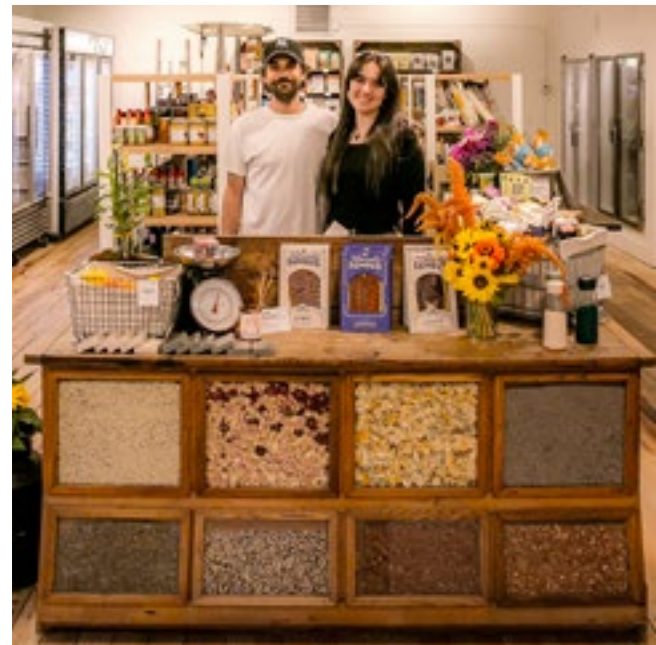


# The State of the Food System

## Rogue Valley Community Food Assessment

### Action Plan 2025-2030



Developed by the  
Rogue Valley  
Food System  
**NETWORK**  
growing our local food system







## Forward

Every day in the Rogue Valley, farmers plant seeds, grocery store workers stock shelves, food bank volunteers pack boxes, and families gather around dinner tables. The document before you, alongside the State of the Food System: Rogue Valley Community Food Assessment is both a reflection of this daily work and a vision for its future - a snapshot of where we are and a road map for where we need to go.

For those who have dedicated years or decades to food and farming in our valley, some of these challenges may feel familiar. We've been talking about the need for more processing facilities, better water management, and improved farmer support

for a long time. We acknowledge this history and the persistent nature of these issues.

Yet today, we stand at a pivotal moment. The Rogue Valley is poised for what could be a transformative change in how we think about, grow, and share food. With unprecedented resources, attention, and collective will focused on our food system, we have a rare opportunity to move beyond addressing symptoms to creating real solutions.

The challenges we face - from food access to infrastructure gaps, from water management to waste reduction - were created by people, which means people can solve them. But we can't do it alone. At RVFSN, we see our role as connectors and conveners, bringing together people and organizations who might not otherwise find each other. We live in spaces where great ideas meet action, where challenges meet solutions.

**"The challenges we face - from food access to infrastructure gaps, from water management to waste reduction - were created by people, which means people can solve them."**

This Action Plan represents more than two years of listening to over 2,000 community members share their ideas, challenges, and hopes. It builds upon generations of work by farmers, food businesses, nonprofits, and advocates. But its true power lies not in its pages but in its potential to unite us in a common cause.

It took just a few generations to unravel our local food

system. With focused effort and committed collaboration, we can build something better. Every person who grows, sells, serves, or eats food in the Rogue Valley has a part to play in this work.

As Wendell Berry reminds us, "What we need is here." The ingredients for success are all around us - in our fer-

tile valleys, in our innovative businesses, and most importantly, in our people. Now is the time to bring them together.

We invite you - indeed, we need you - to find your place in this plan and join us in creating a food system that works for everyone in the Rogue Valley.

Alison Sexauer, Executive Director, [Rogue Valley Food System Network](#), on behalf of all who participated in the making of this plan.

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## Using this Plan ►



Organizations and individuals can engage with this plan in multiple ways:

### 1. As a partner

- Join a relevant working group
- Share successes and challenges
- Contribute to collective impact measurements
- Participate in regular network gatherings

### 2. As a resource

- Use the plan to support grant applications and funding requests
- Identify potential partners working on similar initiatives
- Align organizational priorities with regional needs

### 3. As an advocate

- Share the plan with your networks
- Support policy recommendations
- Help build public awareness and engagement

**The 2025-2030 Action Plan, and the corresponding 2024 Rogue Valley Community Food Assessment, has been made possible through the dedication and contributions of many individuals and agencies. It could not have been created without the financial support of the following:**

A Greater Applegate (AGA), Alumbra Foundation, AllCare, Ashland Food Coop, Friends of Family Farmers, Gordon Elwood Foundation, Institute for Applied Sustainability at Southern Oregon University, Jackson Care Connect, Medford Food Co-op, Organically Grown Company, Oregon Food Bank, Oregon Community Food System Network, Oregon Department of Agriculture Specialty Crop Block Grant, Oregon State University Extension Service Small Farms Program - Jackson County, Roundhouse Foundation, Travel Southern Oregon, and the United Way of Jackson County.

*Layout and Graphic Design: Georgia Julius*

*Photo credit; cover and inside spread: Steven Addington Photography*





## Introduction

### What is a “Food System”?

People talk about food systems, and the truth is, depending on who you speak with, a food system can mean a lot of different things to people, primarily because it is so interwoven with every aspect of our lives and foundational to our economy. In general, a food system is defined as all the processes and activities involved in feeding a population, from growing, harvesting, and processing food to packaging, transporting, marketing, consuming, and ultimately disposing of it. It involves the people, resources, policies, and infrastructure that support these activities, along with the environmental, economic, and social factors that influence how food is produced and distributed. All of us are part of the food system, in myriad ways.

It’s important to note that a food system is more than just a series of steps; it is deeply influenced by policies,

culture, and values. These elements shape everything from what we grow, to how we distribute food, and even to who has access to it. The food system intersects with many other community priorities, such as advancing equity and addressing the impacts of climate change. A just and sustainable food system ensures that



“A just and sustainable food system ensures that all people have access to nutritious food, supports the livelihoods of those who produce it, and preserves the health of the environment for future generations.”

all people have access to nutritious food, supports the livelihoods of those who produce it, and preserves the health of the environment for future generations.

