prior to harvest of the first certified organic crop. **No residues** of prohibited substances exceeding 5% of the EPA tolerance.
- Restrictions on use of raw manure and compost, and **no sewage sludge or irradiation**.
- **No use of genetically engineered organisms** (GMOs).
- A **record-keeping system** that clearly describes all practices being implemented on the farm.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Food to Bank On aims to provide support where it will have the most impact and effect, with farms that show the greatest promise for success, need of support, and potential to fulfill a recognized need in the local food system. To this end, our advisory committee of mentor farmers will review and accept applications according to the following criteria:

- Demonstrated serious **commitment** to a future and livelihood in agriculture in Whatcom County
- Commitment to sustainable farming practices, following **Organic crop production** requirements
- Viable plan to target a **new market**, a sufficiently growing market, and/or fill a **new product niche**
- Minimum of **1 year agricultural experience**
- Farmers must have a **viable plan for a starting a new farm or own a farm** they've operated for no more than 3 years
- Commitment to obtaining a **business license**

If this sounds like a good fit for the evolution of your farming enterprise, please fill out the attached application in as much detail as possible. Applications are **DUE Thursday October 15, 2020**. Please email or postmark by the deadline. Applications can be emailed to alex@sustainableconnections.org or mailed to 1701 Ellis St. # 221, Bellingham 98225. Feel free to contact us with any questions or clarifications!

Thank you for your interest and all the best to you!

Cheers,



Sara Southerland
Food & Farming Program Director



Alex Smith
Food & Farming Outreach Coordinator

**Workshops and in-person interactions are subject to change based on Health Department regulations*



FOOD TO BANK ON 2021 - APPLICATION

We recognize that farm plans are a work in progress, and by nature Food to Bank On applicants are near the beginning of the process. This application is meant to help applicants carefully consider their agricultural vision, the resources they bring to bear, and additional needs they will have, to increase the likelihood of success in a demanding occupation. Please give as complete information as is known to date. Add additional lines or pages as needed.

Applications are DUE Thursday, October 15, 2020. Please email or postmark by the deadline. Applications can be emailed to alex@sustainableconnections.org or mailed to 1701 Ellis St. # 221, Bellingham 98225.

BACKGROUND

Name of farmer:
Name of farm:
Address:
Phone & fax:
Email & website:
Describe your background and interest in agriculture:
Summarize your current (or proposed) farming enterprise:
Number of years in operation as an owner/manager, or proposed start date:

SUSTAINABLE FARMING PRACTICES

Please describe your commitment to Organic and sustainable farming practices:

Will you pursue Organic or other certifications?

BUSINESS, MARKETING & FINANCES

Describe your background in business:

On what basis do you feel that your farm is a viable business opportunity?

What and where specifically are your target markets? Who are your target customers?

How do you see your choices of products and markets affecting other farmers? How do you intend to ensure that your farm is filling niche markets and strengthening the community rather than causing harmful competition?

Budget: Please briefly outline your financial strategy, including estimated expenses and income: (this will only be reviewed by staff of Sustainable Connections and our advisory committee)

Will you be relying solely on farm income? Describe your other employment (if any), and any foreseeable time conflicts - how you plan to overcome them:

Do you have a business plan? Are you interested in creating and using a business plan with support and guidance from peer beginning farmers and mentors?

RESOURCE INFORMATION

LAND AVAILABLE & NEEDED (acres in cultivation, additional acres available, soil tilth, etc):

INFRASTRUCTURE AVAILABLE & NEEDED (outbuildings, greenhouses, storage):

WATER SYSTEMS & WATER RIGHTS AVAILABLE & NEEDED:

EQUIPMENT & TOOLS AVAILABLE & NEEDED:

LABOR AVAILABLE & NEEDED (please be as specific as possible for current and projected future needs):

PERMITS/PROCESSING AVAILABLE & NEEDED (do you need a food processing permit, or an outside facility to process your product to provide it legally?):

FOOD TO BANK ON

How did you hear about Food To Bank On?

Why are you interested in the project? What part of the Food To Bank On project do you anticipate being the most valuable?

Workshops will likely be Tuesdays from 6-7:30pm, Jan-Apr. Can you commit to attending all these workshops?

Are there any *specific* training, topics, mentoring, or other assistance you hope to receive through involvement with Food To Bank On & Sustainable Connections?

Are you interested in becoming more connected with the community of local farmers? How and why?

Are you aware of the public face of the project and willing to have your enterprise represented as a Food To Bank On participant?

THE FUTURE

Do you anticipate participating in Food To Bank On for the full 3 seasons of the project?

Would you be interested in mentoring beginning farmers after you graduate?

Food to Bank On relies on the generosity of mentors, teachers, donors and participants. How do you foresee “passing on the gift” of your experience as a Food to Bank On participant? (A few examples: offering to become a mentor farmer, organizing/presenting workshops to other beginning farmers, giving to the food bank or families in need after you graduate, giving away cuttings/seeds/baby animals to new farmers, etc.)

Ten or twenty years in the future, what do you see yourself doing? What role do you see farming playing in the greater scheme of your life?

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