

Highlights from the
**2007-2010 Columbia River Gorge
Community Food Assessment**



**Covering: Klickitat and Skamania Counties in Washington State, and
Hood River, Sherman, and Wasco Counties in Oregon.**

Gorge Grown Food Network partnered with the following organizations to conduct this assessment:

Klickitat and Skamania Counties:

Klickitat County Health Department, Klickitat County WSU Extension, Skamania County WSU Extension, Mid-Columbia Children's Council, Oregon Food Bank, and the WSU Horizons Program, and Crossroads Resource Center

Wasco and Sherman Counties:

Wy'East Resource Conservation & Development, Mid-Columbia Community Action Council, North Central Public Health District, Sherman County Commission on Children and Families, Sherman County Senior Center, the Oregon Department of Human Services, Wasco County OSU Extension, Mid-Columbia Medical Center, North Wasco County Commission on Children and Families, Mid-Columbia Senior Center, Oregon Food Bank, the City of Maupin, and Crossroads Resource Center

Hood River County:

Hood River County OSU Extension, Hood River County Health Department, the Oregon Department of Human Services, FISH Food Bank, Soul Café, Mid-Columbia Community Action Council, The Next Door, Inc. / Nuestra Comunidad Sana, Hood River County Commission on Children and Families, Oregon Food Bank, and Crossroads Resource Center

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Why Food and Farms?

Drive in any direction along the Columbia River in Oregon or Washington – north, south, east, west - and you're bound to see acre upon acre of agricultural land. The Columbia River Gorge Region produces a diverse bounty of food, including orchard fruits, grains, livestock, vegetables, and more. Much of the region's land base is devoted to agriculture, and farms, ranches, and the businesses that serve them are a primary driver of the regional economy.

Yet every day, some Gorge residents go hungry. Others are forced to make the choice between healthy food for their families and rent, medical bills, and other expenses. More residents than ever are accessing local food banks as supermarket prices rise along with the cost of living.

This is not a scene seen only in the Gorge. For the last 50 years, the US agricultural system has been dominated by international interests as our rural communities and local infrastructure have suffered. Family farmers and small food processors have found it increasingly difficult to make a living growing and selling real, fresh, healthy food, even as federal subsidies rendered some food products – highly processed ones made from commodity crops – artificially cheap. A family can purchase a six-pack of soda for less than the price of a pound of fresh, healthy, local cherries.

Where does the food we grow go? And how can we ensure everyone who lives here has access to the food they need? Most of us know very little about where our food comes from, and much less about how it was grown, packed, sold or shipped to the store. But food is a basic human need and a major economic driver in our community.

It is time to take a serious look at our local food system and find out how we can make things better: how we can reduce hunger, improve health and nutrition, and strengthen our regional economy.

What is a Community Food Assessment (CFA)?

A CFA is a collaborative, participatory project that takes a big picture look at our food system in all its parts – production, distribution, consumption – so we can learn how it works and how to improve our food and farms. It shows what our most pressing needs are, as well as the key community assets on which to build. It is a resource and an organizing tool. Actions identified in this CFA approach issues of real need in Columbia Gorge communities, and the information gathered here helps make that case.

Goals

This purpose guided our work: *to identify both resources and needs in the community surrounding food security, agriculture, and health, and to ultimately improve access to locally grown food, especially for people with low and moderate incomes.*

Financial Support

This project was supported financially by the generosity of the following organizational partners and grants:

- Gorge Grown Food Network, Oregon Food Bank, Wy'East Resource Conservation & Development Council, Klickitat County Health Department
- Community Food Projects Program of the USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, *Planning Grant # 2007-33800-18520*

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Growing Food: Farms, Ranches and Local Markets for Local Produce

The Columbia River Gorge region is known for its agricultural character and heritage. In addition to its famous mountains, rivers, and spectacular natural scenery, a drive in any direction through the Gorge takes one past fruit-laden orchards, waving golden wheat, cows and calves on open range, neat rows of vegetables, and much more. Agriculture is a significant regional economic driver, totaling over \$281 million in gross sales in 2007.* The region's farms received \$18.4 million in government payments. Farms and the businesses that serve them make up a substantial portion of the region's employment base, and the majority of farms in the region are family-owned. The average age of a Gorge farmer is 56.3, just below the national average of 57.1.

