



Salmon-Challis Comprehensive Food System Feasibility Study

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PHASE 1: January 2022

SUMMARY

The producer-focused assessment of the local food system in Lemhi and Custer Counties reveals a robust ecosystem of farmers, ranchers, growers, and makers who provide a diverse offering of food products and share an undeniable passion for nourishing their community. In most, this passion resembles conviction and is referred to by many interviewed as a “calling.” That cultural context permeates the opportunities and challenges of the local food system in ways that cannot be reduced merely to data and statistics.

Our insights consist of feedback from over 45 producers, who graciously shared their thoughts with us via in-person interviews, phone calls, and an online survey. In the survey alone, 56% of the 27 respondents live in Lemhi County and 44% in Custer County. Most of these people are individuals who are either not structured as businesses or do not have an outward facing presence as a business.

A majority of the people we spoke with identify as either needing to grow their business to have the economy of scale to make it, diversifying their revenue streams and / or customer base, or wanting to grow their business more generally. With that in mind, the interest in a shared facility and intention of making value-added products if/when a physical facility and structural support exists both received a relatively strong response from producers.

The producers who shared their insights with us repeatedly identified structural support-based needs, as opposed to purely physical needs. Marketing, connection to consumers, access to larger markets, and grant writing assistance were among the most popular responses, ranking right alongside the more physical components. Further, structural elements such as a business incubation program, access to learn from skilled experts / mentors, networking with local producers, and information / education on how to follow public health guidelines all rank in the top five features or services respondents would utilize if offered.

In terms of more physical aspects of the supply chain, transportation stands out as the greatest need, with all three forms (distribution of products to markets, transportation of product to buyers and of inputs needed) ranking in the top five most frequent responses. The most requested physical facility feature is unsurprisingly increased meat processing capacity. Though there are other physical assets that received strong support, including cold storage (freezer and refrigerated), commercial kitchen (cooking and cold / prep), and temperature and climate-controlled growing space, the demand for a shared physical space offering these amenities seems to depend highly on how accessible (both financially and geographically) the production space would be.

The hesitancy related to accessibility seems to reflect the intense strain many are experiencing in terms of time and energy. More than half of survey respondents identified as being either in the middle or closer to “struggling and worn out” than to the other end of the range, which was presented as “energized and enthused.” This mirrors what we heard in our in-person meetings as well. Because

hardworking local people with their collectively passion, expertise, knowledge, and resolve are the foundation of the local food ecosystem, supporting these people and inspiring hope in them feels necessary to maintaining and strengthening the local food system. With nearly everyone sharing with us what gives them hope, we have a good foundation to work from as we move forward.

INVENTORY

The inventory of producers lives in a custom-designed database powered and hosted by a software called Airtable. Airtable allows for the triangulation of qualitative information as well as the calculation of quantitative data. The software can hold a wide variety of information in a number of different field types. And that information can be made visible or hidden in various views and to different users.

Airtable also supports automatically updated queries via saved-views managed by filters, groups, and sorts. These segmented lists can be shared to specific audiences or the public via links or by being embedded in an existing website or by downloading as a csv file. Updates to the overall database will automatically reflect in real time via the shared links or embedded views within a website. For example, if a veggie producer in the database begins raising pigs for meat, the database admin can add the “pork” label to the producer’s account within Airtable. Then, that producer will auto-populate on the list (saved filtered view) of protein producers while still showing up on the veggie producer list. If a producer changes his or her website or phone number, a simple change to their contact info will reflect in all places that producer is included. This allows for the list to remain current, should someone(s) take ownership of maintaining it, as opposed to the static pdf list that from 2013 or 2016, which cannot be readily updated or accessed.

Airtable is an easy-to-use software that resembles Microsoft Excel, but has far more capabilities as a customizable database. As the local food movement and support system grows, Airtable will allow the inventory to grow. Airtable is free, to a point. For specifics on user levels and payment structures, please refer to [Airtable’s website](#).

SURPRISES & OBSERVATIONS

Below is a collection of surprises and observations, in no particular order. They are shared to provide more information than the SUMMARY and to reveal the perceived connections of individual components, many of which may inform the final recommendations in Phase 4.

The percentage of producers contributing to the local food system that do not identify as a business or do not grow/raise/make/create as their primary way to derive their livelihood is higher than we initially anticipated. From the survey alone, only 30% of the respondents have a business website; however, 48% had either a Facebook page or Instagram account for their business or ranch. Comparatively, the food system in Custer County seems to be supported by a higher percentage of individuals on the production side, rather than businesses. That being said, this unexpected observation rings true to both counties. In our opinion, it is both a strength of the food system and perhaps a limitation. So, this distinction seems necessary to weigh when analyzing the identified needs and interest in shared production space. The

interest in the structural components of a shared system – a business incubation program, access to learn from skilled experts / mentors, networking with local producers, and information / education on how to follow public health guidelines – and the cost concern of potential shared production space reflect this individual vs business breakdown of producers within the local food system. It should be noted that most of the individuals who are perhaps not formally businesses still grow, raise, make or create food in ways that are as serious and dedicated in their approach to production and providing food to their community as the local producers who are structured as businesses. It does not seem that one (individual vs business) is significantly reliable or dependable. The shared conviction of people like Tawna Skinner, who said “I have been given a gift of being able to grow extraordinary food. It is my passion. And I love to share it.” is one of the things that was most often mentioned in terms of what gives people hope related to the local food system.

The strong positive response to the need / interest in structural support elements surprised us. Perhaps, it is that people are more willing to say “I need support” in a way that may reveal that they aren’t an expert or someone who has it “all figured out” by checking a box in an online survey than by forming the sentence and saying the words out loud to someone else. Some of these areas are ones in which maybe a producer doesn’t have expertise or knowledge; however, it seems that they are also areas that reflect the lack of time to “do it all” expressed by most producers and, as mentioned before, the identify of many producers as doing it on the side or for fun instead of as a business or a means to support themselves financially.

Mentorship, whether involving a local peer or community member or someone coming in from outside of the counties, is something that many people are craving. Networking with other local producers also ranked highly in terms of responses. Though more formal sounding, “mentorship” or “networking” also translate to “peer support.” Over and over in our in-person conversations, phone calls, and even the online survey, individuals shared their personal and professional struggles with us. And in almost every interaction, the person seemed to have a feeling of being alone in their challenge, in their despair or disappointment, in their shame or exhaustion, and in their questioning or fear of failure. Yet, it is clear to us that the places where people felt most alone are the very places within that were most shared amongst their peers. On the survey, when asked about their current feeling of well-being, most participants said they are somewhere between struggling and worn out (1) or being energized and enthused (5). The average response is 3.3, with over half choosing “2” or “3” and only 12% identifying as a “5” on the scale.

Also, in the vein of structural support, having someone to identify financial opportunities and help with the process of writing grants and securing funding are services in which many participants expressed interest. In our conversations, many producers spoke to the stress they feel related to the financial position of their farms or ranches. Again, this is one of those areas that is deeply personal, where people can feel shame or discouragement, and can convince themselves that they are alone in those feelings. It is possible that having a local professional within a non-profit or agency dedicated to helping with grant writing and / or marketing and accessing new markets, which are also resounding needs amongst producers, could help lessen some of the burden many seem to be feeling.

The stressful strain on individual producer’s time showed up throughout our conversations and the survey, with most people sharing that they can’t imagine fitting one more thing into their schedule. With this we found a lot of chicken-and-the-egg type scenarios - or for the more number minded people out there, circular-reference error situations. The interrelatedness of so much we asked about and the dependencies of so many elements are worth noting and taking into consideration when analyzing the

responses to any one question on its own. For example, of the survey respondents, well over half (63%) identified that they would create a new value-added product in their business if they knew the support is there to take a chance, with another 26% as maybe. Additionally, of the respondents, 30% said they need to grow their business to have the economy of scale to make it, 41% said they need to diversify their revenue streams and / or customer base, and 44% said they want to grow their business more generally (on a “check all that apply” question). However, on average, the interest in shared production infrastructure ranked as 3.6 (out of five), with only 37% of the respondents choosing “5: very interested in participating / absolutely needed for my business.”

Money in the form of cost was the most mentioned concerns related to a shared-facility, which could potentially provide the space to help create a value-added product or grow or diversify a producer’s current business. Second to money, the concern of distance / proximity to a physical space was identified as a concern. We view these responses as a reflection of time being a precious commodity, one in which many feel they do not have near enough of when it comes to their businesses or lives. So, what looks like a disconnect between the shared interest of many participants in adding another product to their offerings and the repeatedly expressed feeling that distance to a facility or cost to use a space or service would be a hinderance may actually be more of a connection between the lack of time and money due to labor shortages and a lack of adequate structural support. Adding a value-added product or growing / diversifying one’s business takes time. It is possible that for some new equipment that would streamline a process could help free up some time. And it is possible that creating a value-added product could significantly increase the revenue of a business allowing for the financial flexibility to support an employee, which could free up time for the owner. It is also possible that access to a dedicated business support person who could provide grant writing and marketing services or better connect products to consumers would significantly increase the gross margin of a business or otherwise positively change the financial position of a producer. However, paying for any of these elements now or taking the time to get to or participate in them seems to be a hesitation of many producers. So, as we move forward, drawing these connections and untangling the dependencies between them will be a key part of whatever recommendations come from the ongoing assessment.

In terms of the responses related to creating a new value-added product if the support (physical or structural) exists in the future, perhaps spelling out the physical design and use details of a future proposed facility and / or the terms and services of a structural support system would enable a switch from “maybe” to “yes” among participants. In our conversations as well as in the survey comments, many referenced an interest in growing additional crops or raising more animals. But it is like Jessica McAleese of Swift River Farm said, “Why grow more tomatoes if there’s nowhere to take or sell them?” So, at this point of not yet detailing specifically what a shared-facility concept could entail (commercial kitchen, canning, co-packing, meat processing) or a structural support system idea could incorporate (business incubator, mentorship, access to and availability of grant writing and funding resources, etc.), it is hard to fully quantify the demand with certainty. That being said, we one of the strongest correlations between the interest in business incubation space as well as mentorship and the number of people who want to launch another product.

The bottleneck of local meat processing, both custom-exempt and USDA certified, is a thread from producer conversations that we expect will continue through to the infrastructure portion (Phase 2) and community analysis (Phase 3). This need also reflects the highest number of producers in the region, in terms of absolute numbers and acres. That being said, beef is, and will always be, an export product of Lemhi and Custer Counties due to the ratio of cattle to people in the area. So, in terms of supporting and strengthening the local food system, meat processing, both custom-exempt and USDA, is absolutely a

need, but perhaps not definitively the greatest need. This will be determined as we weigh other perspectives during later phases of this project.

We also spoke with additional individuals, institutions, and businesses that support other aspects of the local food system and supply chain over the last four months. For the purposes of this phase, we did not include that insight, but have gathered it and will incorporate it in the appropriate future phases.

NEXT STEPS

As the project continues, we will work with the committee to define the desired sub-set lists (by specific categories of products, regions, etc.) and to determine where the lists should be shared. We will schedule a zoom meeting, which can be recorded for future reference, to walk through the inventory and will make time at one of our future visits to do an in-person hands-on tutorial as well. Though the producer phase is wrapping up, we can and will be updating the inventory as we move through the remaining phases of the assessment.

