



## **A Guide for Farmers and Ranchers**

The purpose of this document is to share the vision of the PSFH planning committee to provide guidance for farmer and rancher sellers and provide printed reference and training resources to best optimize food hub services to increase sales and build new customer relationships. Puget Sound Food Hub reserves the right to make periodic updates and changes to this document.

### **Table Contents:**

About.....	Page 1
Eligibility Requirements.....	Page 6
Rules of Collaboration and Participation.....	Page 8
Contact Information.....	Page 25
Farmer and Rancher Farmer and Rancher Commitment.....	Page 26
HumanLinks Foundation Grant Application.....	Page 27

**Administrative Office:** Mount Vernon, Washington 98273

**Hub Locations:** Woodinville, WA, Bow, WA and Everson, WA

**Legal Structure:** Operating as a registered trade name under Northwest Agriculture Business Center, a Non-Profit 501c3 Corporation.

**Stakeholder Partners:** 21 Acres Center for Local Food and Sustainable Living  
Bow Hill Blueberries LLC  
Cloud Mountain Farm Center  
Northwest Agriculture Business Center

**Model:** Farm to business/institution

**Target Market:** Restaurants, grocery stores, food manufacturers, corporate and institutional campus dining services, commissaries, home delivered meal programs, childcare centers and hospitals throughout the Puget Sound region, from Whatcom to Pierce counties, including underserved communities.

## **A Note to Farmers and Ranchers**

Together we've gathered lots of experience and listened to you, your customers and market research over the last few years that has shaped where we are today. We understand the market is changing for farmers, and we are better able to anticipate needs and issues that might arise. We still very much consider this business a start-up operation so there are no guarantees that unanticipated issues will not show up. We will work through these issues as they arise, but we look forward to working through these issues together to build on our foundational success.

In 2016 the Puget Sound Food Hub is poised to increase farm sales, while limiting costs for farmers, making a strong case to business customers. The active participation of all involved adds to the success of the Puget Sound Food Hub.

We're in this for the long haul. Thank you in advance for your personal commitment and investment to the future of food and sustainable farming.

## **About**

The concept of the Puget Sound Food Hub was first researched in 2006 and began to be implemented in 2009 and 2010. For the purposes of this document the Puget Sound Food Hub will be referred to simply as the "PSFH".

PSFH is simply an association of farmer-directed food hubs operating cooperatively in the Puget Sound region, the PSFH combines marketing, aggregation, processing, and distribution for eligible local farms and ranches. The goal is to develop linkages between local farms and business and institutions with a vision of creating healthier communities while expanding economic opportunities for sustainable northwest Washington farms. PSFH's purpose is to increase the production, distribution, and consumption of regionally produced food.

Puget Sound Food Hub provides marketing, aggregation and distribution of the freshest, seasonal produce, meat, dairy and more, direct from local agriculture producers.

- We're making it convenient for businesses and institutions to buy local food direct from local farms with an online marketplace, streamlined payment options and aggregated delivery to their door.
- Shared marketing and infrastructure opens up markets for farms to increase sales, reduce costs and waste, and decrease carbon footprint due to coordinated and combined delivery.
- Farm product is never mixed or combined with other farmer's product. A farm packs a box at the farm and it stays in that box with traceable identification labeling back to the actual farm that produced it.
- Farms own their product through the supply chain – their production methods are transparent and food is traceable to the farm. It's not a warehouse store selling nameless, faceless "local" food.

- Farms develop and maintain direct customer relationships, negotiate their own prices and nurture business growth for their farms. They do not hand over their customers, or steep margins, to a third-party.
- Traveling distance between farm to customer is shortened compared to broad line distributors. Seller farms operate within the 7 counties of northwest Washington including Whatcom, Skagit, Island, San Juan, Pierce, Snohomish and King.
- Food is fresher than any typical distributor's offerings. Fresh produce is often picked the day before it reaches the customer.
- Buyers appreciate greater varieties of vegetables, fruits, livestock breeds atypical in the commodity market and highly prized for flavor (not whether or not it holds up in cold storage!) There is demand for such unique products.

### **Purpose**

- Link local farm production to local consumption focusing on high volume, business-to-business commerce. Investments in infrastructure for value-added agricultural products will allow for larger scale buyers (e.g. schools, hospitals, colleges, restaurants and locally/regionally owned grocery stores) to buy regionally grown products.
- Maintain a desirable brand supported by excellent customer service and an easy to use online marketing and management platform to increase farm sales transactions and coordinate delivery.
- Strengthen connections across a regional, values-based supply chain by working with key stakeholders in private, non-profit and government sectors to further develop additional farm aggregation sites throughout Puget Sound, building community commerce from a strong foundation.
- Increase business intelligence of farmers and ranchers through the NABC Network.
- Foster growth of a regional food system that seeks to secure the long-term health of local agriculture and the preservation of a sustainable food shed. Limit energy waste, greenhouse gas emissions and unnecessary costs by utilizing efficient systems and environmentally responsible technologies.
- Increase buyer's direct access to locally produced and healthful food by participating in public health partnerships that aim to help the underserved in our region. Foster existing partnerships with private and public organizations to improve regional health and nutrition statistics by thereby contributing to the reduction of obesity rates, and other chronic diseases related to dietary quality.

- Enhance the economic viability and sustainability of family farms and farmland by providing business planning assistance, access to capital, access to profitable marketing opportunities, and fostering best practices that will sustain all resources. Retain dollars locally, create and retain jobs in rural communities, and connect rural economies to the regional food industry.
- Provide technical assistance to farmers, ranchers and their customers for the healthy development of the Puget Sound regional food supply.
- Ensure food safety and manage risk by requiring all hub aggregation sites and distribution partners to create and comply with GAP and Hazardous Access Critical Control Point (HACCP) plans, and requiring everyone along the PSFH supply chain to carry appropriate licenses and product liability insurance coverage.

## **Leadership Team**

The Puget Sound Food Hub Leadership Team is comprised of Key Stakeholder Partners from Northwest Agriculture Business Center, 21 Acres Local Food and Sustainable Living, Bow Hill Blueberries LLC and Cloud Mountain Farm Center. The Leadership Team meets regularly to discuss business operations, finance, policies, marketing and opportunities to increase sales. Any new policy created by the Leadership Team is presented to the Farmer Advisory Committee for further discussion and final approval.