Family-owned farms come in many different sizes in the region – the eastern Gorge farms are larger, reflecting their primary crops: grains (wheat, barley) and beef cattle. Both of these types of operations require large acreage for production. In the western Gorge, smaller parcels dominate, with blocks of orchard fruit trees and grapes comprising much of the agricultural acreage. Certain portions of the Gorge are more agriculturally-focused than others; while Hood River, Wasco, Sherman, and Klickitat Counties all had from \$31 - \$100 million in agricultural sales, Skamania County, which has most of its land area in National Forest lands, had only \$2.6 million in sales. A substantial portion – 74% -- of farms in the Gorge region reported sales of less than \$50,000 in 2007, and 88% of farms reported less than \$250,000 in sales in 2007.

The region's farm production expenses in 2007 totaled just over \$249 million, for a regional net income of \$32.5 million. 2007 was a good year for many of the region's commodity crops; not all years fare so well for the region. Examining Bureau of Economic Analysis figures from 1977-2006, the region's farms average \$234 million per year in cash receipts and report \$254 million per year in farm production expenses – an annual loss of \$20 million. Farmers and ranchers earn another \$23 million per year of farm-related income — primarily custom work, and rental income (30-year average for 1977-2006). This underscores the difficulty producers face in making a living farming; additional sources of income, be they farm-based or second jobs, are an important part of staying financially viable for many of the region's farmers and ranchers. Only 49% of farm principal operators in the Gorge list farming as their primary occupation.

Unlike many parts of the country, the Gorge is actually seeing an increase in the number of farms – the region saw a 15% increase in the number of farms from 2002 to 2007. However, at the same time, the amount of actual land in farms decreased modestly across the region, as did the average farm size.

The region's unique climate, spanning near-rainforest rainfalls to the west and near-desert aridity to the east, allows for a wide range of crops and farm products. The challenge for the Gorge is in getting these crops to market. The vast majority of crops produced here are commodity products, destined for national and international markets via wholesale channels. Growers' wheat co-ops and cooperative fruit packing houses are the primary channels through which the region's top two agricultural products are sold and then shipped. However, in addition to these high volume sales areas, many area farmers also produce crops for local markets: orchard fruit for fresh eating, grains for flour milling, fresh vegetables, cut flowers, and free ranging cattle, pigs, poultry, and other meat animals.

Across the nation, the percent of farm products sold direct to consumer – the USDA Census of Agriculture's closest proxy to measuring "local" sales – is only 0.4% of gross farm receipts. In the Gorge, the percentage is 0.8% - a small amount, but one that is twice the national average.

* 2007 is the most recent agricultural data available from the USDA Census of Agriculture.

Hood River County Agriculture at a Glance

Hood River Co	Total Sales (millions)	Direct to Consumer Sales	Land in Farms (acres)	Number of Farms	Average Farm Size (acres)
2007	\$100,443,000	\$1,237,000	26,952	553	49

Hood River County is predominantly a fruit-growing county, with over three quarters of its farmland in pears, apples, and cherries. It is the top fruit-growing county in the state of Oregon, and the county's pear crop represents 1/3 of the winter pears eaten in the US. County farmers also report producing hay, wine grapes, vegetables, berries, other tree fruit crops such as peaches and nectarines, poultry/eggs, beef, cut flowers, live plants and bulbs, and seed stock (beans, grains), among other items.

Most of the food grown in the county is destined for national and international markets by way of traditional wholesale markets. County farms were responsible for over \$100 million in sales in 2007 – with \$95.9 million of that in fruit. Another \$2.1 million went into nursery crops, leaving just \$2.4 million for all other crops – including vegetables and livestock. 69% of the county's farms are under 50 acres in size, and 57% of farms sold under \$50,000 worth of products in 2007. Only one in five Hood River County farms sells direct to consumers, bringing in \$1.2 million in sales in 2007; this represents 1.2% of total ag sales in the county.

Wasco County Agriculture at a Glance

Wasco Co	Total Sales (millions)	Direct to Consumer Sales	Land in Farms (acres)	Number of Farms	Average Farm Size (acres)
2007	\$89,862,000	\$432,000	949,462	649	1463

Wasco County has a sizable agricultural sector and is one of the top state producers of sweet cherries (first in Oregon) and wheat (fifth in Oregon). County farmers and ranchers also report producing other grains (barley, triticale), wine grapes, vegetables, berries, other tree fruit crops such as pears, poultry/eggs, beef, pork, cut flowers, live plants and bulbs, and seed stock. Approximately 40% of the county's farms are less than 50 acres in size, and 24% are more than 500 acres.

