

Food Aggregat

Products
Choices
going to be?

We are connecting people
to local food through grants,
markets, to selling, buying, cooking, &
eating.

PURPOSE

exists to nourish
culture & community
through food for everyone
& equitable food system,
because creating
healthy food.

SOUTH KING COUNTY FOOD AGGREGATION & ACCESS

have equitable
access for

have relationships with
food system

have food
production
-growing spaces

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Introduction

A group of organizations in South King County are working together to develop a facility for aggregation of and access to healthy and local food. The organizations include the Food Innovation Network, the International Rescue Committee, Living Well Kent, Shared Soil, the South King County Food Coalition (SKCFC), and Elk Run Farm (a project of SKCFC). Public Health - Seattle & King County is convening the group and is an active voice in the discussion and planning of the project. Additionally, King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks (KC DNRP) is providing guidance and support to this effort.

The core group began the process of strategic planning to develop a collective vision and strategy in February 2018. Several compelling and intersecting factors demonstrating the need for this project include:

- Small farmers in South King County need a place to aggregate their produce to support selling into local market channels.
- Multiple deliveries to small sites in South King County are not cost effective for farmers, even though there is the demand for their products.
- Food access initiatives, such as food banks need an aggregation space to handle the produce they want to buy, receive as donations, distribute, and grow.
- South King County lacks facilities for food aggregation, storage, and processing.
- There is a lack of access to local, fresh food that is grown and stays in South King County.
- There is a lack of growing space in South King County, especially for refugee, immigrant, and low-income communities who face additional barriers such as transportation, start-up funding, and language and literacy skills.
- Organizations and farmers are unable to expand their programs without addressing infrastructure barriers.

The partner organizations work with recent immigrant and refugee farmers, food bank clients, volunteers, wholesale distributors, elderly and youth. They support each other through their commitment to provide equitable access to healthy, local food to residents of South King County. This common agenda lends itself to a collective impact approach to create a sustainable and resilient solution to lasting social change for this community.

Why Food Access

The ability to access healthy and culturally appropriate food is the foundation of personal and community interdependence. Access is not only a critical element of social equity and food sovereignty, it is a critical method to address root causes of persistent health concerns such as heart disease, diabetes, and obesity which are more prevalent in low-income and people of color communities.

Increasing this community's share in their own food system increases their independence, health, and interconnectedness. The great needs in South King County make way for many opportunities for food access initiatives that strengthen and create market channels, build resiliency, and create community for immigrants and refugees, a growing population in South King County.

Why South King County

South King County is home to many innovative and entrepreneurial businesses and organizations working to improve food access and health equity while creating community, such as the six core group member organizations working together to build this facility.