## **Farmer Advisory Committee**

The Puget Sound Food Hub Farmer Advisory Committee an opportunity for farmers to voluntarily provide input on a variety of decisions related to the development of the Puget Sound Food Hub business. The Farmer Advisory Committee should maintain at least 6 current and active food hub seller representatives from a variety of agriculture categories, growing practices (certified organic and non-certified organic), both farmers and ranchers, and, if possible, include at least one representative from each of the six counties it serves, including, Whatcom, Skagit, Island, Snohomish, San Juan and King. Farmer advisory committee meetings are coordinated and facilitated by members of the Puget Sound Food Hub Leadership Team on an as needed basis

The current roster includes:

Tim Terpstra, Ralph's Greenhouse  
 Harley and Susan Soltes, Bow Hill Blueberries  
 Anna Martin, Osprey Hill Farm

Marijke Postema, Maltby Produce Markets  
Eiko Vojkovich, Skagit River Ranch  
Kai Ottesen, Hedlin Farms  
Tom Thornton, Cloud Mountain Farm Center  
Jessica Gigot, Harmony Field Farm  
Mike Finger, Cedarville Farm  
Jen Hart, La Conner Flats

### **Marketing Committee**

The Puget Sound Food Hub Marketing Committee is comprised of volunteers from the Leadership Team and the Farmer Advisory Committee. The Marketing Committee meets as needed to address marketing and sales strategies, tactics and outreach to build brand awareness of the Puget Sound Food Hub and its value propositions to increase sale and community engagement.

The current roster includes:

Kai Ottesen, Hedlin Farms  
Jen Hart, La Conner Flats Farm  
Harley and Susan Soltes, Bow Hill Blueberries  
Terri Hanson, Northwest Agriculture Business Center  
David Bauermeister, Northwest Agriculture Business Center  
Austin Becker, 21 Acres  
Robin Crowder, 21 Acres  
Cheryl Thornton, Cloud Mountain Farm Center

## **Puget Sound Food Hub Seller Eligibility Check-list**

The Puget Sound Food Hub purpose is to grow market access and build economic sustainability for northwest Washington farms while increasing access to locally grown food for all. In an effort to ensure transparency and compatibility, all suppliers must meet the following eligibility requirements before selling online.

The **Guide for Farmers and Ranchers** will answer many questions and clearly state what is required of participating sellers.

Before selling products through Puget Sound Food Hub, farmers and ranchers must meet all of the seller eligibility requirements below. Please use check marks below indicating your farm and/or ranch meets each requirement, and provide documentation where required.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Subscribe to the NABC Network and pay the \$50 annual subscription. Only current, paying northwest Washington farms and ranchers are eligible to participate.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Print, sign and return the Farmer and Rancher Commitment (page 20).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Obtain a Master Business License (WA UBI) and any required Specialty Licenses. Farmers must be legally permitted to sell raw and value added agricultural products commercially. Apply for a Master Business License through the Washington State Department of Licensing (DOL). Specialty Licenses may be required in addition to a Master Business License for products such as eggs, cut flowers, and products sold by weight. Please provide the Coordinator your Washington state business license numbers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Follow WSDA marketing guidelines and have implemented quality production standards according to the size and scale. Reference the WSDA Small Farm and Direct Marketing Handbook.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Print, sign and return a W-9 form for the current year
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have at least one year of commercial or wholesale experience prior to participating in the Puget Sound Food Hub (i.e. direct to restaurants, farmers markets, CSA, farm stand).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Comply with current county, state and federal food safety requirements for product categories. As the Puget Sound Food Hub matures, we anticipate being able to provide education and resources for all suppliers to become GAP certified. Reference the WSDA Small Farm and Direct Marketing Handbook.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Each farm shall provide copy of the certificate of coverage for a \$1M/\$2M policy. Please add ALL FOUR organizations as additional insured: 21 Acres Center for Local Food and Sustainable Living, 13701 NE 171st St, Woodinville, WA 98072 (425) 481-1500; Bow Hill Blueberries LLC, 15628 Bow Hill Rd, Bow, WA 98232, (360) 399-1006; Cloud Mountain Farm Center, 6906 Goodwin Road, Everson, WA 98247, (360) 966-5859; Northwest Agriculture Business Center/Puget Sound Food Hub, 419 South 1st Street, Suite 200 Mount Vernon, WA 98273-2924. Tel: (360) 336-3727.
- \_\_\_\_\_ If you are interested in receiving the subsidy offered by the HumanLinks Foundation, please complete and return the application on page 18.

Return a signed W-9 form, copies of WA UBI business and specialty licenses, certificate of insurance (copy of certificate of coverage with additional insured names added) to Puget Sound Food Hub, c/o NABC 419 S. 1<sup>st</sup> Ave. Ste 200, Mount Vernon, WA 98273, fax to 360-336-3751, or send electronically to [terri@agbizcenter.org](mailto:terri@agbizcenter.org)

After you complete these steps, you will receive login credentials to the Puget Sound Food Hub website and create your password; then follow instructions on how to revise/upload your product information into the new market website. We look forward to working with you.

## **Rules of Collaboration and Participation in the Puget Sound Food Hub**

### **How It Works**

- Sellers and buyers request an account online and a food hub coordinator reviews requests and approves/activates all buyer and seller accounts
- Sellers add and update their own inventory, farmer profile and descriptions, pricing and availability
- The food hub coordinator distributes a weekly fresh sheet by email (twice weekly during high season) to customers reflecting all offerings for sale that week
- Buyers shop online through the Puget Sound Food Hub website which uses a Local Food Marketplace platform. Buyers may order from multiple farms, compare products, and read farmer profiles including the *Who*, *How*, and *Where* the food is produced - learn about each product, growing methods, certifications, and more
- Buyers place their order, choose a delivery date and pay one invoice online by credit card or purchase order (for qualifying customers only).
- Farms receive orders by email with delivery instructions
- Farms pick, pack and deliver ALL ORDERS to the nearest “home hub” aggregation site (Bow Hill, Cloud Mountain or 21 Acres) according to instructions
- The Puget Sound Food Hub home hubs coordinate customer pick-ups and delivery into Seattle, Skagit & Whatcom on Tuesdays and Thursdays (to be expanded as demand increases)
- Products are marked & delivered, the customers are billed in one invoice and farmers get paid by mailed check.