Most of the food grown in the county is destined for national and international markets. County farms were responsible for just under \$90 million in sales in 2007 – with 66%, or \$59 million, in fruit. Livestock sales accounted for \$10.5 million and grain sales for \$15.8 million. Vegetable sales represented only \$252,000 of farm sales in the county. Only 13% of Wasco County farms sell directly to consumers, bringing in \$432,000 in sales in 2007. That \$432,000 represents slightly less than 0.5% of total agricultural sales in the county.

Sherman County Agriculture at a Glance

Sherman Co	Total Sales (millions)	Direct to Consumer Sales	Land in Farms (acres)	Number of Farms	Average Farm Size (acres)
2007	\$31,749,000	\$81,000	514,004	208	2471

More than 96% of the land in Sherman County is in agricultural use, with the vast majority of that land devoted to grain production and range for cattle. Sherman County ranks third in Oregon for grain production. County farmers also report producing hay, vegetables, tree fruit crops such as cherries, poultry/eggs, beef, pork and lamb. Only 5% of the county's farms are less than 50 acres in size, and 73% are more than 500 acres, reflecting the prevalence of grain and cattle operations.

Most of the food grown in the county is destined for national and international markets. County farms were responsible for more than \$31 million in sales in 2007 — with 93%, or \$29 million, in grain. Livestock sales accounted for \$1.6 million. Only 3% of Sherman County farms sell directly to consumers, generating \$81,000 in sales in 2007. That \$81,000 represents just 0.25% of total agricultural sales in the county.

Klickitat County Agriculture at a Glance

Klickitat Co	Total Sales (millions)	Direct to Consumer Sales	Land in Farms (acres)	Number of Farms	Average Farm Size (acres)
2007	\$57,298,000	\$525,000	601,216	893	673

Klickitat County has a sizable agricultural sector and is in the top third of Washington counties for production of several crops, including grains (wheat and barley), forage, tree fruit, livestock, and grapes (fourth in the state for grapes). County farmers and ranchers also report producing vegetables, berries, poultry/eggs, beef, pork, and live plants. Approximately 65% of the county's farms are less than 50 acres in size and 26% are more than 500 acres.

Most of the food grown in the county is destined for large national and international markets. County farms were responsible for \$57.2 million in sales in 2007 – with 51 percent, or \$29.5 million, in fruit (and nuts). Livestock sales accounted for \$13.4 million and grain sales for \$8.6 million. Only 15 % of Klickitat County farms and ranches sell directly to consumers, bringing in \$525,000 in sales in 2007. That \$525,000 represents just under 1% of total agricultural sales in the county.

Skamania County Agriculture at a Glance

Skamania Co	Total Sales (millions)	Direct to Consumer Sales	Land in Farms (acres)	Number of Farms	Average Farm Size (acres)
2007	\$2,661,000	\$68,000	5,472	123	44

Skamania County has a history as an agricultural community but in recent years has not had as much agricultural activity as its neighbors in Oregon and Washington. The only agriculture sector for which Skamania County is in the top half of state producers is aquaculture. County farmers and ranchers also report producing wine grapes, vegetables, berries, tree fruit crops such as pears, poultry/eggs, beef, pork, cut flowers, and nursery plants. Approximately 45% of the county's farms are less than 50 acres in size. County farms were responsible for \$2.6 million in sales in 2007 – with 33% in fruit. Livestock sales accounted for \$1.6 million. Only 22% of Skamania County farms sell directly to consumers, bringing in \$68,000 in sales in 2007, which represents 2.5% of agricultural sales in the county.

Challenges and Opportunities for Gorge Agriculture

Farmers and ranchers in the Gorge are determined to succeed into the future. In interviews, they report numerous substantial challenges and barriers to success, but also a commitment to working with their peers and partners like Gorge Grown to seek solutions. Top issues in farmer interviews were:

- Difficulty making a living

- Challenge getting crops to market (distribution and marketing)
- Land prices
- Government regulatory issues
- Energy and input costs
- Water rights and shortages
- Labor issues

Difficulty making a living was the top concern among farmers in most counties. As the regional data show, agriculture as an industry is not always profitable in the Gorge, and many farmers have second jobs or spouses with full-time jobs to make ends meet. The other barriers listed above contribute to the difficulty making a living in farming in the region. However, in these challenges lie opportunities to strengthen agriculture and increase farmers’ ability to succeed into the future in the Gorge.