As part of the scope of Phase 2, we will be formally making the following connections between participants (from the survey and in-person meetings):

- Those interested in commercial kitchen for fresh prep processing (peeling, chopping, bagging, etc.) with Jo Philpott, owner of an underutilized commercial kitchen space that does not have cooking components included
- Those looking for freezer and refrigerated storage space with Last Wave, which has cold storage space
- Those looking for local processing for pork/lamb/beef, specifically USDA processing, with Josh Hale, who is in the process of finalizing plans and fundraising for a USDA facility to be built in the area via a Friesla system
- Those interested in making charcuterie and / or smoked-meat-related value-added products with Josh Hale, in the event that his facility could include these amenities
- Those looking to combine orders for packaging in order to potentially decrease the input costs needed for their value-added products with each other (ex: jars)
- Those looking for greenhouse space with each other
- Challis Bread Co. with producers looking for items that Challis Bread is trying to source (ex: Paul Werner, summer apples)
- Those interested in transportation services where their routes / needs overlap geographically

Also, as part of the scope of Phase 2, we will be developing a matrix detailing and comparing commercial kitchen options. In addition to including this future matrix in our report, we will provide it directly to all who expressed interest in commercial kitchen space for cooking and/or prep.

QUESTIONS

Below, we have included a list of questions (in italics) that we are considering as we move forward, based on our Phase 1 findings and observations. This list, which is not exhaustive, is in addition to the questions included or inherent in the scope of Phases 2 – 4.

How can local producers best be supported as people and as businesses? Would some form of peer-to-peer organization or support-structure or group (whether it provided mentoring, or access to experts, or networking, or a combination of the three) help people feel less alone in the things that weigh them down? How could a change in that feeling of alone-ness help fortify the local food system?

We suspect this same question will come up when it comes to analyzing the infrastructure pieces of existing meat processing, community-run gardens, food security and affordability programs, and more.

Are farmers and cooks highly revered in their local community or just among their peers? If they are, how can the community better support them? What could that look like in terms of community investment or buy-in to meet some of the most pressing needs?

Perhaps there's a simple fix to support the local food system in terms of propping up or making possible a specific part of the supply chain, such as a food hub; however, it is also possible that such a facility would need to be accompanied with a shift in community conversation or a slight change in paradigm or perspective to make such an addition successful.

With the details spelled out for shared physical space and support services, would there be a clearer "yes" from producers regarding their intent to make additional value-added product(s)? How can support meeting the needs identified in ways that are sustainable and lasting?

Cameron Rolle, of Sweet Belly Farms, provided insight, which resonates with our thoughts related to responding to the needs, "With whatever physical infrastructure or non-physical infrastructure/resources/groups that are set up, someone has to maintain, update, and run it. I am concerned that there will not be funding or enough volunteer energy in the future to keep this momentum going. I would like there to be significant planning for ways to access funding in the future and dedicated, paid persons or committed volunteers who will be able to maintain whatever project is created." As we move forward with this project, we will provide some of the planning she has requested and will be asking questions, like the one above, to support this concern.

How can we use the hope identified by producers as a foundation from which to build in a way that is inviting and inclusive as well as inspiring to those that grow, raise, make or create food in Lemhi and Custer Counties?

We want to address all of the challenges, short comings, and obstacles head-on without taking a negative approach to the local food system. When faced with realities that seem to lend themselves naturally to a scarcity mindset, we want to shift toward an abundance perspective that incorporates "both, and" type thinking instead of binary thinking to allow for more creative and collaborative solutions. Working from a foundation of hope might be the most authentic and applicable way to do this.

PHASE 2: March 2022, Original / June 2022, Revisions

INFRASTRUCTURE ATTRIBUTES & INVENTORY

The infrastructure that comprises the supply chain is organized below in four categories: Growing Food, Accessing Local Food, Processing / Preparing / Storing Local Food, and Support. A list of the infrastructure components, where relevant, are included in [a list within Airtable](#), the database system, which can be updated as needed and linked or embedded in a website. As we continue to learn more about the community and continue conversations with individuals, businesses, and support agencies and organizations, we will make updates to this inventory within the report and the database. Following the completion of the study, the database can be regularly updated by the advisory committee or wherever the information will live and be managed.

Growing Food

When it comes to the access and availability for people to grow their own food in Lemhi and Custer Counties, the physical components of the supply chain consist of the following infrastructure categories: Community Gardens, Seeds and Seed Starts, and Education.

Community Gardens

The Salmon Community Garden at the Sacajawea Center - Salmon

Providing garden plots for rent, the Salmon Community Garden also gives growers access to compost, an assortment of free seeds, access to a greenhouse, and automatic irrigation. Garden plots are rented on a first come, first serve basis. The current contact for the garden is general@sacajaweacenter.org.

School Garden - Salmon

The School Garden includes The Garden Classroom, The Kitchen Classroom and the Summer Kids Garden Program. The garden is primarily utilized by the school; however it also partners with local organizations and agencies such as:

- Lemhi County Farmers Market booth
- Lemhi Social Services
- Lemhi Afterschool Promise
- LCCI Mahoney House
- Community produce pick days
- Student backpack produce program
- BLM Firewise Garden

- USFWS Pollinator Patch

The current contact for the garden is salmonschoolgarden@gmail.com.

Challis Community Garden - Challis

The garden is located on a plot next to the Challis Community Church. In the past, anyone has been welcome to plant whatever they like so long as they have approval of the Garden Manager. The first-grade class at Challis Elementary School plants pumpkin seeds in the spring and return as second-graders and pick their pumpkins in time for Halloween.

The current garden contact is Helen Winegarner - hslkwinegarner@yahoo.com.

Seeds and Plant Starts

Like much of the local food supply chain, the infrastructure that is connecting seed and plant starts to customers is rather informal. Swift River Farm sells plant starts direct-to-consumer and sells seeds through Snake River Seed Cooperative, who distributes to Mountain Harvest in Salmon. Other than Swift River Farm, none of the sellers of seeds and / or plant starts operate as businesses or sell as their main focus. In Lemhi County, Jessica Moggo, Max & Lisa Bonner, and Tawnya Skinner have all sold plant starts in years past. Sometimes one or more of these seed growers, sells starts at the Lemhi County Farmers Market. Other times customers can schedule a time to come by their greenhouses to purchase plant starts. And some years all of their starts are spoken for through existing relationships and word of mouth. Though there is some consistency, it seems as though the availability of particular plants for sale from these community members and others varies year-over-year. Similarly, some years and weeks, there are plant starts that come from the abundance of private at-home gardens for sale at the Challis Farmers Market. Also, the local FFA chapters throughout both counties have at times sold plant starts, but this too has not been consistent year-over-year.

Education

In Lemhi County, Shannon Williams with University of Idaho Extension curates a comprehensive local education list that includes offerings from Ag Extension, local organizations (Community Gardens), nonprofits (Salmon Valley Stewardship, Lemhi Regional Land Trust), industry groups (Farm Bureau, Stockgrowers, etc.) and agencies (NRCS, Idaho Department of Agriculture) that serve the region.

There is more on education in the State-level Resources header under the *Support* section further down in the report.

Accessing Local Food

In addition to the infrastructure that connects people in the community with the resources and ability to grow their own food, there are key structural support and physical components of the supply chain that help people access local foods. These connection points include Food Pantry / Food Access Programs, Grocery Stores that Sell Local Food Products, Farmers Markets, and Community Support Agriculture.

Food Pantry / Food Access Programs

There are several food pantry and food access programs in Lemhi County and a couple in Custer County. Due to both the pandemic and the challenges of organizing and maintaining volunteers the hours / days of operation and logistics of each program change. Here's a simple list of the organizations and programs by County:

- Lemhi County
 - Calvary Chapel Food Bank - (208) 756-4422
 - Also works with Idaho Fish & Wildlife as a distribution point for meat harvested from their roadkill program.
 - Salmon Assembly of God Food Pantry - (208) 756-3393
 - Eastern Idaho Community Action Partnership (EICAP) Food Distribution - (208) 756-3999 / fssalmon@eicap.org
 - Currently delivers to Salmon Outreach Office, 955 Riverfront Dr, Suite A, Salmon, ID 83467
 - Salmon Senior Citizens Nutrition / Meals on Wheels - (208) 756-3556
 - Lemhi Afterschool Promise - (208) 940.0409 / LASP@custertel.net
 - Backpack Program - (208) 336-9643 / info@idahofoodbank.org
- Custer County
 - Helping Hands - (208) 879-4713
 - Eastern Idaho Community Action Partnership (EICAP) Food Distribution - (208) 756-3999
 - Currently delivers to Challis Office, 120 Hwy 93, Challis, ID 83213
 - Mackay Food Pantry has a once a month distribution. The site is at 401 S. Main, Mackay, ID 83251 and the number is 208-588-3180.
 - Mackay Food Center- (208) 589-3331, a privately funded group that donates food twice a month to both members of Custer and Butte County. They serve between 20-25 individuals and families every two weeks. Their food items are completely based on community donation including meat, veggies and funding to purchase canned goods and paper products.

To keep up with the latest information regarding which days specific food pantries are serving meals, reference the [Idaho Department of Health and Welfare](#) website or call the numbers associated with each program.

Grocery Stores that Sell Local Food Products

The following grocery stores consistently and reliably sell local produce, protein, or value-added products.

- Lemhi
 - The Corner Store - Salmon
 - Carries Pack Idaho Farm goods.
 - Mountain Harvest - Salmon
 - Carries a wide variety of local vegetables, dairy, meat, eggs, and value-added products.
 - Nature's Pantry - Salmon
 - Carries a wide variety of local vegetables, dairy, meat, eggs, and value-added products.
 - Saveway - Salmon
 - Carries more regional projects like Local Bounty salad mix (Bitterroot), Paradise Grove raw milk from Montevue, Falls Brand pork and beef value-added products, Salmon Valley Honey
 - Tendoy Store - Tendoy
 - Carries eggs from Agency Creek and fresh Oddfellows sandwiches
 - Baker Country Market - Baker
 - Carries Mountain Valley Cheese, tea from Stephenville
- Custer
 - Ivie's - Mackay
 - Carries meat from Elkhorn Ranch South
 - Carries fresh fruits and vegetables in the summer from the Mackay FFA
 - Mountain Village Merc - Stanley
 - Carries meat from Elkhorn Ranch South and Local Bounty (Bitterroot)

Farmers Markets

Lemhi County Farmers Market - The LCFM manager position, whether paid or volunteer, is subject to change on an annual basis. The LCFM Board of Directors will establish the Manager roles and duties before the first Saturday market of the season and communicate this position to the vendorship.

Town Square Park in Salmon
Saturdays from 9am to 1pm
June - September
lemhifarmersmarket@gmail.com

Challis Farmers Market - The market is organized as a co-op and operated by volunteers.

Challis City Park in Challis
Saturdays from 10am to 1pm
June - October
Gretchen Roman - tgroman@hotmail.com

Mackay Farmers Market - Lost Rivers Economic Development helps coordinate the market in terms of sponsorships and general coordination.

Mackay History Park
Saturdays
Late May - Late September
Mandy Cecil - (208) 760-1998

Community Supported Agriculture

Swift River Farm

For 2022, the CSA will deliver to Stanley, Ellis, Challis, East Fork, Salmon, and North Fork. Specifics related to pricing, frequency of delivery, and produce inclusion are available on the farm's website: <https://www.swiftriverfarm.org/csa>.

Swift River also offers veggie share programs for individual groups as well as commercial outfitters.

Agency Creek Farm

2022 is the first year - planning is still in progress.

Contact Kathy Batteron for more information www.agencycreekfarm@yahoo.com.