### **Product qualifications and origin**

Food or floral products grown in northwest Washington including vegetables, fruit, herbs, dairy, eggs, meat, poultry, grains, flours, dried beans and legumes, minimally processed value-added products (jam, pickles, etc) are acceptable.

All products should be produced and sold by the farmer or rancher seller and must bear the farm’s name on product labeling.

Co-packed products that are not of the farmer’s direct production must be approved by the Coordinator in advance.

All products must be produced with a high standard of farming practices that are transparent and reflect a commitment to the integrity (health) of the land, water, animals and people.



All pre-sold orders must be inspected by the farm before bringing it to the hub for delivery. Products must be packed neatly in a sturdy, new waxed or lined box, free of dirt and insects. The food hub does not own the product, nor does the staff open or repack contents inside boxes. There is no excuse for poor quality.

All processed foods must be made in a WSDA licensed processing facility, with all ingredients listed on product label (must follow FDA label requirements).

For prepared foods, 75% of the defining ingredient(s) in the product must be produced by the farmer selling it.

Meats must be processed at a USDA licensed facility and poultry must be processed at a USDA or WSDA licensed facility and be legal to sell to retail and wholesale buyers.

If shortages exist from inventory levels online, DO NOT find alternate product from other producers or retailers to fill the order from the secondary tier or brokers. The Coordinator should be notified immediately for resolution and payment accounting.

Farm co-ops or associations may list products under one organizational name, however all farm members must be listed in the farmer profile with a primary point of contact established for hub communications and customer inquiries. Each product must be labeled with the actual name of the farm where the product was produced. Brokers are not allowed to sell other farm products through the Puget Sound Food Hub.

### **Production systems and related claims**

The buyer will decide which farm and farm products prefer and select appropriately, based on their individual needs, resources and expectations.

Farmers should avoid making claims that cast doubt on the safety, healthfulness or nutritional content of products produced under systems other than their own.

Complaints or accusations of improper production practices or sourcing by others should be made to the Coordinator for resolution and should not be a part of the marketing of any producer.

All producer claims made regarding their production practices MUST be verified/explained fully (For example, the use of the word “natural” would need to be defined) to the buyer in your producer profile and product listings.

If products are sold as “organic” an appropriate and current certification must be posted and made available to the Coordinator. All appropriate records shall be maintained.

Regardless of production practice, participating farmers shall make their farm available for inspection as needed.

If a farm has a food borne illness or is being investigated related to an illness outbreak, the farm must notify the Coordinator immediately by phone and by email.

### **Seasonality**

It shall be the goal of the Puget Sound Food Hub to operate 50 – 52 weeks a year, however there may be occasions, such as religious and national holidays or unforeseen needs to adjust delivery schedules. All sellers will be notified by email in advance of any changes in delivery schedule.

Farmers should consider a mix of crops and products that will provide for market product diversity throughout the year and to increase their opportunity for sustained sales.

Farmers should consider a full complement of season extension tools and techniques, systems to allow for product storage (that retains quality), as well as value added products that offer shelf stability and a longer season of marketing, in order to take full advantage of the PSFH as a marketing tool.

## **MARKETING SUPPORT & OPPORTUNITIES**

The Puget Sound Food Hub provides marketing, sales and outreach activities on behalf of the hub. We encourage producers to take advantage of as many of these opportunities as possible. Below is a list of the tactics that the food hub uses to promote the hub and a list of activities that farmers can do to maximize potential sales.

### **Food Hub Marketing on Behalf of Producers**

- Food Hub website
- Bi-weekly Fresh Sheet
- Buyer newsletter and communications
- Coordinated sales meetings with buyers
- Provide buyer groups for farmers to target – 10 buyers for initial sales contacts
- Pursue and engage opportunities with organizations such as: Agrilicious, Eat Ballard, Edible Seattle, Cascade Harvest, Sustainable Connections, Tates List, Eco-Trust's Food-Hub.org, Healthcare Without Harm, National Good Food Network Food Hub Collaboration, etc.

- Present to key groups such as: WSDA Farm to School, City of Seattle Farm to Table Partnership, Healthcare Without Harm, Bon Appetit Management Company, Eurest, etc.

### **Marketing Opportunities and Activities for Farmers to Maximize Hub Sales**

1. Proactively communicate with food hub staff about sales goals, strategies for the farm
2. Orient the food hub staff and specifically distributors/drivers to the farm – location, history, products, people, animals, etc.
3. Provide robust farm and product descriptions on [pugetsoundfoodhub.com](http://pugetsoundfoodhub.com)
4. Provide suggestions to food hub staff for products to be featured on Fresh Sheets
5. Keep food hub staff apprised of new products, products leaving, special opportunities
6. Provide samples for buyers to be delivered by distributors/drivers -- as often as possible
7. Participate in Bon Appetit's Farm to Fork program by becoming pre-approved
8. Participate in coordinated sales visits with institutional or grocery buyers (UW Medical Center, Eurest, Bon Appetit, Community Food Co-op, Central Co-op, The Markets, PCC, Sno-Isle Co-op, San Juan Co-op, Cone and Steiner, Farmigo, etc.)
9. Participate in conferences and presentations (Sustainable Connections, F2C2, NGFN's Food Hub Collaboration, Tate's List)
10. Create relationships with buyers by sending personal notes, recipes and/or pictures with deliveries
11. Review buyers' menus weekly and identify farm products to meet ingredient needs
12. Provide buyers with farm newsletters – subscribe buyers or place hard copies with orders
13. Provide marketing materials specifically for Farm to Table enrolled child care centers – suggest kid friendly foods, offer information for staff to share with children about the farm, photos
14. Follow up with buyers after orders by email or phone call
15. Use food hub logo on farm marketing materials, including web and social media
16. Provide suggestions to hub staff for Facebook posts and newsletter topics
17. Post information about food hub to social media sites for the farm such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.
18. Discuss possible institutional CSAs with buyers
19. Discuss forward contracting with buyers
20. Invite buyers to guest author posts on farm blogs
21. Extend formal invitations to buyers to visit farm, volunteer, host staff gatherings

## **Competition**

The Hub provides many Producers and Buyers access to otherwise unavailable commercial and institutional markets and provides support for marketing, sales and outreach activities to Producers and Buyers on behalf of The Hub. We encourage Producers to take advantage of as many of these opportunities as possible (see PUGET SOUND FOOD HUB MARKETING SUPPORT & OPPORTUNITIES ABOVE) to optimize sales. All those using the Hub benefit from the time, effort, and financial resources spent to build and maintain the Hub.