Opportunities to sell farm products direct to local consumers, through farmers’ markets, community supported agriculture, farm stands, and more, are growing at a fast pace across the nation, including here in the Gorge. However, because these opportunities are limited in this rural region, farmers report using 2-5 different direct to market channels, including the above listed channels in addition to online orders, restaurant and caterer sales, and more.

While only 0.8% of farm products in this region are currently sold direct to consumer, this is twice the national average. In addition, direct marketing is growing at a much faster rate than conventional sales methods in both Oregon and Washington. From 1997-2007, Oregon had the fastest-growing rate of growth for direct marketing, 259.1% over 44.1% for other agricultural sales – the greatest increase in the nation. Washington, with the tenth-greatest increase nationally, reported a 163.2% increase over the same time period compared to 37.3% for total agricultural sales.

It would not be feasible for the residents of the Gorge to attempt to consume all – or even a substantial portion – of the crops farmers here grow for national and international markets. The scale of production is far beyond local market capacity to absorb. However, there are opportunities for these producers to identify local channels for some of their harvest, or to develop value-added products for Gorge-wide and Pacific Northwest-wide sales. There is little local or regional market for raw commodities such as wheat or barley, especially given the lack of milling and processing facilities, but there are opportunities for the development of local products, such as flour or animal feed. For this to happen at any scale, we need supply chain infrastructure improvements – distribution, processing, marketing – in the Gorge. Not only would developing this infrastructure help farmers get their crops and value-added products to market, they would create local jobs and keep more dollars in our regional economy.

The potential market value of additional local and regional direct to consumer sales is substantial. Based on the Bureau of Economic Analysis’s estimates of household food purchases, the residents of the Gorge spend \$201.8 million on food each year, including \$118.7 million for home use. The vast majority of these dollars are spent on food that does not come from local sources. There is significant potential to strengthen our local economy with even a modest increase in local and regional food purchases, and an increase in farms growing crops for local markets.

If Gorge residents purchased just 20% of their fresh food – meats, poultry, fish, eggs, fruits, and vegetables – from local sources, the economic impact on the region would be significant:

Potential Value of 20% Local Purchases (in millions)

Product	GORGE	Hood River	Wasco	Sherman	Klickitat	Skamania
Meats, poultry, fish and eggs	\$5.1	\$1.3	\$1.7	\$.14	\$1.3	\$.67
Fruits and vegetables	\$4.5	\$1.1	\$1.5	\$.13	\$1.2	\$.59
TOTAL	\$9.6	\$2.4	\$3.2	\$.27	\$2.5	\$1.26

GROWING FOOD: Recommendation Summary

- Encourage the development of more locally-focused farm and food businesses, and the success and growth of existing operations
 - *Expand and improve producer education and cooperative marketing and networking opportunities to increase farm viability and growth*
 - *Assist beginning and transitioning farmers in securing land on which to operate and start-up capital and materials*
- Develop and improve local markets for local products, including direct to consumer sales opportunities
 - *Strengthen and develop new direct to consumer market outlets, such as farmers' markets*
 - *Identify opportunities for commodity producers to develop products for local direct markets*
 - *Identify potential new locally marketed value-added products appropriate to local producers*
 - *Work with larger buyers, including institutions and businesses, to encourage and aid them in regularly purchasing locally produced farm products*
- Fill in regional supply chain gaps with local businesses and cooperative opportunities for producers
 - *Develop stronger food processing (including value added) infrastructure for products destined for local markets*
 - *Develop stronger food distribution infrastructure, including partnership efforts, for products destined for local and regional markets*

Accessing Food: Food Security, Emergency Food, and Shopping

While the Gorge is a heavily agricultural region, access to food is difficult for many residents. The region's population of over 75,000 is geographically dispersed across over 7,500 square miles, meaning many residents must drive long distances to access a full service grocery store. Others have limited incomes and depend on emergency food pantries to supplement their monthly food budget.

Across the Gorge, 15.1% of residents live below the federal poverty line. These residents struggle to balance housing, utilities, transportation, and health care costs, as well as accessing food for their families.