Food systems don’t operate within rigid boundaries. The interconnected nature of global food production

and the influence of both state and local policies mean that our local food system is part of a much larger network. However, for the purposes of this plan, we are focused on the food system within southern Oregon's Rogue Valley, specifically in Josephine and Jackson Counties. Here, we aim to create recommendations that reflect the unique needs and opportunities of our region, guiding us toward a more resilient and equitable food system that aligns with our local values and goals.

## What is a community food action plan?

A food system plan is a strategic framework that outlines a community's vision for its food system and details the steps needed to achieve that vision. It is defined by the American Planning Association as "a set of interconnected, forward-thinking activities that strengthen a community and regional food system through the creation and implementation of plans and policies."

Food system plans are akin to the long-term planning documents used by cities and counties for land use, transportation, and economic development. Food system planning has not always received the attention it deserves, partly because there isn't a dedicated "Department of Food" at the city or county level to oversee these efforts. Yet food is intricately connected to many critical aspects of community planning, including land use, water resources, transportation, and infrastructure.

Recognizing this, more cities and counties are beginning to integrate food system planning into their broader strategic efforts, bringing focus and intentionality to the development of sustainable and resilient food systems. In the absence of these government support systems, food networks, policy councils, and alliances have stepped in to ensure cross-sector thinking, collaboration, and action. We intend to use this plan to collaborate with local governments, integrating its findings into their strategic planning efforts, while also building on grassroots efforts to bring real solutions to the challenges identified.

This plan serves as a guide for how we can cultivate, distribute, and consume food in ways that support the health and well-being of everyone in the Rogue Valley community.



## How was this community food action plan created?

The Rogue Valley Community Food Assessment and Action Plan emerged from an extensive community engagement process designed to hear from voices across our food system. Building on earlier food system assessments, RVFSN launched a comprehensive outreach effort in 2022 to understand current challenges and opportunities in our regional food system.

Our engagement strategy focused on reaching community members through multiple channels. We distributed bilingual surveys through social media platforms, partner newsletters, and community networks. The community survey received 593 responses across Jackson and Josephine Counties, while our targeted farmer/rancher survey gathered input from 80 agricultural producers.

To ensure we heard diverse voices, we went directly to where people gather—hosting listening sessions at food pantries, farmers markets, community centers, and agricultural businesses. We conducted focused discussions on key topics including food insecurity, emergency preparedness, farm and food work, and regional food distribution. These conversations provided invaluable insights into the lived experiences of our community members.

The 2023 Food Solutions Summit brought together farmers, food businesses, nonprofit organizations,

*This page: Abigail of RVFSN takes notes during a breakout discussion at the Rogue Valley Community Food Solutions Summit held in March of 2023*

*Facing page: Vendors at the Applegate Evening Market*



and community members to shape the priorities and actions in this plan. Working with Kitchen Table Consulting, we synthesized these community insights into the goals and actions presented here. This year was also crucial for developing additional funding partnerships with the Gordon Elwood Foundation, SOU Institute for Applied Sustainability, Alumbra Foundation, and Roundhouse Foundation.

With these partners on board, we ramped up the final round of data collection and hired New Venture Advisors (NVA), consultants specializing in food system planning and sustainable food business development, to support our small staff in completing the assessment and action plan. We also brought on a part-time coordinator to assist with outreach.

NVA and the RVFSN network co-designed a research and planning process that would both engage a broad swath of stakeholders and hear from core food system stakeholder groups. This research included the following:

- **Secondary data that was collected across all sectors of the food system.** Data sources such as the U.S. Census, Census of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service, the Oregon Department of Agriculture, and Feeding America were accessed to identify relevant county-level food system metrics. *See Rogue Valley Food System Assessment for this full data set.*
- **A community-wide survey** that was open to all community members from February through May

New Venture Advisors LLC (NVA) is a strategy consulting firm specializing in food system planning and food enterprise development committed to environmental sustainability, social impact, equity, diversity, and inclusion as we help our clients realize their vision for a more just and sustainable food system.

NVA has assisted dozens of governments and councils in understanding the challenges and opportunities in their food system through data-driven food system assessments and community-driven planning processes. We excel at developing effective action plans to make community food systems more resilient, equitable, and economically viable.

2024. The community survey, which asked residents about their goals, perceptions, and challenges when it comes to accessing healthy local food in the Rogue Valley, received 593 responses across Jackson and Josephine Counties. The response was a statistically significant sample size with a confidence level of 98 percent and  $\pm 4.78$  percent margin of error. *See Rogue Valley Food System Assessment for this full data set.*



- **A farmer/rancher survey** that was open to agricultural producers from February through May 2024. The farmer/rancher survey, which asked producers about their challenges, barriers, and needs when it comes to producing food, received 80 responses from agricultural producers in the Rogue Valley. This was not a statistically significant sample; however, it provided valuable anecdotal information in combination with other research tools used in the assessment. *See Rogue Valley Food System Assessment for this full data set.*
- **Focus groups** and interviews conducted in the spring of 2024 to hear from key stakeholder groups that may have been missed earlier in the engagement process. Focus groups were held on the following topics:
  - Food insecurity in the Rogue Valley
  - Emergency preparedness in the regional food system

- Farm and food work in the valley
- Food buying and distribution in the region
- Grocery store management
- Oregon Pasture Network

The findings from all of these community engagement methods were used to create draft goals, objectives, and actions for the food action plan. These were revised by the project steering committee, and then shared with the community through a prioritization survey taken by seventy-nine respondents. Respondents were asked to rank the draft actions, identify any ideas that were missing, and suggest potential partners for the work. The action plan that follows reflects this community prioritization.

Altogether, we have included the challenges, hopes, and dreams of over 2,000 community members in this report. This comprehensive engagement process has been instrumental in shaping the Rogue Valley Community Food Assessment and Action Plan, guiding us toward a more sustainable and equitable food system for our region.



*This page: Patrick of Red Buttes Farm and Carrie of Daily Blessings Farm*

*Facing page: Survey fliers were distributed in Spanish and English throughout the Rogue and Illinois Valleys*





## How to Read This Plan

The Rogue Valley Community Food Assessment and this food action plan were written to guide the development of an accessible, economically viable, and ecologically sound food system in the Rogue Valley. This plan serves as a guide for how we can cultivate, distribute, prepare and consume food in ways that support the health and well-being of everyone in the Rogue Valley community.