The Hub depends on consistency, honesty and cooperation from its participants in order to provide competitive, transparent, efficient and mutually beneficial services. To sustain and expand this system, the Hub and all its enrolled Producers and Buyers are asked to follow certain non-compete guidelines. Specifically:

- All Producers and any individuals, businesses, or organizations with which they or their employees are in any way affiliated will sell their goods to Hub Buyers only through the Hub. Producers will not seek to create new business relationships with Hub Buyers for sales outside the Hub.
- All Buyers and any individuals, businesses, or organizations with which they or their employees are in any way affiliated will purchase goods sold by Hub Producers only through the Hub. Buyers will not seek to create new business relationships with Hub Producers for sales outside the Hub.
- Producers and Buyers with an established history of doing business with each other prior to joining the Hub may continue transactions outside of the Hub, though they are encouraged to use the Hub instead.
- Violations of the above-listed guidelines could erode the value and viability of the Hub and its enrolled Producers and Buyers. Any Producer or Buyer who knowingly violates these guidelines may face an immediate and permanent termination of enrollment in the Puget Sound Food Hub.

## **Farm-Direct to the Businesses and Institutions**

The Puget Sound Food Hub website format allows direct purchases from farmers whom the customers select and build a relationship with for repeat business. If your product does not look good or meet their expectations, or if they doubt that you produced it (for any reason) they will likely be customers lost forever!

PSFH reserves exclusive oversight and publishing rights of all content on its web site. You must refrain from making your product look better based on claims made against others. In this regard “others” means other farmers in the PSFH or selling at the local farmers’ market but also the big box stores, “corporate/industrial” agriculture, foreign producers etc. *We cannot raise the bar by stepping on other farms.*

While there will be some funding to promote the PSFH, it will be the ongoing

responsibility of all involved (every farmer) to promote the PSFH at every opportunity and to build a relationship between potential customers and their products. Let's work together to increase all farm sales!

- Keep your farmer profile and inventory up to date and easy to understand with good pictures that clearly represent the products you offer.
  - Follow-up with customers after a sale! The PSFH is different than a traditional distributor. We want farms and buyers to have direct relationships. This helps to build capacity and keeps operational costs manageable. Make sure your customers appreciate that the work you do is important to you and that your customers are a priority to you.
  - Talk with the coordinator, hub site managers to offer periodic discounts, and product samplings. Encourage them to see you at your other points of sale, such as farmers' market, roadside stand, farm market, etc. Invite coordinator and managers to tour your farm and see your growing practices so that they can talk about your farm and products to potential buyers.
  - Offer referral discounts if a repeat customer sends you someone new-communicate with Coordinator to program discounts and credits in the website.
  - Participate in on PSFH farm marketing events. The PSFH is in the process of developing a customer retention program that will include sellers and customers in field walks, trade days, twilight meetings, open houses, tours etc.
  - Communicate with Customers about product size or quality if there is a relationship to the time of year, growing conditions etc.
  - Let buyers know in advance when to expect your products: *"Sweet corn will be ready in 2 weeks...stock up on the butter!"*
  - Be honest... Be transparent... Go the extra mile to demonstrate a commitment to customer service.
  - Encourage your existing business customers to purchase from you through the Puget Sound Food Hub. This way you can maintain and streamline your commercial and wholesale accounts, spend less time off the farm, save money and provide a great service to your customers.
- Remember: Quality, honesty, professionalism and consistency are what will make customers happy and individual farmers successful. Successful farmers and satisfied customers will make the Puget Sound Food Hub successful for all.
- It all starts with YOU!!!***

## **Crop Diversity**

Season extension methods serve farmers well who participate in the PSFH. Buyers are looking to source product beyond what is typically available during a typical Washington summer. Hoop house products, covered row crops are in high demand in the shoulder seasons through the PSFH.

Grow products for the shoulder seasons, communicate with buyers in advance about demand for products; ask for estimations of volumes, talk about pricing.

Consider hardy greens, root crops like carrots, leeks, onions, parsnips, potatoes, beets, turnips, celeriac, garlic, shallots, winter squash and anything that can be stored for winter sales.

Also consider hoop houses or covered row tunnel crops.

Work with PSFH to assess the following and consider growing what:

- you enjoy growing and gives you the greatest satisfaction
- grows well in your soil
- takes no more labor than you are able to commit to it
- provides you the greatest yields
- gives you the highest return to your inputs of land, labor and capital

## **Regulations and Food Safety**

The PSFH will abide by all applicable federal, state and local regulations. All sellers must complete and file all licenses and product liability insurance coverage required for seller participation. Please see the eligibility requirements checklist on page 6 of this document.

It is of great importance for farmers and ranchers to create a food safety and recall plan as part of their standard operating procedures. PSFH has provided all farmers a Generic Farm Food Recall Template so that farmers may use it as a guide when creating their own food recall procedures. PSFH aggregation and distribution partners have all filed HACCP plans for logistics and the PSFH has a Recall Claim Procedures process in place. Farmers are ultimately responsible for any food recall but PSFH will support the farmers any way we can.