Poverty Rates in the Columbia River Gorge

Gorge Average	Hood River	Wasco	Sherman	Klickitat	Skamania
15.1%	13.2%	14.6%	15.5%	19.3%	13.1%

Most survey respondents from each county do the majority of their grocery shopping within their county, with the exception of Sherman County (only 11.2% of residents drive less than 25 miles to purchase their groceries). However, because of the rural characteristics of the region, a significant portion of respondents report traveling 26 or more miles to do their shopping, often to a larger grocery store that has lower costs and a greater variety of food. Large grocery stores in The Dalles and Hood River are primary destinations, as are discount grocers in the Portland area.

Distance Driven to Shop by County (Percentage of Survey Respondents)

Distance Driven	Hood River	Wasco	Sherman	Klickitat	Skamania
25 miles or less	86.4%	85.9%	11.2%	73.1%	71.1%
26+ miles	13.6%	14.1%	88.8%	26.9%	28.9%

In addition, residents across the region utilize a wide variety of secondary food sources, including: home gardens, farmers’ markets, farm stands, food pantries, senior centers, hunting, fishing, and convenience stores or gas stations.

Over 90% of respondents to the survey in all five counties report choosing to buy products grown or produced locally some or all of the time when they are available. Lack of availability and cost are the two primary reported barriers to purchasing local products.

When asked what barriers they face accessing the food they need to feed themselves and their families, Gorge residents report *cost* and *time for shopping* as their two biggest issues. While many residents drive long distances to access food, transportation was not as highly ranked as an issue for respondents.

A grocery store assessment was conducted as part of the CFA to better understand the reality of shopping for food in the Gorge, especially for families living at or below the poverty line. The assessment was conducted using the USDA’s Thrifty Food Plan survey, which meets the dietary requirements of a family of four for one week. The assessment revealed that, with some exceptions, rural stores tend to be more expensive and provide less variety of healthy, fresh foods than full service supermarkets located in larger towns. Rural grocery store owners were interviewed as part of this assessment, and the majority of owners report a need for assistance in getting more frequent, affordable delivery service to their stores so as to better serve their customers and offer a wider variety of products. Both small and large grocery stores in the region accept food stamps (SNAP) and benefit from this service.

Below is a table of some of the costs of the Thrifty Food Plan across the region.

Cost of Shopping for Groceries in the Columbia River Gorge (Thrifty Food Plan, One Year)

Highest Cost in Region	\$ 9,372.00
Lowest Cost in Region	\$ 4,567.20
Average Price across Region	\$ 7,671.42

While most residents of the Gorge, and Oregon and Washington, do not need to worry on a regular basis about where their food comes from, many do. As of 2009, approximately 12% of American households reported that they had so little money for food that they worried over how to feed their families and took actions like cutting portions, skipping meals, and serving foods that they knew were less healthy but cost less. These people are considered “food insecure.” When households report a high frequency of these actions, particularly skipping meals, they are considered to have “very low food security.” Our community survey included two questions to address food security in the Gorge:

Skipping Meals in the Columbia River Gorge

	Hood River	Wasco	Sherman	Klickitat	Skamania
% of People Skipping Meals Once a Month or More Because They Can't Afford to Buy Food	12.7%	10.1%	9.2%	7.9%	14.0%
% of People Skipping Meals so That Their Children Can Eat	8.1%	11.6%	11.6%	8.0%	13.4%

** The full USDA Food Security survey includes a broader range of food security-related questions; responses to these two questions are intended to gain an approximation of food insecurity issues in the Gorge*

The figures from these Oregon counties are comparable to the state of Oregon, which has a food insecurity rate of 13.1%. USDA uses a complement of food questions each year to gauge food security across the nation. There is no official tracking of levels of food insecurity by county in Oregon. As of 2008, 17% of Klickitat County residents, the fourth most food insecure county in the state, and 8% of Skamania County residents are considered to be food insecure. Food insecurity across the Gorge is higher among families with children, low-income families, Latinos, and Native Americans in some counties.