The timeline for the plan is five years, recognizing some actions may be able to be implemented immediately, while others will take years of additional development.

**The plan is organized from broad goals to specific actions:**

► **Goals:** There are four goals in the action plan that reflect the key needs and aspirations of our community. These state the desired outcomes and describe a vision for the Rogue Valley food system in the future. **Note:** These goals were prioritized by the community in the first community-wide survey, so Goal 1 represents the top priority for community members, Goal 2 represents the second priority, and so on:

- **Goal 1:** Ensure access to healthy food for all
- **Goal 2:** Invest in a thriving local food and farm economy
- **Goal 3:** Protect soil and water health
- **Goal 4:** Reduce food waste and related solid wastes

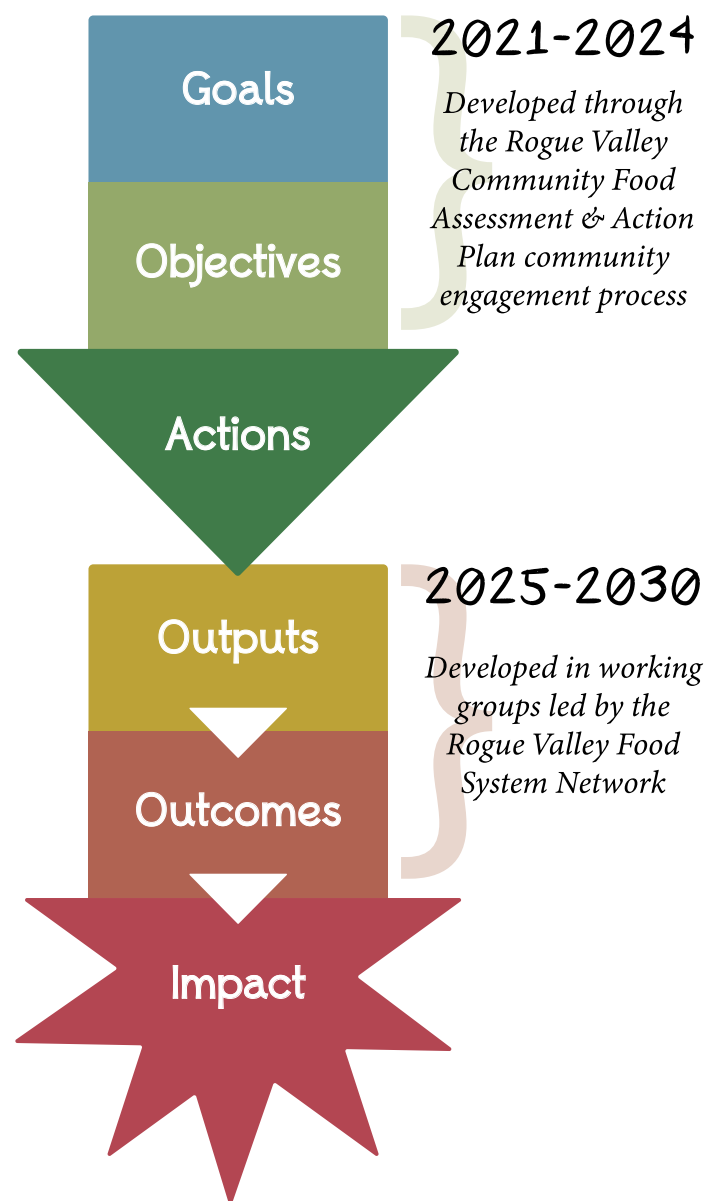
► **Objectives** are more specific, measurable strategies to guide local work to reach each goal. Each goal has multiple objectives that support it.

► **Actions** are the specific policies, programs, and initiatives to meet the objectives. These actions are listed below under each objective, as .1, .2, etc.

**In addition to these specific goals, the project steering committee recognized that certain key values were critical to their vision for the Rogue Valley food system. These cut across all food system sectors and the plan's actions were checked against these values to ensure that they were woven into the outcomes.**

- **Resilience** – the ability for the Rogue Valley food system to weather events such as climate disruptions, supply chain issues, and economic forces

- **Equity** – the idea that food is a right and that everyone should have access to healthy, affordable, and culturally relevant food
- **Community health and well-being** – the idea that our food system should generate health and wellness for all of us, from producers to consumers





## Goal #1: Ensure access to healthy food for all

### Objectives

1. Ensure that the built environment supports access to healthy food.
2. Make food more affordable for Rogue Valley residents.
3. Support Rogue Valley residents' ability to grow, hunt, and prepare their own foods.
4. Strengthen the charitable food network in the region.
5. Strengthen emergency response systems to ensure that food is available in times of emergency.

## Goal #2: Invest in a thriving local food and farm economy

### Objectives

1. Support farmers and ranchers.
2. Build the supply of local food.
3. Build demand for foods produced in the Rogue Valley.
4. Support food system entrepreneurs and create careers in agriculture and food.

## Goal #3: Build healthy soils and protect watershed health

### Objectives

1. Protect water quantity and quality.
2. Build healthy soils.
3. Preserve land for food production

## Goal #4: Reduce food waste and related solid wastes

### Objectives

1. Prevent wasted food.
2. Support the safe rescue and redistribution of food to feed people in need.
3. Increase access to composting.
4. Engage and educate our community about food waste.



## Goal # 1: Ensure access to healthy food for all

Access to culturally appropriate fresh produce, proteins, and whole foods is essential for a nutritionally balanced diet and overall health. While some residents in the Rogue Valley have access to these foods on a regular basis, we know that many in our community do not. Lack of access to and affordability of healthy food can have significant impacts on our community members' health and well-being.

**All residents of the Rogue Valley should enjoy the benefits of nutritious and culturally appropriate food, grown or raised by local farmers in the valley when possible.**

The objectives and actions in this goal address critical factors influencing food access, including the physical accessibility of food stores and pantries, the affordability of food, the ability for residents to grow their own food, the strength of the charitable food network, and the resilience of the food system to emergencies.