Processing / Preparing / Storing Food

The portion of the local supply chain that transforms animals and plants into value-added food products consists of three main infrastructure categories: Meat Processing, Commercial Kitchens, and Cold Storage.

Meat Processing

Meat processing was identified as one of the highest "needs" for producers, and our study of the area's infrastructure confirmed the lack of meat processing assets. With the way Idaho laws are currently, meat sold directly to the consumer by the individual cut (instead of as shares) and any meat sold wholesale to a restaurant to grocery store, etc. must be processed at a USDA facility. There are no USDA facilities in

Lemhi or Custer County. The closest facilities are at least a few hours away. This greatly inhibits the ability for local producers to cost effectively sell their beef, pork, etc., locally. There is one custom-exempt facility in Lemhi County and two possible facilities coming, one to Lemhi and one to Custer County.

Pete's Custom Meats, Salmon

Currently the only meat processing facility in Lemhi or Custer County, Pete's is a custom-exempt butcher shop with a retail counter. At Pete's Custom Meats, domestic livestock and wild game are processed. The slaughter component of Pete's Custom Meats is near the fairgrounds. Pete has a slaughter truck that can be deployed to ranches, but due to the rising cost of gas, currently he does not take it further than Baker. Pete also sells individual steaks, pork chops, and other beef and pork products, including value-added offerings like snack sticks and sausages. Pete purchases the USDA-processed meat from a large-scale packing plant in Colorado to sell directly to customers. Though it is not technically "local beef", the public perception of buying directly from Pete's Meats instead of Saveway in Salmon or Costco in Idaho Falls or Missoula is considered buying local food for many in the community. Contact info for Pete's is in the Airtable database.

Cutler Ranches Custom Meats, Challis

The former Challis Butcher Shop has been purchased by Jamie and Preston Cutler. The plan for the Cutlers is to cut their own beef to sell at the retail counter in the butcher shop and to custom-cut meat for other producers locally. The shop is now operational (June 2022). The intention is for the Cutler's beevs will be slaughtered at a USDA processing facility in Rigby and sold in Challis. Contact info for Jamie is in the Airtable database.

Lamb's Grocery, Challis

Though primarily a grocery store, Lamb's Grocery has a robust meat counter complete with meat processing capabilities. Currently their meat, which comes up from Associated Foods, arrives broken down to muscle groups. From their skilled meat cutting staff cuts the beef or pork or lamb into individual cuts. They have the capacity to use a bone saw as well to create t-bones and bone-in ribe-eyes. Currently (June 2022), they are working with local ranchers and meat process owners, the Cutlers, to begin buying and processing Cutler Ranches Meats to be sold at Lamb's. The intent is that they will buy muscle groups of meat straight from slaughter house in Rigby. Colin Lamb also mentioned that the meat counter has a regular sales channel to local business such as restaurants and hospitality outfits who come and shop for their beef at lambs instead of buying through a distributor due to the cost and quality of the cuts.

Lost River Meats, Mackay

This once USDA facility has changed hands. It is now owned by a ranching family from outside the County in Idaho. It is unclear what their intentions are related to pursuing USDA certification, selling direct-to-consumer products in Mackay, or providing capacity for beef that is not part of their own brand and supply chain.

Possible Heritage Meat Collective, Mackay

Planned by local producer Josh Hale, the potential meat processing facility to be located in Mackay on Hale's ranch would be USDA certified. The Hales already sell their beef directly to consumers. As part of their meat processing plant business plan, the Hales plan to offer other ranchers the ability to sell through the Hale brand with their ranch denoted. Contact info for Josh is in the Airtable database.

Commercial Kitchens

Depending on the use, kitchens fall under one of two regulatory bodies, and sometimes both: East Idaho Public Health (EIPH) or Food and Drug Administration (FDA). If the food being prepared is going to then be sold directly to the consumer by the preparer, the food can be prepared in a Commissary. According to EIPH, "a commissary is a place where food containers or supplies are stored, prepared, or packaged for transit, sale, or service at other locations." Put more simply, a commissary is just for cooking and serving. A commissary is usually a licensed food establishment or other commercial kitchen. A commissary can't be a private home kitchen. A plan review application must be submitted for a new commissary. Most commercial kitchens can be a commissary if licensed and an inspection is done. So, the kitchens of Odd Fellows or Last Wave could be commissaries. Both the kitchen and the person(s) making food would need to be licensed.

According to EIPH, if the food is being prepared to then be sold wholesale (as in through a grocer or to a restaurant), then the entity that licenses the kitchen in which that food should be prepared is the FDA. However, the FDA information filed under How to Start a Food Business, FDA inspection is only required for food that will be sold across state lines. Examples of Food businesses NOT regulated by FDA, according to the FDA, include:

- Retail food establishments (i.e. grocery stores, restaurants, cafeterias, and food trucks), which are regulated by state and local governments.
- Farmers markets

More specifically, the FDA website details that, "Facilities that manufacture, process, pack, or hold food that is intended for human or animal consumption in the United States must register with FDA before beginning these activities. The registration requirement applies to any facility that conducts these activities, unless a facility is specifically exempt under [21 CFR 1.226](#). For example, farms, retail food establishments, and restaurants are exempt from food facility registration requirements. FDA has an [online resource that details "How to Start a Food Business."](#) It keeps up with changes in regulations and updates links accordingly. They also offer [step-by-step instructions on how to register a food facility.](#)"

According to EIPH, there are only two commercial kitchens licensed as commissaries are St. Charles Church in Lemhi County and Legion Hall in Custer County. The Grange in Tendoy has been licensed as of September 2022. According to the [Idaho Department of Agriculture](#), there

are not any licensed commercial kitchens in Lemhi or Custer County. The Sacajawea Center in Lemhi County used to be licensed, but no longer is. Ivie's Grocery in Mackay also used to be licensed, but no longer is. We are still waiting for confirmation from the FDA on which kitchens they have licensed and inspected in Lemhi or Custer Counties. The Mackay Senior Center recently updated their kitchen, and they believe that they are licensed as a commercial kitchen.

EIPH in Custer County said that the Garden Creek Farms CoPack Facility in Challis is an FDA licensed and inspected commercial kitchen facility. Currently the CoPack Facility has two main uses: honeycomb processing and VUKOO energy bar production. The honeycomb processing is handled in a custom fulfillment-type situation where employees of Garden Creek farms process a product created overseas for a single company to then sell and distribute in domestic, but not local markets. As of early 2022, the contract with the honeycomb import company supports 4.5 full time employees at the facility. Within the facility, a separate commercial kitchen space is leased by a company which produces VUKOO bars. Currently that production is typically only on weekends. The manager of the facility indicated that between these two uses, the kitchen is at capacity and does not have space for other users or custom fulfillment order clients.

The Advisory Committee working on this project identified a much longer list of potential commercial kitchens, though it appears none of them are currently licensed and inspected by EIPH or FDA. The informal list created includes: The Sacajawea Center, Innovation Center, Calvary Chapel, the Senior Center in Salmon, Salmon Valley Baptist Church, upstairs kitchen at Saveway, First Presbyterian Church Salmon, Sweet Water Hollow, the Grange, Elks, Lemhi County Fairgrounds, Challis Community Center, Living Waters, the Senior Center in Challis, May Cafe, the Rural Fire Hall in Challis, Elk Bend Community Center, Stanley Community Center, Shiloh Ranch, and the rodeo grounds in Mackay.

Possible Craig McCallum is planning to build a for-rent commercial kitchen space near the Creative Confluence Tool Library.

Cold Storage

These are each the current excess space of the operating business. Neither or currently offering cold storage as a separate business enterprise, but both have suggested that they might be interested in subleasing space for those needing cold storage - frozen or refrigerated.

Possible Last Wave

Abi Beer - (303) 319-3274, riversidestation102@gmail.com

Most of the storage space in the basement at Last Wave is more root cellar-type storage; however, there is potentially opportunity to share the freezer or refrigerator space currently utilized by the restaurant. Also, there is potential someone to bring in their own freezer or refrigerator unit and store within the basement space on a temporary basis with short-term leases.

Possible Garden Creek Farms

John - (208) 879-5868, info@livingwatersranch.org

Support

The support section of the supply chain consists of elements that are not physical assets. These support pieces fit into two main categories: Strategic Regional Relationships and State-level Resources.

Strategic Regional Relationships

[O'Hara Commons & Sustainability Center](#)

The Commons purchases goods from a few different makers and producers in Lemhi County. The route to take foods sold to O'Hara Commons also brings foods from the Bitterroot / Missoula area back to wholesale partners in Lemhi County, so effectively this is both a buyer of local goods and an unofficial distribution route.

[Sun Valley Institute for Resilience](#)

The Institute's goal is to advance community resilience through education, collaboration and investments. And specifically through the Local Food Alliance, which produces a Locally Grown guide, and the Impact Idaho Fund, the Institute supports producers in Custer County. Josh Hale, cattle producer in Mackay, works with the Institute.

[Sun Valley Culinary Institute](#)

The Institute has a physical location which includes a commercial kitchen that functions more as an event venue geared toward rentals for private cooking classes, fundraiser dinners, etc. The significance of the Institute is primarily the role it plays in workforce development. With a mission of Providing culinary education to students, professionals, and enthusiasts, the Institute attracts and develops workforce talent for the diverse hospitality industries in the greater Sun Valley region. Through the professional program in particular, the Institute works to strengthen and diversify the local economy. In addition, through the public cooking classes, the Institute promotes community health and wellness with a focus on local food sources and sustainability. Part of the goal of the Institute is to replicate its model in other communities.

State-level Resources

[University of Idaho Food Technology Center](#)

University of Idaho Food Technology Center offers processing and educational assistance to aspiring food entrepreneurs that wish to produce packaged food products for resale. In addition to the technical support through product and process development, the Food Technology Center

includes a commercial kitchen/processing facility, with specialized processing and packaging equipment, where small companies can come get licensed to produce their own packaged food products. The University's Food Technology Center also offers classes such as "Introduction to Food Manufacturing for Entrepreneurs." Some of these classes are in person, and many are online. These types of training are great for cottage foods entrepreneurs, small food manufacturing business owners, and anyone interested in packaging a food product for resale.

[FARE Idaho](#) and [Project FARE](#)

FARE Idaho is a 501c6 nonprofit organization. The organization works to "unite our Idaho food and beverage communities to ensure that independents get a seat at the table with an opportunity to collectively impact positive change within their industry." They do this primarily through advocacy, connection, promotion, recovery, and networking services. FARE Idaho is structured as a member-based organization. They have different membership payment levels for retailers, based on the businesses' gross revenue, producers, and farms / nonprofits / industry partners/ startups. The 501c3 sister organization to FARE Idaho, Project FARE, is an educational nonprofit organization dedicated to telling stories about Idaho's food from farm to table.

[Idaho Preferred](#)

The program aims to identify and promote food and agricultural products grown, raised, or processed in the state. Administered by the Idaho State Department of Agriculture, the program showcases the quality, diversity, and availability of Idaho food and agricultural products and helps Idaho consumers find local products. The program also offers Lunchroom Resources and Parent / Teacher Resources.

[University of Idaho Extension](#) & [University of Idaho AgBiz](#)

Both Extension and AgBiz provide education opportunities at a state-level in addition to the local level. There are state specialists for various agriculture industry components that facilitate opportunities for learning.