Food pantry efforts are often very minimal and limited in the outlying rural regions of the Gorge, with efforts often concentrated in main towns. The following data is from 2008 in Hood River County and 2009 in Wasco and Sherman Counties:

Emergency Food Usage in Oregon Counties

	Individuals served per month	Percent increase in services since 2007
Hood River County	1319	48%
Wasco County	1392	17%
Sherman County	88	25.7%

Data is reported differently across state lines for food pantry usage, which makes five-county comparison difficult. Data collected from the food banks in Washington are total numbers with no distinction made for duplicate individuals or households. In Skamania County, 3,708 food boxes went to households in 2008, with an average of about 300 boxes going out per month. In Klickitat County, the food pantries served almost 10,000 food boxes to 6,799 households, impacting a total of 19,066 individuals in 2008. Over the past few years demand has risen regionally for emergency food, as has the number of repeat customers. A common problem among the food pantries and food banks around the region is the low capacity for storing and stocking fresh produce, making availability irregular and limited for food pantry clients.

Government food assistance programs across the region, including Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or food stamps), and Senior Services would benefit from additional services, including access to fresh, local produce for their cooking and nutrition education classes and the establishment of farmers' markets to allow access to government programs, such as WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program and the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program.

In November 2009, the following statistics about the SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or food stamps) were released:

SNAP in the Columbia River Gorge

County	% of Residents Accessing SNAP (Nov. 2009)	% Increase in SNAP Usage since 2007	Purchasing Power of SNAP (per year)
Hood River	14%	28%	\$2.3 million
Wasco	19%	20%	\$5 million
Sherman	17%	9%	\$320,000
Klickitat	17%	35%	\$2.6 million
Skamania	12%	60%	\$1 million

All counties in the Gorge, with the exception of Sherman County, have seen a significant increase of over 20% of SNAP usage since 2007. Most SNAP clients report having sufficient access to EBT-accepting grocery stores and markets. WIC coupons and food stamp EBT cards are accepted at local farmers' markets in Hood River and Wasco Counties, though there is need to expand these opportunities in

Sherman, Klickitat, and Skamania Counties, where opportunities for SNAP and WIC clients to use their purchasing power for fresh, local products are limited to nonexistent.

ACCESSING FOOD: Recommendation Summary

- Increase amount of fresh local produce available in food pantries, school meal programs, and community meal sites
 - *Coordinate multiple food donation streams to ensure steady and sufficient supply from orchards, farmers' markets, farmstands and home gardens*
 - *Explore opportunity to use the Gorge Grown Food Network truck to pick up and deliver surplus produce and donations in coordination with rural mobile market sites*
- Improve local emergency food infrastructure for increased capacity
 - *Work with communities lacking food pantries (including Maupin, Wishram, and Odell) to seek resources and identify potential sites*
 - *Partner with home gardeners to conduct produce drives*
- Increase sustainability of community meal programs and expand into rural county communities
 - *Work with community groups to increase volunteer initiative and support*
- Support rural food stores to provide a larger quantity of healthy, fresh, and affordable foods
 - *Work with rural grocers to evaluate interest and barriers to sourcing fresh produce*
- Improve current Farmers' Markets outreach and marketing to underrepresented populations and expand the establishment of Farmers' Markets that provide WIC and Senior Nutrition Programs.
 - *Work with market staff and Gorge Grown Food Network to ensure vendors are effectively trained and familiar with the EBT/SNAP program*
 - *Explore financial incentives for low-income residents to access farm direct shopping (including farmers' markets) opportunities*

Food Skills: Cooking, Nutrition, and Gardening

Information on the food skills (cooking, preserving, etc) of families in the Gorge is scarce. Local service providers offering cooking classes do not typically survey their clients on these topics, nor do the national Census or USDA Food Security supplement offer county- or state-level data on food skills. Thus our community food survey included several questions specifically about these skills to get a better picture of what's happening in the region's home kitchens.

On the whole, people across the Gorge report having some food skills: an average of 81.9% of respondents report cooking most or all meals at home, though it is important to note that cooking was not defined in the survey and may include food preparation other than cooking from scratch, including heating frozen food.

An average of 64.9% of respondents in the Gorge cultivate at least a few fruit and vegetable plants; and an average 69.2% report eating fresh fruits and vegetables at least once a day. The reporting of high fruit and

vegetable consumption is higher than comparable state figures for Washington and Oregon, which indicates respondents may be over-reporting, but may also indicate that people understand the importance of fruit and vegetable consumption. In addition, just over half the respondents (an average of 57.5%) self-report that at least half of their food purchases are fresh fruits and vegetables.

Families with gardens eat more fruits and vegetables: an average of 78.1% of Gorge gardeners consume fruits and vegetables at least once a day. 81.8% of families with gardens already share their excess produce with friends and neighbors.

