

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

West Central Mountains Food Coalition is increasing capacity for local food

AT A GLANCE

UI Extension brought local stakeholders together to form the West Central Mountains Food Coalition to strengthen and celebrate local food production and consumption.

The Situation

There is an increasing demand for high quality, local, fresh and organic food in the west central mountains (WCM). This was identified in the America's Best Communities contest in 2016. As a result, the WCM food coalition was formed and has met the need to network and strengthen the local food system. A volunteer network has been successful in implementing the following programs: Raise the Hoops, annual seed swaps, networking dinners, educational programs and a farm to table dinner.

Our Response

UI Extension worked with stakeholders to develop a webpage, logo, newsletter, vision and mission establishing the groundwork for volunteers to organize a food coalition. The UI Extension educator organized partnerships to implement classes and committees to support Raise the Hoops, Cascade and New Meadows community gardens, educational programs including Cultivating Success, Master Gardeners, Victory Garden, Let's get Cooking and Preserve at Home (online) classes. UI Extension was a critical partner launching the first farm to table dinner in 2018. Annual stakeholder winter potlucks celebrate the local agriculture



Raise the Hoops program constructed a 26-foot high tunnel in partnership with the Idaho Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

community by capturing conversation addressing local needs and celebrate success.

Raise the Hoops — This program was offered in partnership with the Idaho Center for Sustainable Agriculture in fall 2016. A site location was selected in Round Valley and 26 participants came together to build and construct a high tunnel greenhouse. This effort has increased season Extension opportunities in Round Valley and serves as a demonstration greenhouse for the region.

Annual Seed Exchanges — Two annual spring seed exchanges take place in Cascade and McCall. The exchanges are in partnership with the Pride of the Pantry Plots Community Garden at the Cascade Food Pantry and the McCall Public Library.

Winter Potluck — A community dinner has been held twice to build relationships and provide professional development opportunities and networking. Guest speakers have presented on the development of cottage foods.

Communications — Stakeholders stay connected with the WCM food coalition through Facebook, Instagram and membership. Community conversations, called Discover your Food System, have identified current assets and future project ideas from stakeholders. WCM food coalition members receive an annual newsletter with updates on local food happenings, stories, and events in the area. Sign up today at <https://wcm-foodcoalition.com> to be part of the conversation and make your pledge to strengthen the local food economy in the WCM.

Farm to Table Dinner — This event sold out and served a locally sourced meal to 85 participants, farmers and volunteers in 2018. This dinner served to increase sales and awareness of local food available in Valley County and bolster membership for the coalition. The farm to table dinner quadrupled coalition membership and followers on social media platforms including Instagram and Facebook. Members of the food coalition have pledged to begin or continue to strengthen the food system in the following ways; 1) 8 percent will grow their own food; 2) 79 percent will shop at farmers markets; 3) 83 percent will purchase meat from a local butcher; 4) 83 percent will donate fresh produce to local food banks; and 5) 58 percent pledge to participate in the annual winter potluck and seed swap celebrations hosted by the coalition. The McCall Outdoor Science School and Brundage Activity Barn are key partners in the implementation of this program.

Program Outcomes

Seven significant community projects identified in 2016 have been implemented by multiple agency cooperators including 1) Donnelly Farmer's Market established and accepts SNAP payment (St. Luke's);

2) Community gardens developed in Cascade and New Meadows (UI Extension, Cascade Food Pantry, Meadows Valley School and Community Foundation); 3) Community commercial kitchen access in McCall and Cascade (Horizons' Lifestyle and Education Team and McCall Community Center); 4) Local classes on farmer financial fitness (UI Extension); 5) Online food preservation classes offered (UI Extension); 6) Food preservation loaner equipment (McCall Public Library); and 7) Food waste reduction through vermicomposting at the schools (Midas Gold).

UI Extension, Valley County has taken a leadership role in educational programs, organizing stakeholders for information sharing, and compiling multiple stakeholders' efforts to aggregate regional impacts on the local food system. These efforts have improved the food system including: 1) increased consumption of fresh and local food; 2) shortened travel time for fresh food access; 3) increased commercial kitchen access in McCall; 4) online food processing classes and equipment available locally; and 5) production classes offered to beginning farmers and ranchers.

Discover your Food System community conversations held in 2018 identified three goals to move forward into the future including: 1) continued efforts to increase membership; 2) cooking series to increase knowledge of cooking from scratch; and 3) continuing to support ongoing volunteer efforts including annual dinner, seed swaps, Raise the Hoops and a farm to table dinner. Winter potlucks continue to bring people together throughout the year for networking and celebration along the way.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

Brundage Mountain Activity Barn; Cascade Food Pantry; Horizons' Lifestyle and Education Team; Idaho Center for Sustainable Agriculture; McCall Outdoor Science School; McCall Public Library; McCall Community Center; Meadows Valley Community Foundation; Meadows Valley School; Midas Gold; St. Luke's, McCall

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Melissa B. Hamilton, Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Valley County • 208-382-7190 • mhamilton@uidaho.edu
23-19-mhamilton-food-coalition • 8/19