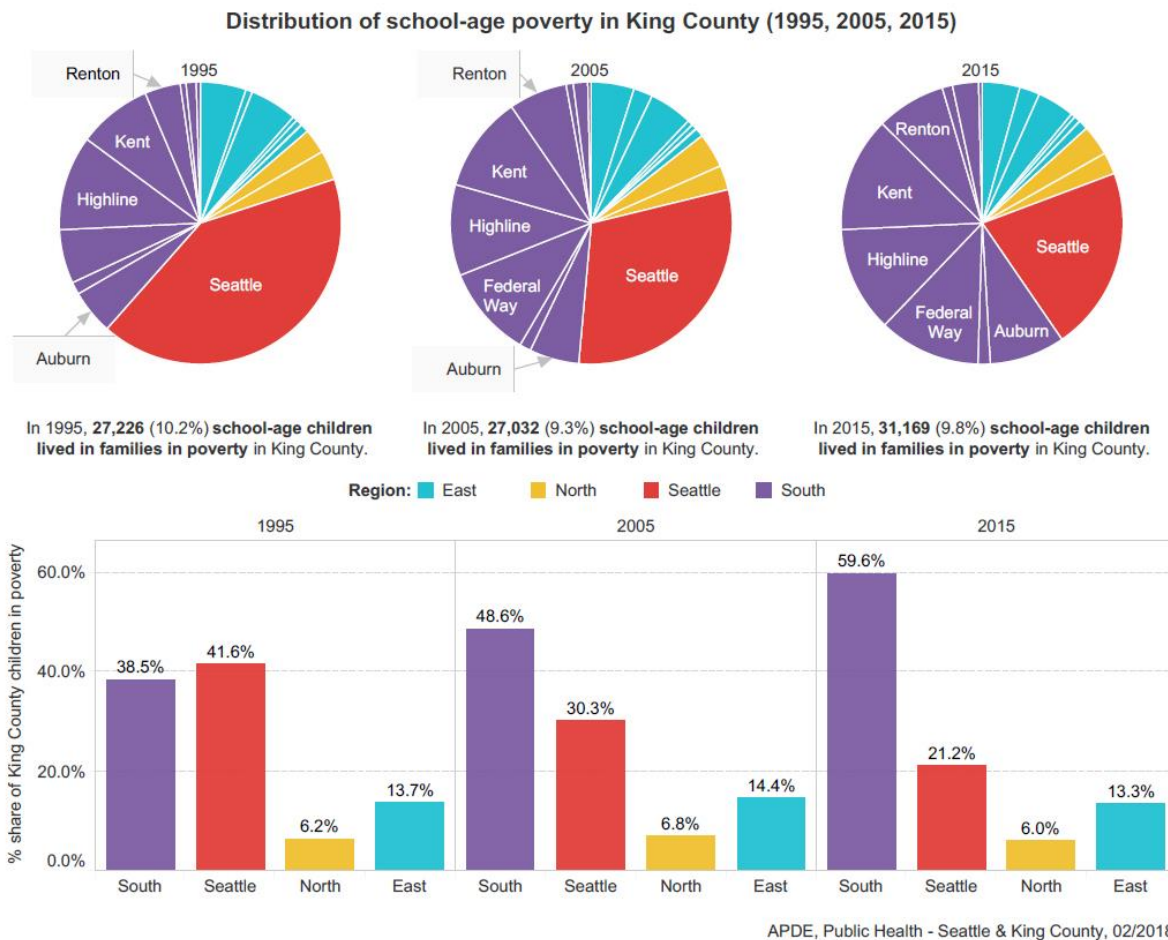
This area is also experiencing increased demand for programs that support food access and health equity. In Seattle, the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment increased more than 35 percent between 2013 and 2018. This is unaffordable without the equivalent of two full-time jobs paying at least the \$15 minimum wage.¹ As housing in Seattle becomes ever more unaffordable, immigrants, refugees, and lower income residents relocate to communities across South King County. These individuals and families want and need culturally appropriate foods or access to land to grow these foods. Additionally, historic land use and

¹ City of Seattle. Mandatory Housing Affordability: Citywide Implementation, Director's Report and Recommendations. February 2018. Available online at:
www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/HALA/Policy/Directors_Report_MHA_Citywide.pdf

other policies has led to South King County having 5 to 7 times more fast food restaurants and convenience stores, than the number of groceries, farmer's markets, and produce stands where communities could access healthy, culturally appropriate food (the King County average is 2.4).²

These issues are interrelated with the shifting socio-economic status of South King County communities. South King County has disproportionately low opportunities for education, economic mobility, and housing/neighborhood indicators when compared to other parts of King County.³ Additionally, over the past two decades, school districts in South King County have seen an increase in student poverty. This demographic shift is indicative of the downstream impacts of poverty such as:

- chronic disease
- inadequate housing
- lack of reliable transportation
- food hardship



² Public Health - Seattle & King County. "Retail Food Environment Index by Health Reporting Area". 2012.

³ Jason Reece, et al. Kirwan Institute. "King County, WA Opportunity Mapping: Mapping to Promote Equitable Community Development and Fair Housing." 2010. Available online at: www.psrc.org/sites/default/files/king_county_wa_opportunity_mapping_apr_2010.pdf.

