



“Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”

—World Food Summit, 1996

Program Overview

The Food Security Coalition is a network of over 30 organizations and agencies working to improve equitable access of nutritious food in the Columbia River Gorge. Through increased communication and coordination of member organizations and agencies, and comprehensive inventorying of the local food system, the Coalition seeks to identify and fill gaps in the food system. The outcomes of this initiative will include a comprehensive, regional response to local food access, farm, and nutrition issues.

Project Background

The catalyst of the Coalition’s creation was a 2015 survey conducted by the Columbia Gorge Health Council and One Community Health, which found that *one in three Gorge residents worry about running out of food, and one in five miss meals*. Upon learning of the magnitude of the problem, community organizations throughout the Gorge joined together to bring in Oregon Solutions to help develop a plan of action for the five-county region of Hood River, Klickitat, Sherman, Skamania and Wasco counties. Oregon Solutions is a program of the National Policy Consensus Center which helps to develop solutions to community-based problems through the collaborative efforts of citizens, businesses, government and nonprofit organizations.

Over the course of six months, the Oregon Solutions project team shared their current work, dreams and needs for the food system, identified major gaps in the food system and services, and formalized their commitments to addressing food security in the region. This effort culminated in the signing of a Declaration of Cooperation in November 2016. The program is now staffed by a Program Manager through Gorge Grown Food Network, which was nominated to become the backbone organization in the Coalition’s ongoing work.

Current Status

The Coalition currently meets quarterly in January, April, July and October. In between, two ongoing work groups meet to coordinate and plan projects to improve food security in the region. The Direct Service and Engagement work group is focused on collecting input from food insecure populations, as well as reaching out to new partners to collaborate on projects to improve food access. They are also working to comprehensively inventory current food resources in the region, identify gaps, and work together to fill gaps in services. The Food Infrastructure group is focused on projects which strengthen the local food system through infrastructure development and improvement. A steering committee meets monthly to plan, coordinate and keep the group’s efforts on track.

For more information on current projects and upcoming meetings, contact Liz Oberhausen, Food Security Coalition Program Manager: liz@gorgegrown.com, or visit <http://www.gorgegrown.com/foodsecurity/>.

Additional members welcome!

So far, the Coalition includes organizations in the healthcare field, nonprofits, food banks, churches, public health agencies, Oregon and Washington State Extension Services, school districts, public officials, farmers, and hospitals, among others. Meetings are open to anyone involved in the food system. Whether you're a producer, processor, restaurant worker, funder, or eater, our regional food system affects us all daily. Everyone has a unique and valuable perspective to share on what a strong, accessible regional food system looks like.

Initial Victories:

- Collaboration between tribal members, the Department of Human Services and the Oregon Food Bank led to the beginning of monthly deliveries of produce and food to Celilo Village.
- Orchard View Farms and Providence Hood River Memorial Hospital split the cost of a \$1,000 freezer for a Cascade Locks site providing meals to people experiencing hunger.
- Gorge Grown Food Network organized farmers and gleaners to donate hundreds of pounds of produce regularly to the Cascade Locks Food Banks.
- The City of The Dalles applied to be a Blue Zones Project City. Numerous Coalition member organizations wrote letters of support for this application.
- Co-convener Ken Bailey and Orchard View Farms donated 14,000 pounds of cherries per week to the Oregon Food Bank and other food distributors
- North Wasco County School District, with the help of the Oregon Food Bank, is exploring the possibility of creating a food pantry in Wahtonka Community School.



“Solving hunger in our region would be an impossible task for any one organization to take up alone. But I believe that we can and will address hunger in the Gorge in powerful ways by aligning our organizational will and resources. Between us, and through really listening to the people experiencing the need, we have the resources, creativity and trust to make the Columbia Gorge a place where hunger is not part of the experience of poverty.”

—Mark Thomas, Providence Hospital

“We are the solutions to each other’s problems.”

— Food Security Coalition member