Note: The actions are in priority order - prioritized both by the project steering committee and the community through a prioritization survey distributed in October 2024.

### **Objective 1. Ensure that the built environment supports access to healthy food**

- 1.1. Collaborate with transportation providers to improve food-focused transportation options for vulnerable populations in rural communities in the Rogue Valley
- 1.2. Increase neighborhood healthy food outlets, including farmers market and CSA locations.
- 1.3. Incentivize neighborhood retailers and rural grocers to stock fresh, healthy food options
- 1.4. Build a technical assistance support system for rural grocers; partner with university and economic development partners to support sustainable rural food access

*This page: Harvesting vegetables at Raptor Creek Farm of the Josephine County Food Bank; credit: Steven Addington Photography.*

*Facing page: Garden education at the Family Nurturing Center, located at Hanley Farm in Central Point.*



The Rogue Valley Community Food Assessment highlighted key needs and opportunities voiced by the community when it comes to ensuring access to healthy food for all:

- **The Rogue Valley is faring worse than the state for both health outcomes and health factors** with higher rates of diet-related diseases than state averages.
- **The Rogue Valley faces higher food insecurity in the region than the state, especially among children:** Food insecurity rates and SNAP enrollment are higher in the region when compared to state averages. For both the overall population and child populations, Josephine County has higher food insecurity rates than Jackson County.
- **Pandemic-related assistance helped food security:** Food insecurity rates decreased notably between 2018 and 2022 in the Rogue Valley. There was an increase in food insecurity rates between 2021 and 2022, particularly among children, as the pandemic-related food assistance programs ended.
- **There is a considerable SNAP gap:** There is opportunity to reach eligible SNAP recipients who are not enrolled in the program. As of 2023, 12 percent of Rogue Valley residents qualify for the benefit but are not enrolled.
- **Food affordability is a major concern:** Over a third of residents are worried about the high cost of groceries and the affordability of food.
- **Community members need more transportation options and better food choices at grocery stores:** Community survey respondents reported traveling long distances to get to a grocery store and noted the time it takes to shop or access groceries as a barrier.
- There is a stated need for more **emergency preparedness coordination** to ensure that food is available in times of emergency.
- **Strong community support networks are emerging:** 64 percent of community members report providing groceries to others in need.
- **Innovative partnerships are expanding food access:** Healthcare providers, schools, and food banks are creating solutions through programs like Double Up Food Bucks and Protein Bucks, while eight farmers markets and nine CSAs help connect local food to local people.
- **School nutrition programs show strong engagement:** The Rogue Valley leads the state in school meal participation and WIC enrollment, with farm-to-school programs helping connect students to fresh, local food. Over a third of eligible pregnant people in both counties participate in WIC services, exceeding state averages.



- 1.5. Focus efforts to attract more affordable grocery stores or a food co-op near Talent and Phoenix communities
- 1.6. Advocate for local governments in the region to provide incentives to small food businesses and grocery stores to locate in low-income/low-access census tracts

**Objective 2. Make food more affordable for Rogue Valley residents**

- 2.1. Increase SNAP enrollment among eligible individuals and families.
- 2.2. Advocate for policies that extend SNAP eligibility and access to underserved populations
- 2.3. Invest in technology upgrades and technical assistance for retailers to make it easier for them to accept SNAP (i.e., purchasing EBT machines, integrating SNAP into online sales systems, etc.)
- 2.4. Continue advocacy for state funding for expansion of Double Up Food Bucks (DUFb), and ensure sustainability of the Protein Bucks program
- 2.5. Build awareness of existing programs that provide food access at farmers markets - including DUFb, Protein Bucks, WIC, SNAP, Farm Direct Nutrition, etc.
- 2.6. Advocate for statewide universal free school meals

- 2.7. Advocate for farm-to-school programs at all Jackson and Josephine County schools that provide nutrition and food system education and support schools to provide free nutrient dense locally sourced meals

- 2.8. Create innovative grocery retail models that prioritize affordable food

- 2.9. Integrate and support the OCFSN Veggie Rx working group to build programs and support in southern Oregon

- 2.10. Help make food assistance programs (specifically WIC and DUFb) more easily available to micro-retailers

**Objective 3. Support Rogue Valley residents' ability to grow, hunt, and prepare their own foods**

- 3.1. Increase access to and resources for community gardens for residents to grow their own foods

- 3.2. Expand and promote opportunities to learn skills that support food literacy, such as basic gardening, cooking, canning/fermentation, and meal planning skills, and access to relevant resources and supplies

- 3.3. Invest in farm-to-school programs to teach students how to grow, harvest, cook, and preserve their own food





- 3.4. Identify supports and incentives that would encourage Rogue Valley residents to grow their own food – i.e., discounted supplies and seeds
- 3.5. Increase support for community/urban farming efforts targeting lower income populations

**Objective 4. Strengthen the charitable food network in the region**

- 4.1. Work with charitable sector partners to expand pantry access at additional times and locations
- 4.2. Invest in and expand farm-to-food pantry programs, utilizing state and federal funds to buy food from local farms to supply local food pantries, building off of the lessons learned from the federal LFPA program
- 4.3. Promote and expand Southern Oregon's Neighborhood Food Projects (green bag projects) that provide a regular supply of non-perishable food to local food pantries through volunteer donations
- 4.4. Invest in collaborative grant writing and fundraising support for the network of food banks and pantries in the region

**Objective 5. Strengthen emergency response systems to ensure that food is available in times of emergency**

- 5.1. Ensure that emergency communications about food access are translated into multiple languages
- 5.2. Hire additional staff and increase volunteer recruitment and training to expand emergency service capacity
- 5.3. Utilize existing networks with local churches, businesses, and supportive organizations to enhance community food support and resource sharing
- 5.4. Expand energy resilience initiatives that support food preparation - i.e. support for cooking meals off-grid, water filtration, etc.
- 5.5. Build up the supply of locally made freeze-dried MREs for emergency food access
- 5.6. Build up the local infrastructure for fresh produce storage and processing to ensure these foods are accessible during emergencies



*Above: Rogue Food Unites was formed in 2020 out of the dual disasters of the Almeda and Obenchain fires and the impacts of COVID-19 on local communities*

*Below: Josephine County Food Bank volunteers pack boxes at Raptor Creek Farm; credit: Steven Addington Photography*

*Facing page: Josephine County Farm Collective grew out of increased desire and need for local food during the COVID-19 pandemic; here the Board of Directors pose with the organization's new delivery van*







## Goal #2: Invest in a thriving local food & farm economy

While regional farm production is a key economic driver, some of the mid-tier value chain businesses - food hubs, processing facilities for fruits and vegetables with freezing capacity, and meat processing facilities, particularly for chicken - are lacking in the region. This lack of food system infrastructure can inhibit economic growth both for producers and retailers.