It is HIGHLY recommended that all growers attend NABC's Transition to Value Added Courses and Workshops (NABC Network members get a discount) and become familiar with the principles of GAP (Good Agricultural Practices). PSFH works closely with the WSDA to ensure that the most up to date information about GAPs, Food Safety Modernization Act and other food safety regulations are available to farmer and ranchers.

**The following standard operating procedures are *required* of all farmers delivering to the PSFH:**

### **Product Handling**

1. Only potable water free of pathogenic organisms may be used for washing produce. Impurities in the water can drastically alter the effectiveness of a detergent or a sanitizer.
2. Manufacturer's instructions must be strictly followed when using sanitizers, chemicals or additives.

3. Harvesting containers must be made of non-toxic materials and constructed so they can be easily cleaned and sanitized.
4. Harvesting containers should be discarded when cleaning becomes difficult or when damaged such that they might break and pieces fall into the produce.
5. Harvesting containers that have been in direct contact with soil, mud, compost or fecal material should not enter the receiving or processing facility at any time.
6. The ceiling over the processing and packing area must remain free of leaks and condensate.
7. Packaged product must be transported to the PSFH in a clean, dry and sanitary environment. Transport sanitation must be checked before fresh fruits or vegetables are placed in the unit.

### **Product Packaging**

1. Product delivered to the PSFH must be packaged in a new, unused box or clear plastic bag or a sanitized reusable box. The PSFH recommends lining boxes with vented plastic liners to protect product.
2. Boxes with openings on the top of the box must be covered with clean butcher's paper or cardboard.
3. Plastic bags may be used to package appropriate products.
  - a. Bags must be clean when delivered to the PSFH.
  - b. Bags must be thick enough to protect the product from exposure to contamination, and must be securely tied to prevent spillage.
  - c. Bags must be new, with plastic clear enough so the product is discernable through the bag.
  - d. Bags must be sized to fit easily within a PSFH reusable crate.
  - e. Bags must contain a label that meets all PSFH labeling standards.
4. Packaging must protect the product from exposure to contamination from:
  - a. foreign objects
  - b. pathogens
  - c. allergens from other products.
5. All products must be packaged in bags, boxes or flats that prevent spillage. PSFH will not be responsible for product that freely spills out of boxes.
6. To prevent cross-contamination of allergens, packages with allergens must not be placed over packages without each of those allergens.
7. The PSFH will not deliver boxes or bags that have been torn or damaged exposing the contents.
8. Certified organic products must not come in contact with a used box or liner.
9. Certified organic produce must be handled in a way that does not risk cross contamination or co-mingling of organic products with non-organic products.

## Labelling

The PSFH HACCP plan requires that all products delivered to the PSFH must contain a legible label that effectively identifies:

1. The source of the product.
2. The type of product that the package contains.
3. The amount of product in the package.
4. Packaging date or lot number.
5. All allergens within the package.
6. Special handling instructions such as “keep chilled below 41°F”

The packaging label cannot indicate an organic product if product isn't certified organic.

Certified organic products must identify the production lot number of the product if applicable.

## The following are *suggested* Operating Procedures for all PSFH growers:

### Cleaning Fruits and Vegetables

Surface microorganisms of fresh produce vary widely and are highly dependent on the type of commodity and the agricultural practices used. Reduction of pathogens on produce is an important step to reduce foodborne illness, decrease spoilage and to improve appearance and nutritive value. Washing and sanitizing fruits and vegetables is a common practice to reduce surface contamination.

PSFH recommends a four-step procedure for cleaning fruits and vegetables:

- a. Remove surface soil by dry cleaning (brushing or vacuuming) before the washing step, and with commodities that cannot tolerate wetting. It is essential to remove surface soil by dry cleaning, brushing air blowers or vacuum (if the item will physically tolerate it).
  - b. Remaining surface dirt may be removed with the initial water wash. A thorough spray wash with chlorinated water or multiple washes are generally more effective than one soaking wash.
  - c. Wash with a sanitizing agent (generally a chemical agent) to reduce surface contamination. The PSFH realizes that the application of such treatments is dependent on the ability of the commodity to tolerate water, and the shelf life of some delicate produce is reduced after they get wet. This is especially true for commodities with large water-adhering surface areas, like strawberries, other berries and grapes. Another cleaning media, air, may be preferred for removal of dust and other debris from these delicate products.
  - d. Final rinse.
1. The characteristics of the commodity will determine the selection of wash equipment. Soft fruits are generally washed on conveyor belts using water



sprayers. More solid fruits like citrus, apples, and pears may be washed in rotating devices or by fluming. Root crops are typically cleaned with brush washers which contain cylindrical rotating brushes. Brushes must be cleaned and disinfected often because they can become a vehicle for spreading contaminants. Air cleaning may also be effective for removing debris, loose soil or other foreign material from very delicate commodities.

2. For quality purposes, it is a common practice is to wash and sanitize produce in cold water. Placing some warm produce in cool water results in a pressure differential. This creates a suction effect that can cause surface contaminants or contaminants in the water to be drawn into the flesh of the produce. Maintaining the water temperature 5°C (9°F) above the internal temperature of the produce will help prevent this suction effect.
3. For those commodities that cannot be exposed to water, prevention of contamination is critical. Applying Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) are necessary for controlling microorganisms on the surface of the fresh produce. This is the case for some berries and other commodities that cannot get wet.
4. Temperature control during preparation and use of sanitizers should be identified as part of the Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures. Water pH should also be monitored - the optimum range is 6.0 to 7.5.

### **Packing and Storage**

Each grower should publish their own Good Manufacturing Practices for packing and storage facilities, equipment, containers, trash handling, worker health and hygiene, and storage of produce and packing material.

### **PSFH Packing and Storage Standards**

1. Facilities should be designed and maintained in a manner to support easy cleaning and sanitation.
2. Buildings should be well screened with barriers designed to exclude vermin, domestic and wild animals, birds, and insects.
3. During operation, all windows should be kept closed or covered with mesh.
4. Walls, floors and ceilings must be maintained in good condition and kept easy to clean and sanitize.
5. Lamps and bulb lights must be covered so that if they should break the product and the work area will not be contaminated with broken glass.
6. The floor should be constructed with a slight slope to avoid water accumulation in production areas.
7. The wastewater system should be constructed to prevent water accumulation in packing and storage rooms.

