

Food activist groups gather at FEAST

By Ellen Morris Bishop
Wallowa County Chieftain

Last Saturday, 45 people participated in a FEAST (Food Education Agriculture Solutions Together) gathering in Joseph to share updates on local farming and food production, and develop better food access, support sustainable production, and consider ways to reduce food waste in Wallowa County. FEAST is an outreach and education program organized by the Oregon Food Bank, and has offered similar programs in rural communities across Oregon, including in Union, Baker, and Douglas counties.

FEAST's most important outcome will be the new food-based programs that Saturday's participants developed. They include education, youth, Farmers' Market, and economic development projects. On Wednesday, March 8th, the Wallowa County Food System Council will award \$4,000 in grants to fund some or all of the projects.

Wallowa County residents are invited to help decide which projects are funded on Wednesday, March 8, with a dinner of local foods starting at 5 PM at the South Fork Grange on Rosewell Street in Lostine.

In Wallowa County, FEAST was sponsored by Oregon State University (OSU) Extension Service, the Magic Garden Project (Joseph United Methodist Church), the Wallowa County Food System Council (WCFSC), and the Northeast Oregon Economic Development District (NEOEDD). This was the second FEAST



Robin Martin and Lynn Curry put the finishing touches on a fresh vegetable platter for the FEAST luncheon.

Photo by Ellen Bishop

gathering here. The first was held in 2011. The Wallowa County Food System Council grew out of that meeting.

At Saturday's FEAST gathering, participants learned about Wallowa County's local foods system from Connie Guentert, Community Connection of NE Oregon which provides food assistance, Leslie Lamb of Ruby Peak Naturals, who buys and markets

locally-grown foods, Lindsey Briggs, Hawkins Sisters Ranch (the new chicken processing facility) Ann Bloom, OSU Extension Service (Food prep and growing classes) and Kristen Ruckdashel, who has developed a Food Prescription Rx program at Winding Waters Clinic.

Then they formed five groups to propose and develop new programs that would

provide better access to, production of, and education about foods grown or provided

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Tracy Gagnon
Community Resource Developer

locally. FEAST offered small grants, totalling \$4,000 to support these efforts. The groups wrote proposals. The funds will be determined and awarded at the March 8th meeting of the Wallowa County Food System Council. The public is invited to attend and participate in decisions on the awards.

The five groups focused on improving access and use of food in Wallowa County.

- The Farmers Market group wants to set up a booth where individuals could sell small amounts of their produce—with an eye to eventually producing enough to have their own booth.

- The Networking group seeks funds for a paid position to establish and maintain a Farmers Market website and Wallowa County specific directory of producers, distributors, available land, commercial kitchens, equipment for loan or rent, and other things useful to food producers.

- The Education group wants to offer a series of

hands-on classes — also available via video and podcasts — that would include information about soils, gardening, food preservation and canning, nutrition, and other subject.

- The Youth Engagement group wants to offer a one-week summer day-camp that includes cooking classes and gardening experiences, as well as starting a Kids-to-Kids Student News video feed.

- The Value-Added Marketing group wants to develop a food hub that would provide strengthened marketing and distribution opportunities to local food producers.

"In 2011, the FEAST product became an actual working council," said Community Resource Developer Tracy Gagnon, who facilitated Saturday's gathering. "So you should all have high hopes for the results that can come from these dedicated community members. They are all great ideas, and they all deserve some of the start-up funding. Now it's up to the community to help decide."





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