**There are many benefits to a thriving local food and farm economy: Farms and local food businesses provide meaningful employment, boost income through wages, increase economic activity by buying from other local businesses, and build the local tax base that supports community infrastructure and services.**

The objectives and actions in this goal are aimed at strategies to grow the local food and farm economy — by supporting farmers, growing the supply of local food, growing consumer demand for local food, and building a robust career pipeline for workers in agriculture and food businesses. Note: The actions are in priority order - prioritized both by the project steering committee and the community through a prioritization survey distributed in October 2024.

### Objective 1. Support farmers and ranchers

- 1.1. Facilitate land access for new and next-generation farmers to ensure sustainable agricultural transitions
- 1.2. Ensure equitable access to statewide farm disaster relief funds for Rogue Valley farmers, increase available funding, and transition focus from recovery to resilience
- 1.3. Address farm labor challenges by improving workforce conditions, additional training, enhancing wages, housing, and access to essential services for farmworkers
- 1.4. Invest in infrastructure, equipment, and distribution support for producers (i.e., through access to shared assets, small business grants, etc.)
- 1.5. Develop regionalized collective disaster response funding to support farmers and businesses in the face of drought and other environmental crises or challenges

*Chickens graze at Nuna Farms in Murphy; credit: Steven Addington Photography*



The Rogue Valley Community Food Assessment highlighted key needs and opportunities voiced by the community when it comes to building a strong local food and farm economy:

- **Agricultural growth is transforming our region:** Our agricultural sales have surged 62 percent since 2017, led by small-scale producers who generate over \$12.3 million in direct-to-consumer sales - showing the vibrant connection between farmers and their communities.
- **Infrastructure barriers limit potential:** Critical gaps in processing facilities, cold storage, and commercial kitchens constrain growth. While some producers adapt by creating home-based solutions, the recent addition of a USDA meat processing facility through Rusted Gate Farm and Montgomery Meats demonstrates how addressing these gaps can unlock new opportunities.
- **Climate challenges threaten stability:** Our farmers face mounting pressures from heat waves, drought, pests, and wildfires, highlighting the urgent need for regional climate adaptation programs that protect both crops and livelihoods.
- **Land and labor shortages constrain growth:** Limited access to affordable farmland and reliable workers continues to challenge both new and established farmers looking to expand, despite strong market demand for local products.
- **Market access shows promise but needs expansion:** While our region benefits from diverse food outlets - from farmers markets to CSAs - many remain out of reach for low-income and rural residents. Recent programs show promise in bridging this gap, but more work is needed.
- **Infrastructure funding lags behind needs:** Despite increased grant programs, the demand for infrastructure investment far exceeds available resources, particularly affecting small and mid-sized producers eager to expand but lacking capital.
- **Collaboration offers solutions:** Emerging models of shared resources and infrastructure demonstrate how working together can help small producers thrive while building a more resilient local food system.

1.6. Promote and support the use of locally adapted seeds for food production

1.7. Support community efforts to re-establish the Josephine County OSU Extension Service

1.8. Advocate for a state beginning farmer tax credit

1.9. Consider innovative models for farmers to be compensated for the ecosystem services their regenerative production practices provide

## **Objective 2. Build the supply of local food**

2.1. Provide education and technical assistance to producers to scale production

2.2. Strengthen partnerships to scale successful farm models and provide mentorship opportunities

2.3. Facilitate growth by enhancing access to wholesale and institutional markets for local producers

2.4. Conduct an assessment of meat processing infrastructure to identify existing resources, develop a public resource guide, and address gaps not covered by the current system

2.5. Strengthen and support local food distribution efforts and infrastructural needs

## **Objective 3. Build demand for foods produced in the Rogue Valley**

3.1. Expand participation and circulation of the Rogue Flavor Guide by enhancing outreach efforts, engaging local food producers and businesses, and leveraging strategic partnerships to increase visibility and support for local food systems

3.2. Launch a local food branding campaign to raise awareness and promote the identity of Rogue Valley's locally produced food; focus on creating a recognizable brand that highlights the quality, sus-

tainability, and community benefits of purchasing locally grown products, while engaging consumers, retailers, and institutions in supporting the local food economy

- 3.3. Facilitate procurement gatherings that connect farmers with buyers, fostering direct relationships and expanding market opportunities for local producers
- 3.4. Identify and reduce barriers in school procurement policies by assessing challenges schools face in sourcing local food, streamlining processes for purchasing from local farmers, and providing guidance on compliance with state and federal regulations to facilitate greater local food integration into school meal programs
- 3.5. Increase support for and reach of farm to school education that teaches students and families about where their food is grown, highlighting Rogue Valley producers and utilizing local items at school lunch tastings
- 3.6. Leverage relationships with grocers to increase the procurement of locally sourced products, and expand programs that support affordability of local food in these outlets (i.e., Double Up Food Bucks)
- 3.7. Build on the success of the Local Food Purchasing Agreement (LFPA) program, which funds food pantry programs to buy food directly from local producers
- 3.8. Explore feasibility of adopting local food purchasing guidelines and policies within local governments and institutions, leveraging their purchasing power to support the local food economy
- 3.9. Support organizations and businesses to source food for events and gatherings from local caterers, farmers, and producers instead of large chain retailers

#### **Objective 4. Support food system entrepreneurs and create careers in agriculture and food**

- 4.1. Develop comprehensive workforce training programs in food manufacturing, culinary arts, and agriculture, aligning with current industry needs and supporting career pathways for diverse populations, including transitional and recovery programs