8. All chemical agents, such as fuels, additives, fertilizers, pesticides, sanitizers, etc. must be packed in durable containers, properly labeled, and stored in clean, dry, enclosed places, separated from food products and packing material. These supplies must be handled only by authorized personnel and should never come in direct contact with the fruits or vegetables.
9. Packing and storage areas should be separated and items individually protected to avoid cross-contamination.
10. Comprehensive Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (SSOP's) and maintenance programs should be published and implemented.
11. A functional pest control monitoring system should be in operation.

### **Equipment**

1. All equipment and containers that come in direct contact with produce or ingredients should be stainless steel or plastic, since these materials can be easily cleaned, disinfected and hygienically maintained.
2. Equipment must have smooth surfaces and be situated to facilitate adequate cleaning.
3. Equipment should not have loose bolts, knobs, or movable parts that could accidentally fall off.
4. If equipment has any paint on it, the paint should be approved for food processing equipment and it should not chip easily. Rust should be removed so it will not flake off onto the product.
5. Oil leaks and over-lubrication must be avoided. Only food grade oil and lubricants should be used on all food processing equipment.
6. A complete equipment cleaning and maintenance program should be implemented to prevent hazards to the operator and the consumer.

### **Harvesting Containers**

1. Containers used for handling produce must be cleaned and disinfected after each use.
2. Containers used for fresh produce should not be used to transport any other items including lunches, tools, combustibles, pesticides or any other materials. These practices can result in chemical or microbial hazards to the consumer.
3. Containers used within the packing facility for transporting the product before and after washing should be color coded or labelled and kept separated from harvesting containers to avoid cross contamination.
4. Container inspections should monitor and document incidents of pest control and infestation.

## **Trash and Waste Handling**

1. A specific secure, confined area outside the processing facility should be designated for the temporary holding of trash and produce waste.
2. The trash and waste collection area should facilitate cleaning to avoid accumulation of residue and bad odors.
3. Trash and waste should be confined to closed containers.
4. Trash containers and wastebaskets used inside the production and packing areas should be conveniently located, properly identified, be able to be tightly closed, and should not be easily overturned.
5. Separation of plant waste and packaging waste material with appropriate recycling is recommended.

## **Storage of Packaging Materials**

1. The storage area should be clean, dry, and free from trash, insects, and animals.
2. The storage location should be well separated from storage areas used for chemicals or other hazardous materials.
3. Packaging materials should be stored on plastic pallets or clean wooden pallets covered with a new slip cover and must avoid direct contact with floors.
4. Storage location should be separated from restrooms and wet production areas.

## **Produce Storage**

1. All products should be stored in a clean location using an organized system. Codes and inventory rotation are important to minimize the time that the commodity is stored and to facilitate recall, in case of problems later in the food chain.
2. Boxes of product should be placed on pallets to avoid direct contact with floors.
3. There should be separation between pallets and walls to allow adequate ventilation and facilitate cleaning and inspection for rodents and insects.
4. Chemicals, trash, waste or odorous material must not be stored near products.
5. Fruit and vegetable storage areas should have accurate, recorded temperature and humidity control to prevent or delay microbial growth. The proper storage temperature and relative humidity will vary considerably depending on the commodity and its specific requirements.
6. Walls, floors and ceilings must be systematically and periodically cleaned to avoid filth accumulation.

## **Transportation**

### **Shipping Container Sanitation**

1. A complete inspection of the transport storage area should be performed before the product is loaded. Be aware of bad smells, visible dirt or traces of organic matter.
2. Transport storage area must be free of visible filth, odors and food particles.
3. Transportation storage area should not have any water condensation and should not be wet.
4. Hermetic seals are highly recommended to avoid pest access and environmental contamination during transportation.
5. If the fresh commodity requires refrigeration during transportation, refrigeration equipment should be functioning appropriately. Temperature monitoring devices should be used to monitor the performance of the refrigeration system.

### **Refrigerated transportation units:**

1. Refrigeration and cooling systems should be inspected before each trip to ensure they are working properly. They should also be under a scheduled maintenance plan.
2. Minimize staging time (time between removal from cold storage and loading into refrigerated containers). Turn on refrigeration units and cooling transportation container before loading.
3. Allow for proper air circulation in the trailer or container by properly stacking, and not overloading the product.
4. Temperature records should be maintained during transportation.
5. Temperature recorders must be calibrated and tamper-proof to ensure that the proper storage temperature is being maintained.
6. Refrigeration coils should be clean and should not drip condensate on the load.

## **Packaging**

Presentation, including packaging, is important! All products must be packaged in the units that were purchased by the consumer. Example: If a consumer purchases 5 pounds of tomatoes the tomatoes must be delivered to the aggregation point in an appropriate package sized for that quantity and is readily distinguishable from other similar packages and identified with the customer name.

Meats should be wrapped in their original wrapping that bears the mark of state or USDA inspection facility and then also placed in a separate plastic bag (new) to reduce any concern for any cross contamination with other products. The meat then needs to be placed in a sealed box (without holes) and taped shut so that all cracks are covered.

Product packages must contain the farm and farmer name on the product. Branding will help the customer identify your farm, differentiate you from others and find your products week after week.

Presentation is important. The customer gives up the ability to choose just the right tomato for their kitchen by purchasing sight unseen. It is your responsibility to see that they are not disappointed that they placed this trust in you to select for them.

*Consider over packing:*

Everyone is familiar with the concept of a “baker’s dozen.” Most customers will appreciate the fact that you have added an extra “potato to the bag,” etc, just so there is no doubt that the amount delivered is at least the volume they purchased.

Farmers are responsible for building your brand and building customer trust!

### **Inventory Management**

Updating farm product availability and price is solely the responsibility of each individual farmer.

EVERY effort should be made to make sure that your inventory that is visible to the customer is accurate and that you actually have that product (quality product) in stock and ready to deliver.

### **Preorders, other sales**

Customers may want to order larger quantities or other items that are not readily available through the online market. Please contact your aggregation site for help to set up custom orders/pricing, standing orders and pre-orders.