[Idaho Food Works](#)

Idaho Food Works celebrates and supports Idaho's small and artisan farms, culinary traditions, and local food ways. Idaho Food Works is a project of University of Idaho Extension's Northern District Community Food Systems Program. Currently the program has very little, if any relevant information gathered or support directly provided to the Salmon-Challis area. However, it appears as though they are working to grow in that direction. Programmatically, Idaho Food Works offers the following:

- Farmers Market Assessments
- Community Food Assessments
- And inventories of Idaho Food Coalitions and Food / Farm Organizations.

In addition, Idaho Food Works creates local food directories, culinary trails, recipes, podcasts, events and more to help achieve their mission and connect people to their food and to the farmers, makers, ranchers, and chefs who grow and prepare it.

[Cultivating Success](#)

Cultivating Success, which is a program tied to University of Idaho, offers educational programming to provide beginning and existing farmers with the planning & decision-making tools, production skills and support necessary to develop a sustainable small acreage farm. The foundational elements of Cultivating Success include,

- Farmer Mentorship
- Experiential Learning
- Community Place-Based
- Whole Systems Focused

They teach classes online such as their most recent class, “Scratching Below the Surface: Idaho Small-Scale Poultry Production”, which is in class sessions held over four Thursday evenings.

INFRASTRUCTURE ASSESSMENT

Our assessment of infrastructure includes Recommended Use / Integration / Connection of Assets, Industry Attributes, Identified Supply-Chain Gaps, and Case Study Examples related to specific gaps.

Recommended Use / Integration / Connection of Assets

In an effort to thread together various assets and strengths of the local food community, the following connections from the data we gathered in Phase 1 and conversations we had in Phase 2 have already been made or are in the process of being made:

- Those looking for freezer and refrigerated storage space to either Last Wave, which has cold storage space in Lemhi County, or Garden Creek Farms who has cold storage space in Custer County.
- Those looking for local processing for pork/lamb/beef, specifically USDA processing, with Josh Hale, who is in the process of finalizing plans and fundraising for a USDA facility to be built in the area via a Freisla system.
- We also gave Josh the list of those interested in making charcuterie and / or smoked-meat-related value-added products with Josh Hale, in the event that his facility could include these amenities. This is a phase II plan for his facility, so no immediate action was taken.
- Those looking to combine orders for packaging in order to potentially decrease the input costs needed for their value-added products with each other (ex: jars)
- Those looking for greenhouse space to use for their small businesses with each other
- Challis Bread Co. with producers looking for items that Challis Bread is trying to source (ex: Paul Werner, summer apples)
- Restaurants looking for year- round / less seasonal salad produce Kathy Batterton / Agency Creek Farms contact info

- Paul Warner and his excess apple wood to Mountain Valley Farmstead for their smoked gouda, which they make currently with apple wood pellets.

In addition, we conducted a more indepth demand survey for meat processing to fulfill Josh Hale's needs for his potential facility. We also provide Josh with insight specific opportunities through USDA Rural Development Programs (MPPEP, VAPG, and Food Supply Chain Guaranteed Loan Program). We also gave Josh contact information for two people in Montana that have either already purchased a [Friesla system](#), which is similar to what Josh is considering purchasing and utilizing, or are in the process of finalizing their purchase. The raw data from that study, which should be kept confidential, was provided to Jolie and Josh. The link can be provided by request.

We intended to connect those interested in commercial kitchens for fresh prep processing (peeling, chopping, bagging, etc.) with Jo Philpott, owner of an underutilized commercial kitchen space that does not have cooking components included. But after touring Jo's kitchen and better understanding the physical limitations of the space, we did not make this connection. We provided Jo with the names of those interested so that she could follow-up as she saw fit, again due to the limitations. We also planned to connect those interested in transportation services where their routes / needs overlap geographically, but we did not see any obvious intersections here.

Industry Attributes

In our assessment, it became clear that many of the challenges or problems identified are real issues, not merely perception problems. We knew this is true of meat processing, but were not sure with commercial kitchens. In Phase 1, producers identified the lack of commercial kitchen space for both cold and hot prep as a problem in their business. After attempting to build a matrix of all of the options, it became clear that ultimately there are not sufficient licensed kitchens. And also that there is a lack of clarity and consistency behind understanding which certifications a particular kitchen would need to meet a business owner's needs, which kitchens currently qualify, and which are in good standing with the regulatory agencies. This presented an opportunity for commercial kitchen space.

Additionally, when assessing the local food system, another thing that sticks out is that the grocery options beyond those listed earlier in the report are all locally or regionally owned, so there are potentially opportunities to increase access to local food at the other grocery stores in the area. Village Square is closing in Challis, but across Lemhi and Custer County there are three other grocery options and a variety of smaller markets. There are four larger scale grocery stores that could have a more robust or consistent local-food offering:

- Saveway, Salmon
- Ivies, McKay
- Lamb's Market, Challis
- Mountain Village, Stanley

One of the challenges for grocery stores in selling local goods is the lack of efficiency in sourcing locally grown and raised foods. If there were a common distributor or single place grocers could call to inquire about inventory, find sources for particular items when one farmer or rancher is out of an item, and coordinate deliveries, it would ease the purchasing of local meat and produce. Even with the supply chain as it currently is, the local ownership of these grocery stores provides an opportunity.

Beyond these two main takeaways, the assessment primarily identified significant infrastructure gaps across each category of the supply chain.

Identified Supply-Chain Gaps

Based on an analysis of the local supply chain and the needs of area producers and wholesale buyers, we have identified the following gaps, organized below by category of the process:

Growing Food

- Formalized / Commercial Plant Starts
- Community Greenhouse Space
- Seed Library

Accessing Local Food

- Reliable & Maintained Gleaning List
- Collective Distribution
- Local Foods School Lunch Program
- Community Food Utility

Processing / Preparing / Storing Local Food

- USDA Meat Processor
- Commercial Cold Storage / Meat Locker
- Commercial Commissary Kitchen
- Commercial Produce Processor Business

Support

- Food Coalition & Policy Council
- Robust Local Food Listing Service
- Support Non-Profit
- Food Development Center / Incubator
- Food Hub

Case Study Examples

The following section details various examples of particular businesses, institutions, organizations, or means that fill the identified gaps. For the gaps under Growing Food and a few points under other sections, examples were not provided because the gaps identified in that section are fairly straightforward. particular identified gaps. Also, because the work so far has not identified that a Food Hub is certainly the only path forward or the most important piece of the puzzle potentially, the case studies do not focus solely on food hubs. Consider this section breadth instead of depth to provide the most inclusive information for the economic development groups and the advisory committee to prioritize and apply in the future. However, this portion of the report does feature a section detailed “Why Food Hubs Fail” to share more depth insight on food hubs per the request of the advisory committee.

Growing Food

Seed Library

In Bozeman, the [Seed Library](#) is incorporated in the Public Library. The collection offers seeds that can be “borrowed,” which in their case means taken without needing to be returned. It also provides information regarding native species, gardening techniques, and connection to local programs and clubs that support people growing their own flowers and food from seed.

Accessing Local Food

Collective Distribution

[Western Montana Growers Co-op](#) (WMGC)

The Co-op offers buyers - individual eaters, grocery stores, restaurants or institutions - the opportunity to order from over 50 farms in one place, with one delivery and one point of contact. The farmer-owned co-op includes growers across four valleys - Flathead, Jocko, Mission and Bitterroot. WMGC serves grocery stores, restaurants, and institutions across Montana and into Northern Idaho and Eastern Washington and also individuals and families the opportunity to buy through their CSA, which is operated in Western Montana. From a producer standpoint, WMGC markets and delivers their products on their behalf. From a buyer standpoint, WMGC makes buying from local and smaller-scale farmers and ranchers more convenient.

WMGC sells the food that is posted to be harvested each day Monday through Thursday. Every afternoon, a refrigerated truck retrieves and shuttles fresh produce to coolers in the WMGC warehouse for packing to be prepared for shipment the following day. Food is then shipped out

either in a WMGC truck or with a partner transportation specialist. This means food gets to the buyer within 48 hours of purchase.

[Black Dog Farm's Aggregated Marketplace](#)

This online storefront operated by a local producer near Livingston, Montana provides buyers one-stop shopping online by connecting customers to goods from several different ranchers, farmers, and makers with a single in-person pick-up location and/or a coordinated local delivery route. Black Dog receives the goods from individual area producers and packages orders for the pick-up and delivery.

Local Foods School Lunch Program

[Livingston Farm to School](#)

Includes elements such as, but not limited to, the following:

- Trout to Tray where middle and high school students raise Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout at the school's aquaponics system and harvest for snacks and meals
- School Meal Redesign, which incorporates more healthy meal options featuring Harvest of the Month products
- Farm Fresh Friday, which includes scratch-cooked recipes on Fridays throughout the 2021/22 school year incorporating local ingredients as possible.
- Lincoln Farm School where an in-town garden provides space for food served at the schools to be grown and for education
- Beef to School, which is the means through which local beef is served in the schools and money the spent on beef is kept locally

Community Food Utility

[Denver County Community Food Utility \(DCCFU\)](#)

The DCCFU is a potential new public utility with the mission of reducing food access barriers and enabling food choice, with focus on programs that reduce food cost, increase access convenience, and reduce charitable food stigma. DCCFU's mission is to enable high quality, healthy, and desired food to reach the stomachs of all Denver County residents each and every day. The utility is centered around the concept of "universal basic food." By enabling residents to work together towards collective priorities, DCCFU aims to leverage consumer demand and item procurement power to improve quality, sourcing standards, and food access.

Processing / Preparing / Storing Local Food

Commercial Cold Storage / Meat Locker

[The Meat Locker](#)

Built and supported by Cornell Cooperative Extension, The Meat Locker and now is managed by Press Bay Food Hub. Meat lockers like this one provide access and opportunities for direct market sales of local meats by creating and offering space to an affordable communal freezer space. The Meat Locker uses an online portal called [Meat Suite](#) to connect farmers and consumers. Individual members can sign up to get a unit in the freezer space. The Meat Locker includes 70 units in the walk-in freeze, with monthly rentals for small bins (that hold 18 gallons) to large bins, able to hold 25 gallons or a quarter of a beef steer.

Commercial Commissary Kitchen

[Twisted Kitchen](#)

Located in Garden City, Idaho, Twisted Kitchen serves the Treasure Valley. The kitchen offers a rent-by-the-hour model with increments as short as 30 minutes 24-7, 365 days a year. Rentals provide users sole access to the 1485 sq. ft kitchen. The Twisted Kitchen utilizes the Food Corridor System, a cutting-edge kitchen management system that allows users to create a secure online account, which then helps them manage a few key facets of your food business. The kitchen also has cold and dry storage available as well for rent, but dry, cool and freezer storage for “day use” are all included in the kitchen rent.

Commercial Produce Processor

[Root Cellar Foods](#)

Located in the Gallatin Valley, Root Cellar converts regionally-grown veggies into fresh ready-to-eat and ready-to-cook products for wholesale (grocery stores, universities, restaurants) and retail consumers in Montana. Root Cellar handles the washing, chopping, shredding, and slicing. They also offer an [online marketplace](#) for goods beyond those processed by Root Cellar. Their platform, associated process and the overall offering are similar to the example of Black Dog Foods earlier in the report.

Support

Robust Local Food Listing Service

It is possible that FARE Idaho and Idaho Preferred will fully cover this gap as they continue to develop and build out. Potential resources to reference beyond Idaho include:

[AERO - Abundant Montana](#)

[Taste the Local Difference - Michigan](#)

They also offer consulting services and helped shape Abundant Montana.