- 4.2. Expand food system business support services by enhancing financial education programs and providing producers with diverse financing options
- 4.3. Conduct a comprehensive review of existing resources for food-based entrepreneurs and develop targeted tools to address gaps in business development, access to capital, infrastructure, and technical assistance
- 4.4. Enhance business support for producers by building capacity within existing technical assistance organizations to provide specialized farm-related education in business planning, disaster resilience, and agricultural accounting



*Jeremy of Blossom Barn Cidery packing cases; photo courtesy of Blossom Barn*





## Goal #3: Build healthy soils and protect watershed health

Soil and water resources in the Rogue Valley provide the very foundation of our food system. Historically, the Rogue River watershed has been one of enormous abundance – salmon runs, oak forests, meadows of camas, elk, deer, rushing rivers, hazel, berries, and much more. The agricultural management decisions made in the 1920s through 1960 profoundly reshaped this landscape. Today, the interconnected web of water, land, wildlife, and agriculture continues to feel the impact of management decisions made one hundred years ago.

**The food production practices we choose can either extract from or regenerate this natural resource base. In the Rogue Valley, there is strong support for food production practices that protect and regenerate our soil and water.**

The objectives and actions in this goal are aimed at strategies to protect water quantity and quality, build healthy soils, and preserve land for food production. Note: The actions are in priority order - prioritized both by the project steering committee and the community through a prioritization survey distributed in October 2024.

### Objective 1. Protect water quantity and quality

- 1.1. Ensure food systems stakeholders engage with water management stakeholders and water managers in the region
- 1.2. Convene regional water management summits that include conservation, municipal and ag use stakeholders
- 1.3. Facilitate and include conversations about water rights and watershed protections in collaborative water management planning
- 1.4. Expand and promote financial and educational incentive programs for water quality enhancement ranchers in the Rogue Valley
- 1.5. Expand access to programs and policies for safe greywater and rainwater use for irrigation, increase education, and subsidize equipment needed
- 1.6. Restore acreage of land under beaver management as a component of water management strategy; explore ecosystem service credits
- 1.7. Collaboratively develop water rate policies that reward conservation and prioritize food production.

- 1.8. Facilitate the development of a collaborative regional water management strategy.
- 1.9. Develop transparent water usage data collection processes to assess water use by sector.
- 1.10. Develop partnerships with timberland managers and livestock producers to implement best practices for watershed protection, including sustainable forest management techniques, riparian buffers, and livestock waste management systems

## Objective 2. Build healthy soils

- 2.1. Support peer-to-peer learning and other educational programs to expand the use of climate-adapted agricultural practices that protect environmental and human health
- 2.2. Incentivize climate resilient farm management practices that maximize soil carbon and water storage capacity of soils



- 2.3. Grow and incentivize projects and businesses that develop compost suitable for agricultural use to improve soil health
- 2.4. Increase access to equipment for use in regenerative farming practices
- 2.5. Create insurance programs that support specialty crop diversity and community resilience

The Rogue Valley Community Food Assessment highlighted key needs and opportunities voiced by the community when it comes to protecting our environment and natural resources:

- **A shifting climate baseline will bring significant impacts to the region:** The climate in the Rogue Valley is predicted to be warmer, drier and more variable. This shift will impact the crops that can grow in this area, the prevalence of pests, water availability, and production capacity as the growing season lengthens and freezing diminishes. It also impacts the working conditions for farm laborers as long and intense heat waves and smoky summers become more frequent.
- **Water management** continues to be a pivotal issue, with a strong need for coordination between urban and agricultural water management as well as a need to improve and incentivize better water conservation practices and infrastructure.
- **Wildfires** impact food production, labor, harvesting conditions, housing, and the quality of key products such as wine.
- Indigenous foods such as salmon, acorns, camas, game animals, and berries were historically plentiful in the Rogue Valley. **Managing resources and partnering with Indigenous leaders and communities** to support their vision of restoring indigenous foodways is an important part of natural resource management in the region and fundamental to creating a resilient, thriving, equitable food system.
- Seventy-six percent of the producers surveyed for the Rogue Valley Community Food Assessment said that they use some form of regenerative farming or ranching practices. **Technical and financial assistance** were listed as the primary needs in more producers implementing regenerative practices.
- **The utilization of prime farmland to meet housing and other development needs** is putting food production at risk. Despite Oregon having strong exclusive farm use (EFU) protections in place, Jackson County currently has the potential to be one of the three hardest hit counties in Oregon, with 13,700 acres at risk for development by 2040.



2.6. Support education and incentive programs to support and protect biodiversity above and below ground

2.7. Protect, promote, and support locally adapted seeds grown in the region; increase production and access to locally adapted specialty crops and cover crop seed, especially in quantity

3.5. Identify gaps and opportunities in conservation and agricultural land preservation policies and programs on county, state and federal level

3.6. Promote and support education and awareness of indigenous foodways; consider creating an easement for tribes on conservation lands

### **Objective 3. Preserve land for food production**

3.1. Promote and ensure sustainability of programs that connect farmers with farm land

3.2. Promote and educate about land use policies that prioritize food production and agricultural use needs

3.3. Link regional brand and marketing to agriculture management practices that care for the environment, including soil, water, and biodiversity

3.4. Develop resources to make land conservation easement opportunities accessible and easy for land-owners and the community to navigate



*This page: Rogue Valley Farm to School students getting their hands dirty; photo courtesy of RVF2S*

*Facing page: A demonstration plot at Raptor Creek Farm of the Josephine County Food Bank; credit: Steven Addington Photography*



## Goal #4: Reduce food waste and related solid wastes

It is estimated that 38 percent of all food produced or imported for consumption in the United States is never eaten.<sup>1</sup> Loss occurs at each step in the food system - from unharvested crops in fields to unsold food in retail stores to uneaten foods on plates. The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality has prioritized preventing food waste in their 2050 Vision and Framework for Action due to the combined environmental burdens of food production, distribution, refrigeration, preparation, and final disposal.<sup>2</sup>

**Reducing food waste can ensure that food goes to feed hungry people, save space in landfills, and reduce methane emissions that contribute to climate change.**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency prioritizes actions that prevent and divert wasted food from disposal. The most preferred pathways – prevent wasted food, donate and upcycle food – offer the most benefits to the environment and to a circular economy. These “top” pathways prioritize using food for its intended purpose: to nourish people. The least preferred pathways – landfilling, incineration, and sending food down the drain – have the largest environmental impacts and have limited potential for circularity.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, the objectives and actions in this goal pro-

pose solutions that first focus on reducing the amount of food waste we generate, then prioritize feeding people food that is safe and nutritious and composting any food waste that remains. Note: The actions are in priority order - prioritized both by the project steering committee and the community through a prioritization survey distributed in October 2024.