About the South King County Food Aggregation and Access Facility

The purpose of the food aggregation and access facility is to create a place where South King County communities connect with and around food. The facility will help new and emerging farmers gain access to market channels (including farmers markets and whole sale distributors) thereby helping to keep more local, hyper-local, and culturally appropriate foods in South King County. In interviews with end-users on design and function of the facility, farmers said they especially want more opportunities to store produce and market channels to grow their businesses financially. This facility will create access to locally grown food products year-round and this will increase consumer demand.

Additionally, the facility will create an active space for community members who want to support and learn about an equitable food system in South King County. The facility will be an access point for education, hands-on experiences, culturally appropriate food, and other resources that promote food security. This integration will collectively support growth of the consumer demand for local food products, community systems for food access, and organized infrastructure systems like processing, aggregation, distribution and marketing.

PHYSICAL DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

The South King County food aggregation and access facility will play a critical role in building a resilient food system across the region. The structure reflects common typologies of food hubs such as being centrally located and incorporating cold and dry storage space. Additionally, this facility intends to incorporate growing space and mixed-use space to support growers, producers and the community through deliberate design choices.

Over-arching attributes of the facility include:

- Scalable
- Moveable structures for flexible scaling
- Sustainably designed
- Replicable
- Space to grow food

The prototype is a facility using shipping containers for shared cold and dry storage located on one to five acres with space suitable for farming. The farming space is intended to support South King County food banks, new and emerging farmers, community gardeners and possibly a youth development program.

As funding and operational capacity allows, mixed-use space will be developed and include a commercial kitchen, co-working office space, technology to support business needs of growers and producers, a walk-in freezer and other amenities to support the users, families and the community at large. Shipping containers will be considered for these aspects as well.

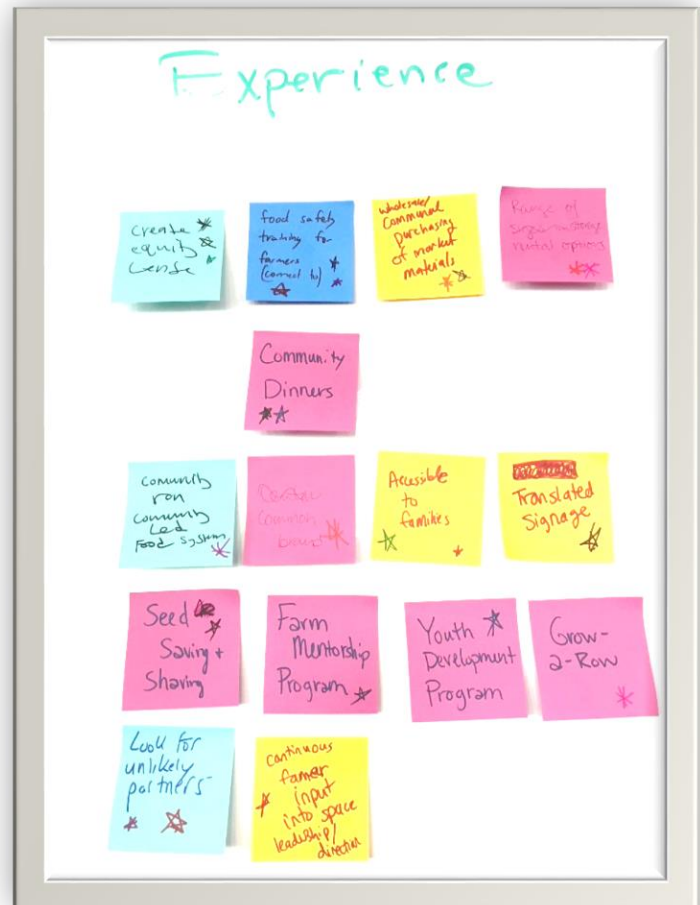
OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Food hubs or aggregation sites are diverse in structure, focus, and defining models. There are already hundreds of active food hubs and aggregation

centers operating across the U.S. Therefore, there are a range of options for possible investment and support. The facility will function as a non-profit driven collaborative or cooperative that balances market-oriented and non-market activities.