### **Delivery**

Please do not deliver Puget Sound Food Hub orders to customers. Farmers may not use the PSFH for delivery or storage only. All items that come in contact with shared infrastructure (cold storage, trucks,) must be purchased and tracked online. According to the PSFH HACCP plans, farmers are required to use the Puget Sound Food Hub aggregation and delivery services. No unauthorized distribution services are allowed. There are other ways to stay connected with your customer other than delivery.

It is the responsibility of each farmer to deliver quality prepackaged product of the quantity and type that they have represented online and sold to the customer via the designated aggregation point on the day and time that is prearranged.

Farmers may work collaboratively to share transportation to the aggregation point but must realize that they are responsible for the condition of the product when it

reaches the PSFH site and for any delay in delivery.

If for any reason the farmer sees an issue in meeting the commitment to the customer it is HIGHLY recommended that they COMMUNICATE ASAP with the hub manager or coordinator to explain the situation and how it will be remedied. Changes will need to be recorded in the website so that the customer is issued refunds or credits in a timely manner.

Customers have 24 hours to dispute payment for products that are not in satisfactory condition. They must take a photo of the product still inside the box that it came in, and explain the cause for dispute in detail to the coordinator. We will make sure the farmer has the opportunity to remedy the situation, but please communicate with the coordinator or hub manager to let them know immediately how the problem was resolved so they may record the outcome in the system and take appropriate action.

### **PSFH Pricing**

No one can or will price a farmer's product for the PSFH. All farmers determine their own pricing – the price you enter is what you get paid. There are websites that can offer current market prices but those are only a place to begin; they do not reflect your level of quality or production input costs. It is recommended that all farmers consider all production costs including your labor, time and some profit. Value your time and labor and remember that while you might take your product for granted, others place a high value on it.

Competition is healthy but it is important to know your costs and set your price with those costs in mind. Pricing your product so low that you cannot realistically recoup your input costs is not sustainable and should be avoided. In addition, undercutting prices of others will have a negative downward spiral impact on the PSFH as a whole.

One of the goals of the PSFH is to educate buyers about the true cost of food production so that they are understanding of, and more willing to pay appropriate prices for sustainably grown food.

You might expect prices to fluctuate somewhat though the season. It likely costs more to produce those first nice high tunnel tomatoes but as the bulk of the summer crop becomes available the price may well drop.

### **Subscription Fee**

The PSFH will be a member driven organization and \$50 Annual NABC Network subscription fees will contribute to the funding of its operation not covered by fees or grants, namely NABC's technical assistance to food hub farmers.

## Hub Services

The operational costs of the PSFH will in part be offset by a hub services charge associated with the gross value of the product sold by the farmer. Each transaction will include the cost of hub services based on a predetermined percentage of the gross sale. Hub services covers administration, bookkeeping, distribution services, cold and dry storage, food safety adherence, communications, marketing and more. It is also important to remember that since you may be investing less in marketing and distribution time by selling through the PSFH that it will offset some of the hub services cost. In addition, you are adding value for the customer through the convenience of online sales and delivery.

Total cost for hub services is currently 20% of the total sales for each transaction. To help support sustainable farming, The HumanLinks Foundation offers a grant for farmers who adhere to specific sustainable farming practices and an application is available at the end of this guide. **The payment that the farmer receives from the PSFH for their products (as of March 2016) will be the product unit price entered into the system. For farms that receive the HumanLinks grant, an additional monthly subsidy check totaling 10% of the final customer price will be paid out separately to the farmer.** This program, for approved farms, will be in effect through December 31, 2016.

Bank/credit card service fees of 3%, which cover banking and credit card costs, are additional and not included in the hub services cost. With the bank service fees, the total cost added to the unit price will be 23%.

This hub services margin may increase or decrease in future years, but not without providing notice in advance to the farmer. It is important to note, as a nonprofit committed to supporting sustainable agriculture, one goal of the PSFH is to keep costs to farmers as low as possible and allowing the majority of the revenue to flow to the farmer. **The hub services margin is what will ultimately pay for the services provided by the PSFH**

## Invoicing and Payments

The PSFH is responsible for customer invoicing and payments initiated online. While most customers use credit cards, a handful of authorized buyers, including larger institutions, will pay by purchase order. Net payment terms may vary. PSFH will issue payment by check to sellers weekly.

## Networking

While the PSFH fosters the direct-from-farmer-to-customer model of transaction the quality of each grower reflects on every other grower. As the old saying goes, "*A rising tide raises all ships.*" If a customer receives poor quality goods or less than

they ordered, they will not only associate it with that farmer but with all farmers in the PSFH.

It is highly recommended that producers not only individually raise the bar but also work together, to network, share information and advice to increase local production, and help each other improve and grow when possible. Again, let's work together to increase both quality and quantity of production!

### **Final thoughts**

Marketing opportunities are expanding for consistently high quality Washington grown products. We look forward to an exciting opportunity for our farmers and your customers. This is something new to all of us and there may well be unexpected challenges along the way. It is also exciting to think that there may well be opportunities that show up as the PSFH grows and evolves. *THANK YOU!*



## CONTACT INFORMATION

### **General Inquiries, Administration, Billing, Technical Assistance:**

Billing Address: P.O. Box 2924, Mount Vernon, WA 98273  
Tel. 360-336-3727 Fax 360-336-3751

- General Inquiries [info@pugetsoundfoodhub.com](mailto:info@pugetsoundfoodhub.com)
- Terri Hanson [Terri@agbizcenter.org](mailto:Terri@agbizcenter.org)

### **Farm aggregation and distribution site for Skagit, Island & San Juan Counties:**

Bow Hill Blueberries LLC, 15628 Bow Hill Road, Bow, WA 98232

- Harley Soltes [Harley@pugetsoundfoodhub.com](mailto:Harley@pugetsoundfoodhub.com) 206-940-1960
- Susan Soltes [Susan@bowhillblueberries.com](mailto:Susan@bowhillblueberries.com) 206-719-7926