### Objective 1: Prevent wasted food

- 1.1. Launch source reduction educational campaigns for farms and businesses
- 1.2. Expand food waste audits and share tables in schools to reduce food waste in cafeterias
- 1.3. Revitalize on-farm gleaning programs that prevent unharvestable food from going to waste
- 1.4. Support legislation such as date labeling requirements and required food waste tracking and reporting and other policies that encourage food waste prevention

### Objective 2: Support the safe rescue and redistribution of food to feed people in need

- 2.1. Expand existing food rescue efforts in restaurants and grocery stores, identify additional geographies, and collect data on the impact of these efforts
- 2.2. Invest in infrastructure (i.e., food hubs, freezer space), transportation, and logistics for food res-

<sup>1</sup> ReFED Releases New Food Waste Estimates and Calls for Increased Action by Food System

<sup>2</sup> Materials Management in Oregon: 2050 Vision and Framework for Action

<sup>3</sup> EPA Wasted Food Scale



cue and redistribution, especially for restaurants and other sources of prepared foods

cal tax incentives and grants for composting businesses

2.3. Advocate for expanded and accessible state and local tax incentives and grants for food rescue programs

3.5. Work with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality to simplify the permitting process for composting operations wanting to scale up

2.4. Explore the feasibility of capturing food waste generated by seed operations and creating value-added food products

3.6. Increase access to composting supplies for individuals and families to practice backyard composting

2.5. Cover farmers' harvest costs for produce they donate to food rescue organizations

3.7. Install compost bins next to trash and recycling bins in public spaces, especially those near business districts, food courts and food halls, farmers markets, and areas with a high density of mobile food vendors

2.6. Educate businesses on Good Samaritan laws and liability protections that protect businesses that donate food

#### **Objective 4: Engage and educate our community about food waste**

#### **Objective 3: Increase access to composting**

3.1. Expand existing food recovery and composting pilot programs with restaurants and grocery stores, identify other geographies for expansion, and collect outcomes from these pilot programs

4.1. Advocate for school-based composting and vermicomposting programs and incorporating composting education in schools

3.2. Create neighborhood compost sites with local organizations

4.2. Increase awareness of existing compost education programs and expand residential composting education opportunities

3.3. Investigate the viability of a curbside composting program and opportunities to modify contracts with haulers to require bundled services (trash, recycling, and compost)

4.3. Collaborate with local solid waste haulers and wholesale composting businesses

3.4. Advocate for expanded and accessible state and lo-

The Rogue Valley Food System Action Plan represents

*Facing page: photo courtesy of Rogue Valley Farm to School*

The Rogue Valley Community Food Assessment highlighted key needs and opportunities voiced by the community when it comes to reducing food waste:

- Community members are passionate about **keeping compost local**, connecting with local farms, and increasing education and awareness about the importance of sustainable food waste management through neighborhood collaborations.
- However, businesses working to scale up regional composting models in the Rogue Valley face significant **regulatory and funding barriers**.
- **Accurately measuring and tracking** food waste reduction and management strategies require enhanced capacity, infrastructure, and technology, which are currently limited.
- **Scaling residential food scraps pickup programs** face several challenges, including high collection fees for residents, the need to ensure that compost remains local, and the difficulty of achieving large-scale opt-in participation.
- **Addressing all of these barriers will require collaborative efforts** to balance resident affordability, regulatory compliance, and the scalability of collection infrastructure.

more than a collection of strategies and recommendations - it embodies our community's shared vision for a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable food future.

This plan recognizes that transforming our food system requires more than isolated projects or single-organization efforts. Real change emerges from the rich tapestry of relationships between people and place - farmers working with adaptable practices, food businesses creating living-wage jobs, neighbors sharing garden harvests, and organizations collaborating in new ways to ensure everyone has access to healthy food.

There are countless ways to contribute to this vision, and every action - whether small or transformative - helps weave a stronger food system.

This plan is not meant to sit on a shelf. It's a living document that will evolve as we learn, adapt, and grow together. Its success depends not on any single entity but on the collective commitment of our community.

The Rogue Valley's agricultural bounty has long been one of our region's defining features. Now, we have the opportunity to build on this legacy by creating a food system that works for everyone - one that supports farmer livelihoods, protects our natural resources, reduces waste, and ensures all residents can access and enjoy local food. Let's move forward together, turning these possibilities into reality.

We invite you to join us in this vital work. Contact the Rogue Valley Food System Network to learn more

about how you can get involved, share your ideas, and be part of creating a food system that truly nourishes our community for generations to come.

## How This Plan Will Be Implemented

The Rogue Valley Community Food Action Plan serves as a strategic roadmap for the next five years (2025-2030), guiding our region toward a more resilient, equitable, economically viable and ecologically sound food system. This plan is designed to work on multiple levels - from individual organizations to coordinated regional and even state-wide efforts - creating a framework for collective impact and transformation.