And on a regional scale, Sun Valley Institute does this in their [Locally Grown Guide](#). It seems though in most places that a coordinated state-wide effort is most sustainable. The technology needs for a user-friendly and dynamic system, both in building and maintaining, can be better leveraged over a larger geography. That being said, the brand recognition of places like Sun Valley may drive the success of particular hyper-localized listing services.

Support Non-Profit

In Montana, [Community Food and Agriculture Coalition](#) provides many of the support resources identified as “needs” by our interviews in Phase 1 and Phase 2. The mission of CFAC “is to grow a healthy local food community by preserving farmland, teaching new farmers, and making food accessible for all.” They do this through original programming and in-house support services as well as strategic partnerships. An organization whose full purpose is supporting the local food system could be a major support to Custer and Lemhi Counties; however, it is possible that some of the work that CFAC does is already being accomplished by Salmon Valley Stewardship and Lemhi Regional Land Trust. The capacity of the rural community is important in considering whether an additional organization would be helpful or whether it would distract from current efforts and dilute the collective impact.

Food Development Center / Incubator

In Phase 1, producers identified a stronger than expected interest in incubation, mentorship, and other business-related support. There are many models for food development and innovation.

[Magic Valley Food Innovation Center](#)

In the planning phases, this center is intended to be “a space for food innovation including production, manufacturing, and distribution which includes a business incubator to support a thriving entrepreneurial scene with resources to support endeavors such as popup restaurants, food trucks, app development, food supply chain solutions, jar and boxing personalization, and

other ambitious solutions.” Their website features the feasibility study for the space as well as a list of partners.

[The University of Idaho Agribusiness Incubator](#)

Supporting the creation, expansion and retention of locally owned agricultural enterprises, the incubator promotes value-added ventures and local food networks in conjunction with the University’s Food Technology Center.

[Rio Grande Farm Park](#)

In the San Luis Valley of Colorado, the Farm Park provides land access along with business incubation for local farmers with a mission “to foster an equitable local food system that restores the health of the people, community, economy and ecosystem.” The Farm Park is a collaboration with SLV Cooking Matters, Local Foods Local Places, Valley Roots Food Hub, and the Local Roots Guide, is a program of the San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition. So, of the suggestions mentioned in this report, so many go hand-in-hand in several communities. The San Luis Valley Local Food Coalition is its own non-profit similar to CFAC.

Food Coalition & Policy Council

There are dozens of examples of local Food Coalitions and Local-Food Policy Councils. Perhaps the best resource in terms of this project is the [University of Idaho Extension Guide to Developing](#) these coalitions and councils.

Food Hubs & Why They Fail

Though categorized in this Support section, food hubs come in all shapes and sizes and can also provide space and services that fit into each of the other categories of the supply chain. The basic USDA definition of a food hub is “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.” Basically, a food hub provides producers and makes a business management team that actively coordinates supply chain logistics on their behalf.

Food hubs that provide more services—such as physical aggregation, grading, packing, sales, and delivery—often have a warehouse, equipment, and other infrastructure such as product storage, dry goods storage, and cooling capacity. Other food hubs provide fewer physical services and thus have more limited infrastructure. They instead focus on coordination, payment, marketing, and promotion. While some hubs maintain long-term storage facilities, many use a “just-in-time” distribution approach that

minimizes the need for storage and cooling space. Food hubs that use larger spaces often rent or lease excess space to producers or other entities for storage to help offset costs.

The legal structure of a local or regional food hub depends on how the participants of the food hub want to be organized and, to a lesser degree, on the initial and ongoing funding mechanisms. They can be cooperatives, nonprofits, S-Corps, LLCs, etc.

There is a biennial survey completed by the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems & The Wallace Center at Winrock International called the [National Food Hub Survey](#). The latest data is from 2019. The survey from 2021 will be released in the fourth quarter of this year (2022). This report provides insights into the landscape of food hubs nationwide and comprehensive data of operations to date.

In addition, USDA Rural Development has good research and information regarding food hubs. According to an USDA RD Report on Food Hubs issued in April 2015 which compiled lessons learned from the field of eleven food hubs spread across the country, individual estimated sales of these hubs included ranged from \$60,000 to \$5.5 million. Of the hubs included in the study, the longest established food hub opened in 1996 and the youngest ones opened in 2012. Many of the food hubs included in the study were not yet profitable. One of the biggest takeaways from that report is, “Building a food hub is like running a marathon with interval sprints every mile. Training, focus, and perseverance are keys to succeeding.”

Another USDA study, which specifically analyzes why food hubs fail, suggests that the most significant factors to food hub success or failure include internal management issues and board governance. The study looked at six food hubs that are no longer active. According to the USDA study, “The aggregate survival rate of food hubs (looking at a population where n=400) since 2005 is about 88 percent, well over the survival rate for all types of new businesses, which — over a similar time frame — had a survival rate of only about 53 percent.”

A strong relationship exists between institutional demand and the success of operating hubs in a given region, which emphasizes the importance of anchor buyers (large institutions like schools, universities, hotels, convention catering operations, hospitals, etc.) that can provide food hubs with a steady market for their products.

Beyond the demand and supply variables, another point of the study is that cooperatively structured food hubs are more likely to succeed over for-profit or nonprofit food hubs. Though other statistical analysis on active and inactive food hubs reveals that such variables as legal status, business model, location, hub competition, and consumer demand do not indicate consistent factors as to why some food hubs fail while others succeed. What these data and the case studies show is that each situation is unique and that food hubs are people-centric businesses geared toward individual community strengths and needs. These reports and others are provided in the [Research Library within Airtable](#).

If a food hub is the final recommendation in Phase 4, a case study example of a food that is of a similar make-up as that which might be suggested for Lemhi and Custer Counties can be pulled from either of these reports or the database and included. At this point, given how different one hub is from the next, we did not feature a case study on a particular hub.

PHASE 3: June 2022

This third phase of the feasibility study layers a consumer lens on the assessment and analysis of the local food system in Lemhi and Custer Counties. The report consists of an overview of market data, summary of local market needs and community “wish list”, and a deeper exploration of particular gaps in the food system identified in Phase 2 specifically related to consumer wants and opportunities. As part of the work during this portion of the project, updates were made to the [inventory / findings](#) of Phase 1 in Airtable and revisions were added to the [Phase 2 report](#).

MARKET DATA

Statewide, more food is produced in Idaho than could possibly be consumed by Idaho residents. According to the 2021 Idaho Ag Facts Infographic from the Idaho State Department of Agriculture, June 2022, Idahoans would need to consume local products in the quantities below in order to eat all Idaho produced food products.



That being said, Idahoans are still importing much of the food they consume. This is especially true of Custer and Lemhi Counties.

According to the Center for Disease Control 2022 County Health Rankings, Custer County scored a 7 and Lemhi County scored a 7.3 on the food environment index, which includes an index of factors that contribute to a healthy food environment, from 0 (worst) to 10 (best). The data used for the 2022

ranking is from 2019. The overall average for Idaho was 7.5 with counties ranking from 4.3 to 9.7. The chart below displays complementary market data information.

Metrics	Custer County	Lemhi County
Food Environment Index ¹	7	7.3
% Limited access to healthy foods ²	8%	12%
% Food insecurity ³	16%	12%
% Below the SNAP threshold of 130% poverty ⁴	52%	55%
% Food insecurity among children ⁵	20.2%	18.9%
Students eligible for free or reduced lunch ⁶	42%	43%
Cost of average meal (pre-2022 inflation) ⁷	\$3.56	\$3.80
% of Farms that sell directly to consumer ⁸	4%	8%

The percentage of farms that sell directly to consumers is the most dated of all of the statistics. The USDA Census of Agriculture Survey is updated every five years, and data is released the following year. This figure will not be updated until 2023.

The Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) Threshold is another metric that can be used to look at food security. It has been used by University of Idaho Extension in other studies such as the Greater Yellowstone-Teton Community Food Assessment from 2015. County-level ALICE data from 2018 including cities within the counties is included in the county sections below.

Locally, the data of local food in the schools is scarce in part because the integration and use of local food in the schools is relatively non-existent. Because school gardens and programs that would increase local food in schools are explored in this study, the following scientific information is relevant to consider in concert with the more economic market information. In 2007, McAleese, J.D., and L.L. Rankin evaluated the impact of an in-school intervention on fruit and vegetable intake among sixth-grade students from three southeast Idaho elementary schools. Their findings were published in a report called

¹ Center for Disease Control (CDC) County Health Rankings 2022, data from 2019

² Center for Disease Control (CDC) County Health Rankings 2022, data from 2019

³ Center for Disease Control (CDC) County Health Rankings 2022, data from 2019

⁴ Feeding America Map the Meal Gap 2021

⁵ Urban Institute's Disrupting Food Insecurity data

⁶ Center for Disease Control (CDC) County Health Rankings 2022, data from 2019

⁷ Feeding America Map the Meal Gap 2021

⁸ 2017 USDA Census of Agriculture County Profile

“Garden-based Nutrition Education Affects Fruit and Vegetable Consumption in Sixth-grade Adolescents.” in the Journal of the American Dietary Association 107:662-665. “The experimental design compares three groups: a control, one receiving nutritional education alone; and one combining nutritional education with participation in a school garden. Students participating in the nutrition education combined with garden experiences significantly increased their daily intake of fruits and vegetables from 1.9 to 4.5 servings, when compared to 2.1 to 2.2 servings among students in the nutrition-education-only group and 2.4 to 2.0 servings among students in the control group. In addition, students participating in the nutrition education combined with garden experiences significantly increased vitamin A, vitamin C and fiber intake.” Though this is an old study, the compelling statistics are from Idaho, and therefore deemed relevant.

In terms of food produced or raised and available for purchase locally, the market is currently made up of the following businesses or individual contributors:

Foods	Custer County	Lemhi County
Beef / Pork / Lamb	7	6
Chicken	1	2
Veggies	5	10
Fruit	1	6
Eggs	2	4
Dairy	0	2
Value-added Food Products	6	13

The distance from USDA processing for large protein sources such as beef or lamb as well as facilities equipped to slaughter chickens to USDA standards creates a limiting factor reflected in the figures above. This layered with the income figures and food affordability elements also creates a limiting factor. Most local producers of beef, lamb, or pork sell shares and therefore utilize a direct-to-consumer sales approach that can be serviced by custom exempt meat processing facilities such as Pete’s Custom Meats. Particular other food items fall under cottage food laws up to a certain volume of production. The regulation framework and lack of regulation in terms of state-certified meat processing plants both impact the figures above as well.

In addition, other communities within Idaho have more extensive market data due to particular projects undertaken related to food systems or land use in specific geographic areas. For example, in Northern Idaho, University of Idaho and New Jersey Institute of Technology created a study entitled, “A Land-Based and Spatial Assessment of Local Food Capacity in Northern Idaho, USA.” That study takes a

geo-spatial look at the demand for particular foods to be grown and sold locally. It incorporates soil health factors and viability of enterprises in terms of average land holding size and space required to grow particular crops. This study, along with others, is archived in the [research database](#) we have built as part of this project.

As a reminder, all of these statistics are based on pre-covid 19 and pre-2022 inflation data and information.

Custer

Custer County, ID is in the low food insecurity, with low housing costs (rural) peer group. In Custer Co. 15.8% of people are food insecure compared to 11.0% in their peer group and 13.2% in Idaho. Food insecurity is higher among children in Lemhi County according to the data which shows 18.9% of children qualifying as food insecure, compared to 17.2% in the peer group of counties and 16.7% in Idaho.