### **Farm aggregation and distribution site for Snohomish and King Counties:**

21 Acres Center for Local Food and Sustainable Living, 13701 NE 171st St, Woodinville, WA 98072

- Austin Becker [Austin@pugetsoundfoodhub.com](mailto:Austin@pugetsoundfoodhub.com) 920-676-3390
- Robin Crowder [Rbcrowder@21acres.org](mailto:Rbcrowder@21acres.org) 360-224-7220

### **Farm aggregation and distribution site for Whatcom County:**

Cloud Mountain Farm Center, 6906 Goodwin Road, Everson, WA 98247

- Tom Thornton [Tom@cloudmountainfarmcenter.org](mailto:Tom@cloudmountainfarmcenter.org) 360-966-5859
- Cheryl Thornton [Cheryl@pugetsoundfoodhub.com](mailto:Cheryl@pugetsoundfoodhub.com) 360-815-4343

### **Farm to Table Grant Program (City of Seattle Human Services)**

- Katelyn Porter [Katelyn@pugetsoundfoodhub.com](mailto:Katelyn@pugetsoundfoodhub.com) 978-846-4325

### **Whatcom Farm to School**

- Chris Elder [Osoelder@gmail.com](mailto:Osoelder@gmail.com) 360-840-3064

## **Puget Sound Food Hub Farmer and Rancher Commitment**

The Puget Sound Food Hub is committed to supporting Washington farmers. All farms participating in the Puget Sound Food Hub have individually made a public statement about the standards of their farming practices and have received the “Guide for Farmers”.

### **☐ Pledge**

By signing this pledge I agree to the Rules of Collaboration and Participation and verify that all farm information I have provided to the Puget Sound Food Hub about our farm operations in our Producer Profile and Product Descriptions is complete, accurate, true and valid. For certification claims, I have provided complete, appropriate and current information and documentation. As a participating farm I fully understand that any knowing inaccuracy or failure to provide complete, proper and updated information and documentation will jeopardize my access to the Puget Sound Food Hub distribution channels and participation in food hub related activities.

### **☐ Agreement to Terms and Conditions**

I agree that I have read and understand the Puget Sound Food Hub’s “Guide for Farmers” and agree to the terms and conditions outlined. I also understand that farms own their product through the supply chain and is at no time owned by the Puget Sound Food Hub.

---

**Farm Name**

---

**Signors Name**

---

**Date**

---

**Signature**

## **HumanLinks Foundation Application Puget Sound Food Hub Services Fee Subsidy**

---

The HumanLinks Foundation is committed to supporting Washington farmers whose practices take into account the highest stewardship of the land with the most sustainable, chemical-free practices. The Foundation also helps support the operations of the Puget Sound Food Hub. We are optimistic about the future of the Puget Sound Food Hub and the role that it plays in fostering stronger relationships between commercial buyers and local farmers. We value these connections as they lead to a greater understanding of food systems and food production methods. In keeping with these initiatives, HumanLinks is inviting participating food hub farmers to submit an application to the foundation to receive a 10% subsidy toward the hub services fee, thereby lowering the fee from 20% to 10% (plus the credit card transaction fee of 3%).

The Foundation will accept applications from farmers who may be Certified Organic, Certified Transitional or have some other recognized qualifications such as Certified Naturally Grown, humane animal welfare, Salmon Safe, GMO-free and biodynamic. Farmers are definitely eligible who are not certified but whose practices meet, or go beyond the requirements of USDA Organic Certification. It is important to note that farmers do not have to have any official certifications but must practice sustainable methods including no use of synthetic pesticides.

Below is an application to receive the 10% subsidy. Please complete the application and return it by email to the address noted below. A response will be provided by email within 7 days, but most likely sooner.

### **APPLICATION**

Farmers must individually make a statement to the highest standard of farming practices that reflect commitment to the integrity of the land, water, animals and people. See the Pledge below. The important thing to note, regardless of certification, is that these farms do not use any synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, fungicides or GMO seeds. Livestock are raised outdoors using humane methods with no hormones or antibiotics.

### ***Pledge***

On behalf of my farm, we practice farming with the highest standards and are committed to the integrity of the land, water, animals and people. The important thing to note is that our farm does not use

synthetic fertilizers, synthetic pesticides, herbicides, fungicides or  
GMO seeds and our livestock are raised humanely outdoors with no  
hormones or antibiotics.

*Farm Name*\_\_\_\_\_

*Signors*  
*Name*\_\_\_\_\_

*Signature*\_\_\_\_\_ *Date*\_\_\_\_\_

*We recognize that farmers use diverse production methods and appreciate the  
opportunity to learn more about your farm. Please complete the information below.*

**Farm Name**

Contact Name:\_\_\_\_\_

Farm Address:\_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Website: \_\_\_\_\_

**Acreage**

Total Acreage:\_\_\_\_\_

Acreage in Production:\_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been farming on this acreage? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Certifications (Please circle and/or add any Third-Party certifications held by  
the farm)**

Certified Transitional Organic

Certified Organic

Certified Naturally Grown

Salmon Safe

Naturally Raised

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Products (Please circle the products that you have sold or anticipate selling  
through the hub)**

Produce

Meat/Poultry

Dairy/Eggs

Grains

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please describe your farm's philosophy toward sustainable growing practices.**

---

---

---

---

**If you use diverse production practices that range across a spectrum please describe. For example if part of your farm is Certified Organic and part is not, please describe.**

---

---

---

---

**Produce/Grains**

Please indicate if you use synthetic pesticides or herbicides on any of your crops.

Please indicate if you use chemical fertilizers on any of your crops.

Please indicate if you use any genetically modified seeds.

**Meat/Poultry**

Please indicate if you raise your meat/poultry with or without antibiotics. If you use antibiotics, please explain when and how.

---

**Dairy**

Please indicate if you use antibiotics for your herd and if so, when and how are they are managed.

---

**Eggs**

Please indicate the type of feed you use for your hens.

---

**Additional Information**

Please feel free to share any additional information about your farm here.

---

---

---

**SUBMISSION**

Please return this application by email to: Robin Crowder, [rbcrowder@21acres.org](mailto:rbcrowder@21acres.org).  
If you have any questions please send an email or call her at (360)224-7220. Thank you!