### Collective Impact

*"Collective Impact brings people together in a structured way to achieve social change."*

– Collective Impact Forum

As individuals and organizations we can have a fantastic impact on the world around us. When we work together, that impact is amplified, and when we identi-

*Sandwich prep for Rogue Food Unites; photo courtesy of Rogue Food Unites*





fy goals and metrics to collectively work towards, collectively we can create lasting change. The goal of the 2025-2030 is to create lasting change. Collective Impact will help our community get there. Collective Impact brings people together in a structured way to achieve social change. It includes a few key components:

1. **Backbone Organization:** An organization dedicated to coordinating the actions, facilitating communication, bringing people and organizations together on a regular basis and tracking progress is critical to success in achieving collective impact. *The Rogue Valley Food System Network will serve as the backbone organization in coordinating the RVCFA Action Plan over the next five years.*
2. **Metrics:** Identifying metrics that indicate change and collectively working towards meeting those metrics is another key component of success. So, for example, if the Community Food Assessment revealed that 12,000 people are eligible for SNAP but not enrolled, one metric might be that over the next five years we work together as a community to close that gap, so that in 2030, 10,000 eligible people have been enrolled in SNAP benefits. A key component of success in creating change is effectively tracking how organizations are doing in collectively meeting the metrics that have been identified. Rogue Valley Food System Network, as the backbone organization, will be tracking these metrics to help our community know where we stand.
3. **Effective Communication:** Just like sports teams require effective communication between teammates in order to win the championship, successfully creating social change and meeting collective impact goals requires consistent and effective communication, both between collaborating organizations and to the community. Communication becomes especially important during times of disagreement (which are bound to happen), but also in ensuring that the voices most impacted by change are included in the conversation. Rogue Valley Food System Network will help to facilitate conversations, coordinate gatherings, and support Working Group internal and external communications to build trust, understanding and engagement as the community and organizations work together to build a stronger, more resilient food system for all.

4. **Collective Fundraising:** Creating change takes time and resources. Bringing organizations together to collectively fundraise will be part of the work for the Rogue Valley Food System Network over the next five years. Engaging individuals, foundations and government entities in funding change and understanding the impact is a key role of the Working Groups and Rogue Valley Food System Network as the backbone organization.

### Want to Participate?

Please reach out to the Rogue Valley Food System Network: [alison@rvfoodsystem.org](mailto:alison@rvfoodsystem.org).

Beginning with the Food Systems Summit in January 2025 and continuing forward for at least the next five years, Working Groups will be meeting around the four goals identified in the 2024 Rogue Valley Community Food Assessment and 2025-2030 Action Plan. If you or your organization would like to be a part of these Working Groups, or receive more information about how you and your organization might align your priorities with the goals identified by the community, or even just learn more about the various projects and collective work being achieved by these teams of organizations, the Rogue Valley Food System Network would love to hear from you. The 2025-2030 Community Action Plan was created by the community and is for the community. The outputs, outcomes and ultimately the impact of the change we wish to achieve is ultimately up to each and every one of us. That means you! Reach out. We can't wait to talk more.



## Glossary of Terms

### **Beginning Farmer**

A beginning farmer is an individual who has not operated a farm or who has operated a farm or ranch for not more than ten consecutive years.

### **Built Environment**

The built environment is the physical spaces and infrastructure that people create or modify. It includes buildings, roads, sidewalks, water systems, etc. and can encourage or discourage healthy behaviors like physical activity and healthy eating.

### **Direct-to-Consumer (DTC) Marketing**

Where local producers engage with consumers face-to-face at roadside stands, farmers' markets, pick-your-own farms, on-farm stores, and community-supported agricultural arrangements (CSAs).

### **Double Up Food Bucks**

A program that doubles the value of federal SNAP benefits spent at participating markets and food retail stores, helping people bring home more healthy fruits and vegetables while supporting local farmers.

### **Farm to School**

Farm to school is an initiative that aims to connect communities, through schools, with healthy, local food. Farm-to-school programs also aim to support local farmers.

### **Food Hub**

A business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source-identified food products, primarily from local and regional producers, to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand.

### **Food System**

The process followed by food items as they travel from the farm to your table. It encompasses a range of activities, including growing, foraging, and ranching; processing; transporting and distributing; retailing and marketing; preparation and cooking; eating; waste management; safety; land and water stewardship; and environmental preservation. The journey our food takes through the food system is influenced by the Rogue Valley's ecosystem, research, education, funding, policies, and our community's rich cultural traditions.



## **Food Rescue**

The practice of safely retrieving wholesome food still fit for human consumption that would otherwise be left unharvested or go to animal feed or a composting facility, anaerobic digestion facility, energy recovery facility, or other disposal site and redistributing that food through a food assistance program.

## **Food Waste Recovery**

The process of obtaining remaining valuable constituents from food via composting or anaerobic digestion.

## **Foodways**

The cultural, social, and economic practices related to the production, distribution, and consumption of food. Foodways are often a reflection of a group or culture's history, traditions, and beliefs.

## **Low Income, Low Access**

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) identifies areas of low food access based on certain low-income and low-access criteria. Low-income (LI) is defined as a census tract with a poverty rate of 20 percent or greater, or median family income at or below 80 percent of the statewide or metropolitan area median family income. Low-access (LA) is defined as a low-income census tract with at least 500 people or 33 percent of the tract's population living more than one mile (urban areas) or more than ten miles (rural areas) from the nearest supermarket or grocery store.

## **Regenerative Agriculture**

Regenerative agriculture is a system of farming principles and practices that seeks to rehabilitate and enhance the entire ecosystem. This includes farming techniques that enhance the land, including regenerating topsoil and increasing biodiversity; that are resilient to climate change; and that provide a livelihood for the farm families and the local community.

## **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**

The largest federal nutrition assistance program, SNAP provides benefits to eligible low-income individuals and families via an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card. This card is used like a debit card to purchase eligible food in authorized retail food stores.

## **Sustainability**

Sustainability is often defined as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” It includes environmental, social, and economic sustainability.

## **Value-Added Processing**

Value-added processing is a means to utilize produce not used for fresh market sales and the surplus of product during the growing season. Adding value can be something as simple as sorting fruits and vegetables by size and selling through unique packaging to the complexity of processing salsa, jams, jellies, chutney, and meat animals.

## **Women, Infants and Children (WIC)**

WIC is a public health nutrition program serving women, infants and children through healthy foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding support and community referrals.

*Facing page: Processing squash at Raptor Creek Farm of the Josephine County Food Bank; credit: Steven Addington Photography*



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*Facing page: Staff of Rogue Valley Food System Network at the 2023 Brews, Bluegrass, and BBQ fundraiser event; credit: Steven Addington Photography*

*This page: Squash at the Rogue Valley Growers Market; credit: Steven Addington Photography*

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