Data from Feeding America, which is referenced in the calculations for both the Urban Institute’s Disrupting Food Insecurity study as well as the CDC County Health Rankings, rates food insecurity in Custer County at 15.5%, which is in line with the figures from Urban Institute and the CDC. This comes out to 640 individuals.

As of 2018, 34% of households in Lemhi County qualify as ALICE Households⁹. The Idaho state average is 28%. Another 13% of households qualify at the poverty level bringing the percentage at or below ALICE to 47% in Lemhi County. Within the county, the cities have a wide range of qualifying households as of 2018 :

County Subdivision	Total Households	% Below ALICE Threshold
Challis	938	62%
Mackay	653	38%
Stanley	170	30%

Lemhi

According to the Urban Institute’s Disrupting Food Insecurity research Lemhi County, ID is in the moderate food insecurity, with moderate resilience (more rural) peer group. In Lemhi Co. 16.2% of people are food insecure compared to 13.6% in their peer group and 13.2% in Idaho. This figure is higher than the CDC number of 12%. Food insecurity is higher among children in Lemhi County according to the

⁹ United for ALICE 2018 County Profiles

data which shows 20.2% of children qualifying as food insecure, compared to 20.5% in the peer group of counties and 16.7% in Idaho.

Data from Feeding America, which is referenced in the calculations for both the Urban Institute’s Disrupting Food Insecurity study as well as the CDC County Health Rankings, rates food insecurity in Lemhi County at 12.2%, which is in line with the CDC figure. This comes out to 960 individuals.

As of 2018, 30% of households in Custer County qualify as ALICE Households¹⁰. The Idaho state average is 28%. Another 20% of households qualify at the poverty level bringing the percentage at or below ALICE to 50% in Custer County. Within the county, the cities have a wide range of qualifying households as of 2018 :

County Subdivision	Total Households	% Below ALICE Threshold
Leadore	231	37%
Patterson	156	58%
Salmon	3,124	48%

LOCAL MARKET NEEDS & COMMUNITY “WISH LISTS”

We held three separate community meetings to begin to clarify local market needs from the perspective of the consumer (the eater). Though the communities of Mackay, Challis and Salmon are quite different, there were a few consistent responses and shared sentiments across the three communities as it relates to their “wish lists” for their local food system. Throughout the meetings, we heard a recurring request for more variety of eateries, more consistency in restaurants, and more healthy options. Ultimately, the conversations turned to the desire for a stronger community and more opportunities to connect with and learn alongside neighbors and friends.

The summary lists of the identified local market needs are below and are prioritized in order of importance from most to least based on public meeting feedback.

Mackay

1. Food affordability
2. Ability to preserve foods
3. More breakfast places
4. More eateries (general)
 - a. More affordable options

¹⁰ United for ALICE 2018 County Profiles

b. More healthy options

5. USDA meat processing (revitalize Lost River Meats)
6. Hatchery providing fish locally

Challis

1. Enhanced food pantry
2. Greenhouse plots
3. Community classes (nutrition, cooking)
4. Education (climate, resource, water conservation, caring for land)
5. More eateries
6. Alternatives weed management (non-chemical / biological)
7. Community Compost (space for lots)
8. Revitalize fish farm
9. Food storage
10. Mexican food
11. Chinese food

Much of the conversation in Challis focused on increasing community engagement on intersection and relatedness of food, health, and caring for the land.

Salmon

1. Sustainability of existing system and knowledge sharing to support growth in system among producers
2. USDA meat processing
3. Distribution & delivery of local foods
4. Reliability & convenience of market
5. Community food coordinator
6. Education (growing, preparing, preserving)
7. Good, delicious, intentional eateries
8. More producers
9. Community commercial kitchen
10. Gleaning system
11. Mexican food
12. Chinese food

Consistent / shared responses

Could have been time of year, but everyone said strawberries in particular beyond “fruits and veggies”

Our public meetings also consisted of conversations to identify and prioritize a wish list of local products to create ideas for opportunities based on community interest. They are listed by community below in order of importance from most to least:

Mackay

1. Chicken
2. Fruits
3. Veggies
4. Strawberries
5. Lettuce
6. Chicken Fried Steak
7. Trout
8. Dairy
9. Legumes
10. Nuts / Seeds

Challis

1. Chicken
2. Berries (strawberries)
3. Veggies
4. Eggs
5. Grains (heritage varieties, buckwheat, oats)

Salmon

1. Cheese
2. Tomatoes
3. Beef
4. Berries
5. Mushrooms
6. Tortillas
7. Fresh pasta
8. Brats (Lost River Meats)

The conversation in Salmon focused in part on variety, specifically more variety of local items with limited access like cheese and beef.

The facilitated public meetings also incorporated discussion regarding the specific elements within the food system that the community wants to preserve and support into the future. The lists below capture the highlights from the conversations:

Mackay

- Scott Becker Farms
- Liars Den
- Mackay FFA

Challis

- Farmers Market
- Raising meat

Salmon

- Local producers
- Local grocers
- Farmers market
- People's connection to food
- Availability of plant starts
- The way the community cares for one another

GAPS EXPLORED

In Phase 2, we detailed the gaps in the food system. For Phase 3, we explored three of the related gaps that we identified as the greatest initial potential opportunities: meat processing, commercial produce production, and institutional buyers.

Meat Processing

The absence of a USDA-certified processing facility in the region was identified as one of the highest priority needs from the perspective of producers in Phase 1. And then from the infrastructure perspective of Phase 2, again meat processing rose to the top of the list of both gaps and possible opportunities. From the perspective of the eater, again, the desire for more local meats on both the individual consumer level and the larger buyer level gained further momentum in terms of potential for opportunities.

Pete's Custom Meats in Salmon is the largest of the processors in the area. At his meat shop in town in Salmon, Pete and staff hang, age, cut, and process meat for producers who are selling meat direct-to-consumer through custom-exempt sales (quarters, halves, wholes), for people raising or buying whole animal livestock to supply their own meat, and for the shop's own line of meat and value-added meat-based products such as sausages and snack sticks. The meat for the shop's branded product line is purchased from a large USDA packing-plant facility in Colorado. In Salmon, the larger sections of beef and pork are cut into individual cuts and crafted into value-added products. Anecdotally, when we met with Pete, a local customer purchased boxes filled with branded individual cuts and other products from the shop. She said something to the effect of appreciating the opportunity to buy locally from Pete instead of from the larger grocery store in town and remarked that the quality of meat at Pete's exceeds what she feels like she can purchase at the larger grocery store in town. This theme of buying something from a local business and equating that to local food regardless of where the food was grown or raised is something that we heard in several conversations. It will be explored more in Phase 4.

The slaughter component is primarily done off-site at another location near the fairgrounds. Pete's Meats also owns a slaughter truck that can go to ranches (see Phase 2 for more info). Pete is nearing retirement and is currently looking for a buyer for the facility. Potential conversion to a USDA facility is possible for the future buyer, whether third party or within the family of current ownership. However, under current ownership and management, there are no plans to pursue USDA-certification for the facility. In fact, there is actually strong opposition to the government involvement required. Demand for the service of cutting meat for custom-exempt sales and self-reliance in the region exceeds capacity, so there is little market demand as well. However, if Pete's were a USDA facility, an additional local buyer pool would emerge. The ranchers that currently provide individual cuts within Idaho and sell beef in general as cuts and as shares across state lines are one example of that additional buyer pool. Wholesale buyers such as local grocery stores or restaurants would have greater options regarding incorporating more local meat on their shelves and in their menus if there were a USDA facility that was closer to the region, particularly if it were in Salmon. The once successful and now-closed USDA facility in Mackay, Lost River Meats, is not substantially larger than Pete's, so it is conceivable that combined current physical locations of Pete's could work as a USDA facility with potential modifications, likely small, to the space to meet USDA requirements.

Beyond the opportunity in Salmon, there is a possibility that demand for USDA processing could be met, at least in part, by one of a few current efforts in Custer County:

1. Cutler Ranches Custom Meats, Challis
2. Lost River Meats, Mackay
3. Heritage Meat Collective, Mackay

All three are detailed in Phase 2. In the short term, Lost River Meats might be the most likely possibility to meet demand for a USDA-certified facility because the facility was once USDA certified. At this point, it is unclear whether the new owners plan to restore the certification or if they have any plans to accommodate processing for beef or other products beyond their own meat brand. In the long term, a new facility as envisioned by Josh Hale for Heritage Meat Collective might more adequately meet the depth and breadth of demand.

Commercial Produce Processor

In terms of addressing a gap and connecting opportunities, the commercial producer processor idea may be one of the more quickly achievable ideas. However, it may also be one of the more complex due to the number of moving parts. The initial supply and demand stakeholders in the plan are all in Lemhi County, so the analysis of this gap is focused on the greater-Salmon area. During this phase of the work, we connected Jessica McAleese from Swift River Farm. As they shift their business model to include more seed production, their byproduct of unused vegetables grows. Dawn Ardella and Cameron Rolle both have expressed possible interest in operating or owning an enterprise that would physically take care of the processing either from raw whole vegetables into chopped / diced / sliced / grated / etc. or to pre-made food such as soup. Josh and Jessica Henroid from Mountain Harvest have expressed interest in

pre-made foods and curiosity in processed vegetables. Though there seemed to be shared interest from all parties in our exploratory meeting, the question of where ultimately limited the conversation.

A key component of both the gap and potential opportunity is a commissary or FDA kitchen. The only commissary in Lemhi County is the St. Charles Church in Salmon. The Sacajawea Center was formerly a commissary, but is currently not licensed. After meeting with Suzy at The Sacajawea Center, it became clear that the kitchen space at the city-owned facility is not best suited to meet the needs of this potential business or of the number of value-added producers who are looking for commercial kitchen-type space. The municipal ownership and multipurpose aspect of the building are both significant challenges to realizing the vision of a potential commercial producer processor. The idea of possibly expanding or retrofitting the kitchen at the Business and Innovation Center was discussed in our meeting; however, the municipal ownership could pose a challenge. This option has not been entirely dismissed at this time. There might be a possibility related to the Presbyterian Church in Salmon. We are working to connect with Kathleen Brown to explore further. In the short term, it is possible that a smaller scale operation could be organized specifically for Mountain Harvest. If they were to buy the buy-product from Swift River Farm and then hire Dawn to create pre-made food products such as soups with it in a kitchen space built out from the limited existing space within the back of the store, then they could be sold by Mountain Harvest as a Mountain Harvest product in the store. We recommend a walk through of this plan with EIPH to identify finer details prior to moving forward, if this idea is of interest to all that are engaged in the conversation. For a larger scale project that could meet more robust demand from grocery to restaurant, handle common distribution, and source and coordinate from several farmers, a FDA kitchen would be necessary. We intend to include thoughts in Phase 4 after incorporating a few more key conversations.

Institutional Buyers

Institutions who feed people such as universities, schools, hospitals, and assisted living facilities are pivotal in the success of food hubs as well as in terms of improving community health and expanding access to local foods. During this phase of the work, we explored institutional buyers in terms of thinking of them as potential demand drivers for a possible food hub, but also as stand alone as potential improvements that could strengthen the local food system. Our approach in engaging the stakeholders from the schools and health institutions was one of inquiry, not conversion. We asked what they are currently doing, what their needs are, and what some of the challenges or obstacles might be to incorporating more local food, if doing so was a goal or desire they held.

Institutions, particularly those who receive federal funding, are required to buy food products from farmers, ranchers, and processors who have been approved by the FDA or USDA. And depending on the institution's funding, the spending power of their funding beyond the structural channels is often also a challenge. Though there are similarities between public schools and health institutions in terms of the food programs, there are nuances related to their funding and governmental requirements that are quite

different. So, we have broken out the analysis of the gap and opportunity in two categories: Beef/ Farm to School and Health Institutions.