Gardening has a positive impact on food security: the food insecurity of families with gardens in most counties decreased, with the exception of Sherman County, an anomaly which suggests a need for further exploration in that county.

Percent of Gardeners who Skip Meals

County	% Skipping Meals Once a Day because Food is Scarce	% Increase or Decrease in Food Insecurity from Total Survey Population
Hood River	9.1%	-28%
Wasco	5.8%	-43%
Sherman	9.6%	4%
Klickitat	7.0%	-11%
Skamania	9.1%	-35%

Most survey respondents (69.7%) across the Gorge already freeze, dry, can, or smoke food to preserve it; an additional 8.2% want to learn more about how to preserve food. When it comes to cooking, 71.4% of respondents across the region responded yes or maybe when asked if they would be interested in cooking classes featuring fresh food and time-saving tips. The two biggest barriers to cooking at home in the Gorge include not having time to cook and being away from home at meal times for work/school.

There is a limited amount of cooking and preserving education currently offered around the region, mainly available through WSU and OSU Extension, 4-H, Community Education, and for low income households through government food assistance programs such as SNAP-Ed. Cooking classes that address residents' biggest issues, by saving families time and being adapted to on-the-go lifestyles, could benefit Gorge families.

School gardens are starting to appear around the Gorge: 9 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, and 4 high schools have gardens or greenhouses. It is important to mention that efforts are limited in Sherman County, with only one school garden established, and are non-existent in Skamania County, with no school gardens identified as of 2009. Garden coordinators at schools were interviewed, and respondents reported a desire for one of more of the following: more financial and material resources, support from volunteers and the community, better coordination across the region, and additional materials and space.

School gardens could also play an important role in an increase in fruit and vegetable consumption for youth. 4th and 5th graders in Hood River County had a high level of fruit and vegetable consumption (81.3% ate fruits and vegetables at least once a day). That number is substantially higher than data on 8th and 11th graders in The Dalles, who have very low consumption rates (24.5% and 26.1% eat fruits and vegetables once a day or more). In the two Washington counties, fruit and vegetable consumption were not much higher among youth (an average of 29.5% of 8th graders, 19% of 10th graders, and 24.5% of 12th graders eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables per day.) Incomplete data prevents a direct comparison for Hood River or The Dalles children from 4th and 5th grade to 8th and 11th grade.

Community garden efforts are slowly appearing around the Gorge as well, with 13 gardens established in four of the counties. There are currently no known community garden efforts taking place in Sherman County. While most Gorge residents do not currently have plots in community gardens, they report a fair amount of interest in having a plot (12.0%). Community gardens around the region could benefit from the following: better coordination, resource and infrastructure support, shared equipment, increased

technical support for novice gardeners, and volunteer support. There is potential for working with both local churches and county government to find and develop land for additional community garden space across the Gorge. This would be most beneficial for people who would like to plant, but do not own property.

The faith community currently has varying levels of participation in food efforts across the Gorge. Congregations and churches currently involved in food efforts are often active by helping to host and run Senior Potlatch meals, food pantries, general community meal sites, food drives, and community gardens. In general, faith-based organizations could benefit from a more centralized effort to become partners in improving food security around the Gorge.

FOOD SKILLS: Recommendation Summary

- Expand local availability of cooking and nutrition classes
 - *Maintain current cooking and nutrition educational opportunities in the region*
 - *Develop cooking resources and instruction for on-site demonstration at food pantry sites*
- Improve and integrate food skills, nutrition, and self-sufficiency help
 - Make home cooking and preserving resources available in easy to find and utilize places in the region
- Expand and coordinate local gardening resources for home gardeners
 - *Offer gardening education targeted at the demographic of survey respondents who indicated an interest in learning to garden: younger, low income, also interested in gaining other food skills.*
 - *Partner with Master Gardeners and others on management of gardens and development of workshops to maximize space in a garden plot, manage pests, etc.*
 - *Identify additional space and partnership opportunities for community gardens in the region.*
- Work with school gardens to coordinate efforts, share resources, and expand programs
- Work with schools to find additional means of increasing students' exposure to and consumption of fresh food, especially fruits and vegetables
 - *Work with school districts and community stakeholders to access additional food purchasing funding to make it possible to afford, and thus prioritize, local food and improve quality of school meals*
- Centralize and coordinate food and faith efforts among churches
 - *Build a centralized support system for churches doing emergency food outreach*