Examples of market-oriented characteristics include:

- Garner revenue from local food and/or local product sales
- Have a primary focus on maximizing revenue/price opportunities for producers
- Have physical infrastructure and/or human capital devoted to aggregation, distribution, food storage, agriculture-focused marketing, sales and/or administration
- Focus on multiple market channels including direct-to-consumer and wholesale
- Have the capability to work with multiple suppliers across a defined region



- Have resources to engage employees and/or support workforce development in the region

The site design also has the capacity to engage in non-market focused activities such as:

- Programming focused on food security and healthy food access such as local food campaigns, food donations, etc.
- Community engagement, outreach, and training around local food, intersectional issues related to food security (labor, climate, land use, etc.), and healthy eating
- Farm/local food focused labor and skill development including internships/apprenticeships and farmer training programs

COST CONSIDERATIONS

The prototype responds to the needs of the constituents through the priorities of the physical design and organizational structure. The facility is still in the conceptual phase and has not yet received architectural consultation. Consideration of the prototype was informed by conversations with the lead architect at Cargotecture in Seattle, WA and the owner of Dry Box Storage in Chehalis, WA. Both companies specialize in the use of shipping containers as primary construction material for a variety of facilities.

Costs depend on condition and finishing of the materials used, the square footage of the facility and the incorporation of more standard building practice. The following is an overview of costs associated with shipping containers:

Shipping Container	40 ft/ 320 square feet	\$20.00/square foot
Shipping Container with Refrigeration	40 ft/ 320 square feet	\$45.00/square foot
Finishing Costs - site placement, electrical, plumbing, furnishings	\$75.00 - \$100.00/square foot based on finishes and amenities	

INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Aggregation hubs have proven they contribute to the economy by supporting local farmers, fast becoming an established sector of business. As a cornerstone of the local food movement, they are also part of an emerging conversation around food system infrastructure becoming an asset class similar to the renewable energy sector. As such, there are potential opportunities to leverage funding beyond public and foundation grants, individual philanthropy, and corporate investments and partnerships. In the future, food systems infrastructure may benefit through traditional finance approaches such bonds, tax increment finance, tax credits, and revolving loan funds.



South King County Food Coalition staff giving out Elk Run Farm produce during distribution at the Des Moines Area Food Bank (photo credit: Maria Anderson).

Recommendations

As this project moves forward, core group participants will continue to converse and collaborate to develop the design. In moving the project forward, the focus is on **four** issues:

- 1) **Define** the operating structure, including:
 - a. roles and responsibilities
 - b. a decision-making process
 - c. processes on how to mediate conflicts
 - d. how the cost of fundraising will be shared or allocated
 - e. how to share equally in both risk and benefit
- 2) **Develop** communication procedures and documents for internal and external communications
- 3) **Leverage** monetary resources to move this vision forward
- 4) Further **refine conceptual design** to include architectural consultation and cost estimates

The South King County food aggregation and access facility clearly addresses the complex needs of a region. It prioritizes the need to build a stronger and more resilient food system and economy that provides equitable access to healthy food to all residents. This project represents the vision and energy of multiple partners committed to serving the community while ensuring everyone has access to healthy, fresh, local and culturally appropriate food.

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The Consultants

Laura Titzer, Patricia Hennessy, and Maggie Chumbley all have created successful bodies of work in areas of food access and local food in the public sector. They have experience facilitating groups to build effective initiatives especially around food systems. They teamed up to facilitate a series of iterative workshops to find clear purpose and best structures for collaborative work. The findings of this work is documented in the report, South King County Food Aggregation and Access Facility Recommendation for Project Advancement commissioned by Public Health - Seattle & King County.