Beef / Farm to School Program

At this time, none of the public schools in Lemhi or Custer County have formal or consistent beef or farm to school programs. Though some have school gardens ([see Phase 2 for the list](#)), the menus for hot lunch and breakfast (where provided) do not incorporate substantial quantities of locally produced food. Based on research and knowledge of other programs, we approached the opportunity side of this gap by engaging the smaller school districts within the area. In general, the schools utilize a number of programs to source their food from the [USDA Tools for Schools program](#) to ordering through the [Snake River Co-op School Bid](#) process to ordering from [Shamrock Foods](#) to picking up things at local grocery stores like Lamb's in Challis or Ivie's in Mackay. Based on our conversations with each of the schools below, it seems that right now the parents and school boards are largely satisfied with the school lunch programs and are not asking for the inclusion of more locally produced foods or more fresh foods in general.

Stanley: Stanley is among the smallest schools in the district; however the Challis School District, which Stanley is a part of, does not offer hot lunch at the school in Stanley. Stanley does partner with a local restaurant to provide meals at least one day a week, but those meals are for purchase only and so considered an opt-in option, which exempts them from some of the restrictions, from our understanding.

Challis: In Challis, the size of the school, in terms of enrollment, makes the reality of a farm to school program seem less feasible than a beef (or protein) to school program. The school goes through 40lbs of lettuce a week during the school year. Given both the disparity of the timing of the school year in conjunction with the local growing season as well as the scale of farmers growing lettuce, it seems challenging for local producers to supply the needs of the school. Challis does not provide summer lunches. However, if a new business wanted to utilize a hydroponic or greenhouse method of growing to match the season with the demand at a scale that could meet the school's needs, it's possible that a farm to school program beginning with lettuce could be created. The school leadership seemed interested in the potential of both buying local lettuce (if the challenges above could be overcome) as well as potentially utilizing local beef in their school lunch meals. The school currently goes through 40 - 80 lbs of beef per month. USDA child nutrition labels largely dictate how much beef can be served and how frequently it can be utilized. At the time of our conversation (spring 2022), the school was able to purchase beef in 40lb increments for \$3.42/lb through the USDA commodities process for schools. With a potential beef or farm to school program, one of the main obstacles is and will be the cost. In communities where beef to school programs have been successful, typically the beef is donated. Sometimes funds are also donated to cover transportation and processing. In other cases, the commodities money has been used to pay for the processing of donated beef instead of for beef itself. Given these factors, we do not think a beef to school or farm to school

program is viable in Challis at this time. However, as smaller schools pilot programs, there is potential for there to be a more formal exchange with the superintendents, school board presidents, and school cooks from across the area. Such a peer-to-peer network could help bring a beef-to-school program to Challis. Of course, the involvement and engagement of the ranching community would be vital in a successful beef-to-school program. The peer-to-peer network could bring insight into how that relationship between the school and ranchers works; however, the individual rancher championing the program and potentially donating toward it would need to be local and specific to the Challis community.

In the interim, the Challis schools are in need of another large walk-in freezer. The delivery system they utilize is reducing deliveries to once a month, from twice a month. With this decrease in frequency, the orders to fill the menu of meals will be larger than they have been in the past. If Garden Creek Farms was willing to sell one of their freezer trailers, or lease it to the school and allow it to be located at or near the school instead of across town, the school's freezer needs could be met.

Mackay: Mackay's school lunch program is undergoing a transition. With a new school cook on board, Mackay is returning to homemade cooking after a couple of years of pre-made frozen foods dominating their school lunch menu. Going forward, the USDA commodities program will likely be the main avenue for goods for the lunches. But, at this point, the transition is at its beginning phases. There was interest from school leadership in a beef to school program; however, the timing of the transition puts that interest on a lower priority or a time horizon that is a bit more mid-term, rather than immediate. If the school were to transition from a commodity beef to a local beef to school program, it is estimated that the school would need two beef a year to be donated to fill their menu and remain within the USDA child nutrition label restrictions.

In the near term, like Challis, Mackay's food deliveries will be decreasing in frequency, so the school is in need of additional freezer space as well. In addition, there is a potential for the school to work with the bakery in Mackay to provide dinner rolls with particular menu items. Though the menu was not developed yet when we met, again due to the timing of the transition, it is possible that a more formal collaboration between the bakery and school could be possible for the 2022/2023 school year.

Leadore: Out of all three schools we met with, Leadore is the most likely candidate for a beef to school program that could be instituted relatively quickly and a farm to school program that could be built out in the near future. Currently, the school uses most of its USDA commodities money on chicken. They serve hamburger once a week and go through about 80lbs of hamburger a year in the form of cases of hamburger and chicken fried steak patties. Once a month they utilize fresh hamburger for a special meal of lasagna or taco. It seems that if they had more, they would serve more and still be within their USDA child nutrition requirements. With a school board made up of primarily local ranching families, the school's tie to local beef

production is strong. School leadership also expressed an interest in incorporating locally grown produce in their salads. As follow-up, we will host an exploratory meeting between the appropriate representatives from Leadore and those from Winnett and Potomac, MT. We have also made a connection between Kathy Batteron at Agency Creek, which is in the Lemhi Valley as well, and school representatives. The school is also interested in applying for a grant to build a greenhouse and expand their garden. We will connect the school to a few possible grant opportunities that they can explore further.

Health Institutions

There are three main health institutions in Lemhi County. We were able to connect with Meadows Assisted Living Center in Salmon; however despite several efforts, we were unable to connect with Discovery Rehab (Dietary Manager, Jessica) and the Steele Memorial Hospital (Dietary Manager, Alicia Barney).

At Meadows Assisted Living Center, everyone eats everything (including staff), and everything is homemade/prepared in house other than bread. Currently, most of the food served at Meadows Assisted Living Center comes from Saveway or from Costco (closest Costco is in Missoula or Idaho Falls). Michelle from Meadows Assisted Living Center expressed an interest in sourcing local produce (peppers, zucchini, squash, etc.) and local eggs. For produce, the seller would need to be FDA/USDA approved. There are a few farmers who sell through Mountain Harvest who meet these requirements like Agency Creek and Swift River Farms. Though neither typically have excess supply at any given moment, it is possible that if the assisted living center made a request for goods in advance, they could be either set aside ahead of time or could even be grown specifically for them. The rules around buying eggs directly are a bit different from produce, and again, there are several people who sell their eggs through Mountain Harvest such as Summer Creek Farms. A direct connection between them and the center could help better connect the local food system. With the current egg shortage, Michelle, like many others, has been having to go to multiple groceries to fill their need of at least a dozen a day. In the midst of this shortage, Family Dollar has offered to sell them as many eggs as they want at market price.

Sourcing more local meat is also of interest to Michelle. Products like hamburger, bacon, sausage, roasts, and burger patties are all potential products that the assisted living center could buy locally. Like with the schools and grocery stores, the meat would need to be USDA certified, which limits the possibilities. However, the Leadore School's meat needs are less than a whole beef a year and the center's needs would also be less than a whole beef a year. So, if area ranchers were willing to donate one beef a year, it's possible that the school and center could split the cost of USDA processing and transportation, if not donated.

For Meadows Assisted Living Center, the financial barrier is the biggest issue in integrating more local foods. To find efficiencies and save costs, they focus on lots of canned things from large sales and shop in pocatello/idaho falls, because there is a restaurant supply store and buying in

bulk is preferable. The center could be a good candidate to purchase fruit and vegetable by-products from Swift River Farms seed operation. Tomatoes, squash, and other items could potentially be utilized to make food for the residents.

The center also has a garden. One resident is planting in whiskey barrels and one in a raised bed. They used to have a bigger garden, but staffing and labor have been issues. Perhaps a garden manager / helping hand could be shared across several gardens such as this one and the community garden at the Sacajawea Center. Or perhaps one of the many summer kids programs could volunteer / help at the center as part of their programming.

There are also several non-official institutions such as the Mackay Food Center run by Holly Seefried. Should a food hub or common distribution channel develop over time, there's potential that these could be complements to the more structured institutions referenced above.

PHASE 4: August 2022

In order to make the report most useful and applicable, we suggested a variety of potential recommendations and / or next steps. The suggestions range widely reflecting the findings from prior phases combined with research of the food systems in other communities and resources within Idaho and larger the region. Because of the culture of Lemhi and Custer Counties, the assets in place, the needs or producers, and the desires of eaters, we do not think the region can currently support a food hub. Perhaps over time, the food system will strengthen and both supply and demand will increase enough to support a food hub that is similar in size and design to the [Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center in Ronan](#).

The current climate of the food system and greater community create opportunities for many improvements that can individually and collectively strengthen the local food system. As the regional supply chain increases and the local support network improves, it is possible that the private sector will respond by filling in more of the gaps thereby further bolstering the local food system.

The following matrices display a summary list of recommendations and / or next steps organized two different ways: by outcome and by short, mid & long-term recommendations by specific sub-area. The financial feasibility of the potential projects is marked by the quantity of dollar signs. Following the matrices, there are more detailed write-ups that include other feasibility aspects, where appropriate, potential partnerships and resources for each recommended course of action.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATION BY PRIORITY AREA

Improving Community Health	Keeping Working Lands Working	Connecting Farmers and Restaurants / Grocers	Fostering Small Business Growth & Creation	Supporting People in the Food System
Beef and Farm to School and Hospital / Assisted Living Food Programs \$	USDA Meat Processing Plant \$\$\$	Produce Processor Business \$\$	FDA-Certified Commercial Kitchen Space \$\$\$*	Community Food Coordinator \$\$

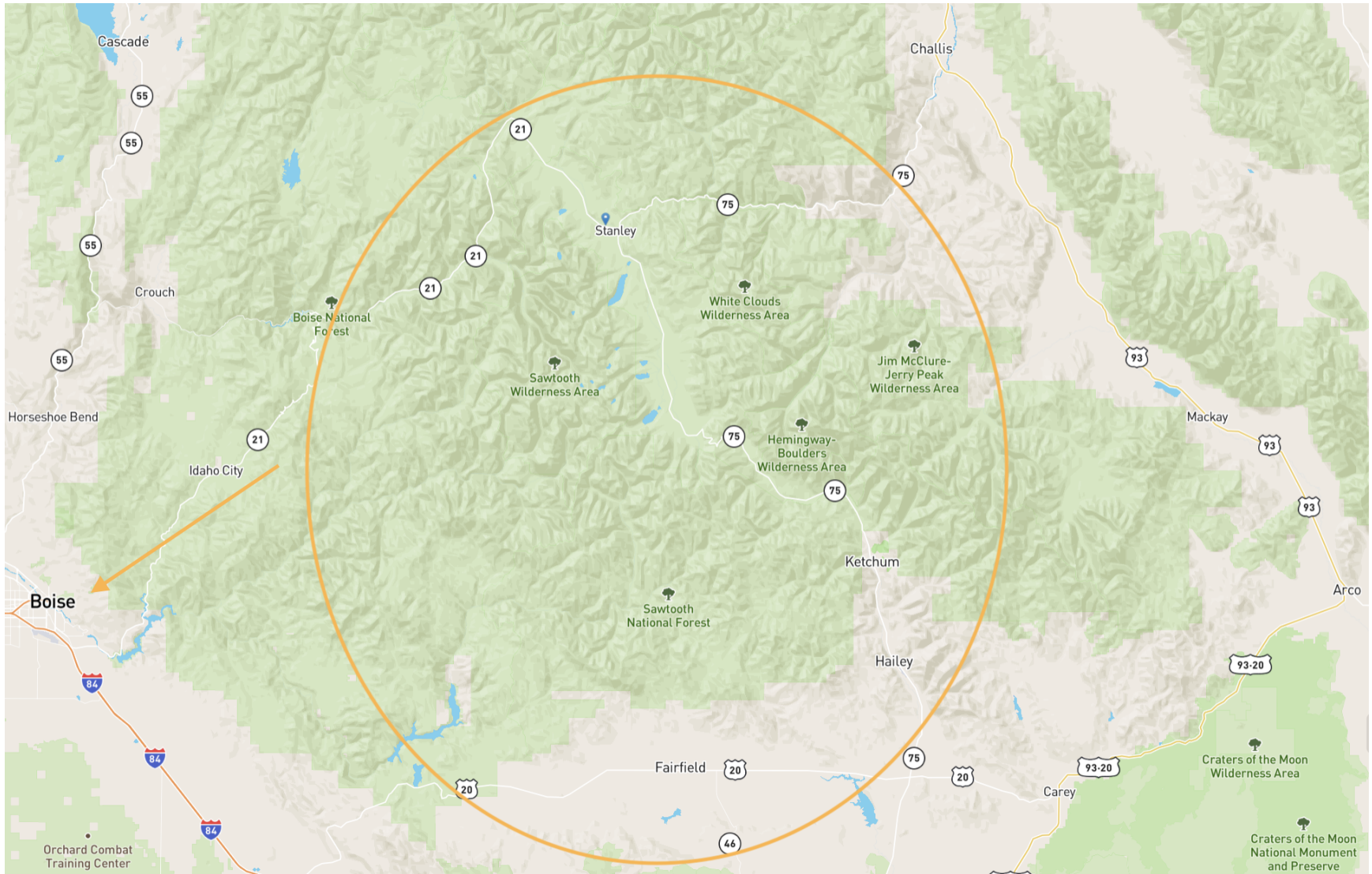
*If building new, \$\$\$, if utilizing existing kitchen \$

SHORT, MID & LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS BY SPECIFIC AREA

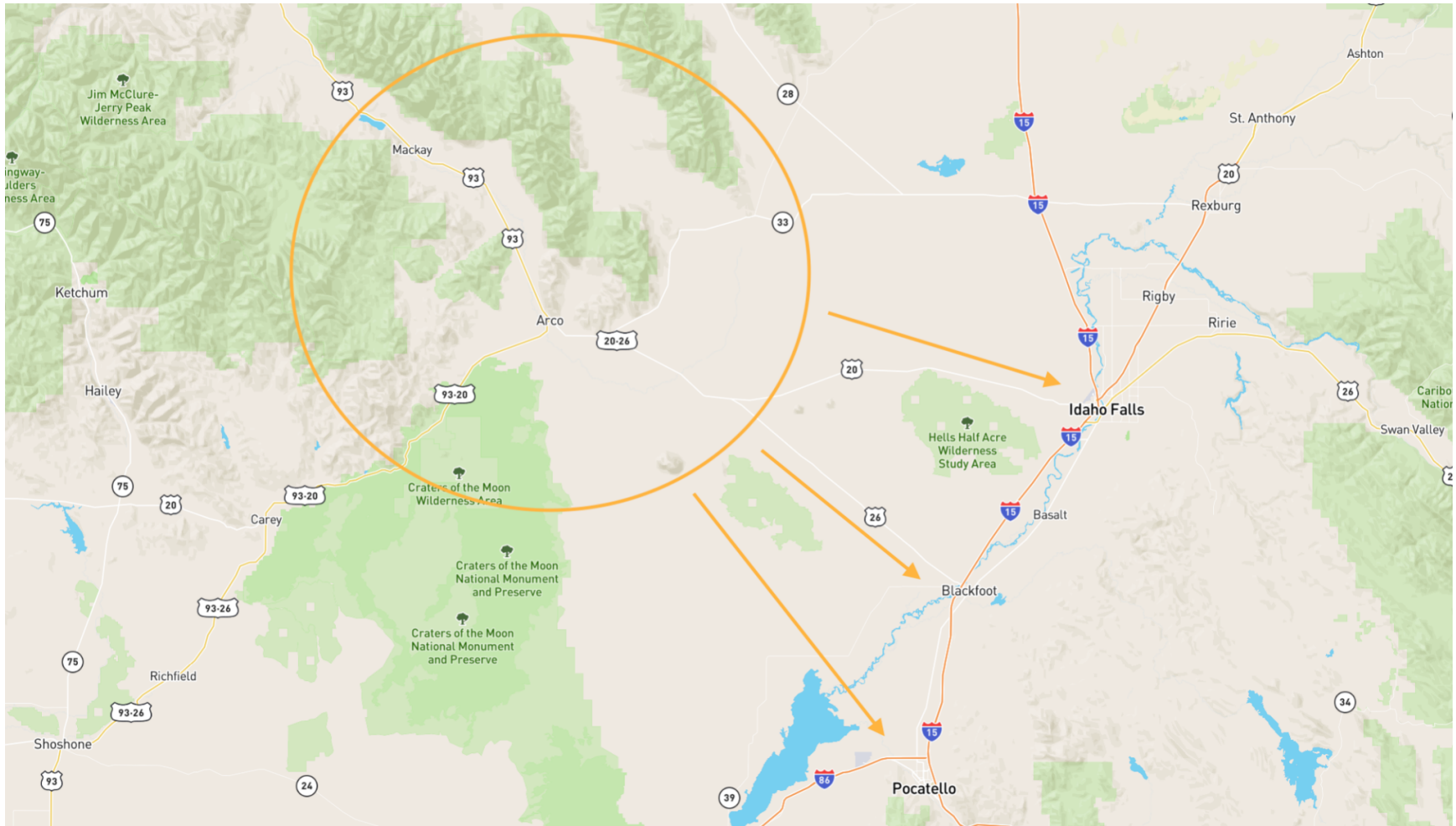
Several of these recommendations are considered as ones that are located or housed in specific communities, but serve the entire region. For example, the Community Food Coordinator for Salmon could serve both Lemhi and Custer Counties. Many of these can be combined into a single facility or a coordinated effort. *put text in here about phasing / cadence of these across communities*

	Salmon	Challis	Mackay	Leadore	Stanley
Short Term	Community Food Coordinator \$\$	Community Food Coordinator \$\$ Greenhouse / Compost Rental Spaces \$($\$$)	Revised Region Producer Analysis \$ Food Preservation Rental Space \$	Beef to School \$	Revised Region Producer Analysis \$
Mid Term	Producer Processor / Commercial Kitchen \$\$\$	Beef and Farm to School \$	Community Food Coordinator \$\$	Community Food Coordinator \$\$	Community Food Coordinator \$\$
Long Term	Commercial Cold Storage \$\$\$	Commercial Cold Storage \$\$\$	USDA Meat Processing Facility \$\$\$	School & Community Greenhouse \$\$	

Revised Region Producer Analysis: Stanley



Revised Region Producer Analysis: Mackay



Community Food Coordinator

The role of Community Food Coordinator could support a number of related needs in the Salmon area, as well as surrounding communities. We recommend that the position begin specific to one community and grow to serve the entire region. The role could include tasks such as keeping the local producer inventory created in Phase 1 up to date and accurate, creating and maintaining a gleaning list, creating coordinated delivery of products to wholesale clients such as grocery and restaurants, managing collective distribution between Lemhi County and the Bitterroot and / or Custer County, and helping farmers, ranchers, value-added producers, and others in the food system access funding sources as they become available. To help shape out the roll, there is a [file of job descriptions](#) for similar roles in the shared drive. They are for jobs beyond the area and do not include specifics for this role in this region.

Based on capacity, the role could be at Salmon Valley Stewardship or at LCEDA. The role could also be shared with a food system-focused organization like Community Food and Agriculture Coalition out of Missoula or FARE Idaho, Idaho Preferred, or Idaho Food Works.

Revised Region Producer Analysis

Take the scope of Phase 1 and apply it to the updated geographies presented in the maps for Stanley and Mackay. Though they are both in Custer County, the trade areas of their local food systems are not county-exclusive or specific. It would benefit both communities to have an inventory of producers in the updated areas and an assessment of the needs, challenges, and opportunities across a broader geography. An updated analysis will inform potential recommendations of how to strengthen the food system that might better suit the greater Mackay and Stanley areas.

Food Preservation Rental Space

Flash freeze and dehydration machines could be purchased and owned by either Lost Rivers Economic Development or the Mackay Senior Center. They could then be rented by the hour or half day to the public on days or during times that are convenient given the other uses of the Center. The rental could provide a pay-back schedule / plan for the machinery. The ability to lengthen the season for fresh food and provide greater options for food storage for individuals is key to the food sovereignty of the area.

USDA Meat Processing Plant

The fastest way to meet the growing need for local meet and support working lands, would be to upgrade the existing meat processing facility in Salmon whenever the current owner retires or sells the business. Though there is enough business in custom-exempt processing to support the business as it is, the physical upgrades needed for the facility to be USDA certified would cost less and take less time than building from scratch. The same is true of the Lost River Meats facility. However, with projects in the works currently such as Heritage Meat Collective, it is possible that a new facility built specifically to USDA specifications may be coming sooner rather than later. For a new facility, gaining a client who will help the project break-even or provide a baseline of reliable demand. So, for example, if the new facility booked a large local client such Alderspring, the facility would be better poised to serve local producers and therefore strengthen the local food system. Even though Alderspring does not sell products into the local market, they are at a much larger scale than any of the other local producers who sell

direct-to-consumer or through retail or wholesale. Their scale, or another producer at a similar scale, could allow a new USDA facility to reliably operate providing market stability for producers who want to grow into selling more locally / regionally.

See Phase 3 for full details.

Producer Processor / FDA-Certified Commercial Kitchen Space

See Phase 3 for full details.

Greenhouse / Compost Rental Spaces

The existing infrastructure at Garden Creek Farms could be repurposed as a rental business that rents individual plots to customers who grow their own food or manage their own personal compost.

Commercial Cold Storage

Existing buildings could be retrofitted to serve this need or a new building could be built. The unused cold storage and freezer storage trailers at Garden Creek Farms could be repurposed, moved, or sold to a new owner to create this business in a shorter timeframe than either option above.

Beef to School

We held a call with Potomac, Winnett and Leadore, to begin to help Leadore shape their potential program. We also put the school in touch with Agency Creek Farms to begin to think through a farm-to-school program as well. Once one local community builds a program, they can be a resource for other schools in the area.

School & Community Greenhouse

An addition of a greenhouse could be utilized to grow the FFA program, create access to more local foods for the immediate community in Lemhi Valley, and provide an avenue to a longer growing season that will allow individuals to be able to be more self-sufficient in growing their own food.

For these ideas, the following grant sources could be viable:

- Various sources within USDA RD and Idaho Department of Agriculture
- Murdock Charitable Trust
- 11th Hour Project / The Schmidt Family Foundation
- Andrew Family Foundation
- Mighty Arrow Family Foundation
- Healthy Food Financing Initiative
- American Farm Bureau Foundation
- National Farmers Union Foundation
- Northwest Farm Credit Services
- T-Mobile Hometown Program
- AARP Livable Communities

- Foster Foundation
- Steele-Reese Foundation

For each of these ideas, coordinating with the State-level Resources listed in Phase 2 might be helpful.