



February 20, 2023

Dear Food and Community Steward,

We're so happy you are eager to learn about partnering with us! The very first thing I want you to know is that Farm to Heart (F2H) was started by farmers, for farmers.

For the past 15 years, my farm partner Brad and I have been selling meat, eggs, and produce through our community supported agriculture (CSA) program, as well as selling produce to restaurants and grocers. In late 2019, we had become disillusioned with the existing markets available to us. We became more and more frustrated by the lack of risk sharing of our wholesale accounts. Chefs and buyers would meet with us in the winter, promising to buy high quantities, yet when it came to weekly orders, it was impossible to match supply and demand, and we were left holding the bag. Chefs would buy less "because it's been a slow week." Grocers would only offer low pricing, arguing the larger quantities they were purchasing justified lower rates because of 'increased efficiency'.

At the end of each season we'd feel exhausted, discouraged, and quite frankly, ashamed at the level of food waste wholesale markets demanded we subsidize. Because we took pride in honoring our commitments, we consistently overproduced to make sure we'd have enough to meet our handshake agreements. The price we paid for that was high, both in the expenses of production and also the physical and mental stress and wasted effort it created in our lives.

During this time, we had built a wonderful, high value CSA program which is one full of choice, caring, and community. Our member retention rate was consistently above 85% and each year our wait list grew longer and longer. Yet by the end of 2019, we had become very tired of hearing, "Well, it's expensive, so, (the CSA model) is great **if** you can afford it." The implication being that we only cared about and catered to a certain socio-economic class of our community.

Meanwhile as a limited resource producer, whose sole income is generated from our farm, we ourselves worried about every dollar. Also, we knew that the 3rd and 4th graders from nearby Fruit Valley Elementary School who visited our farm as a field trip to plant and dig potatoes, overwhelmingly qualified for the free and reduced lunch program. These kids were part of our community and they deserved access to the healthy food grown at our farm.

This is why, in order to remain financially solvent, Brad and I became determined to find a different way to farm that didn't require us to subsidize so much of the cost of bringing food to market, and didn't mandate that we set aside our deeply held value that all humans have a right to healthy food, nor our commitment to the health of our lands.

But how?

Food banks and food pantries are important food sources for under-resourced communities, but the structure of their supply chain and distribution model does not economically lift up farmers and often does not support food sovereignty or even provide choice for community members. Other existing direct market sales channels for farmers, ranchers, foragers, and food stewards such as farmer's markets do not equitably share the risks or burdens of food production, *especially* in the face of climate change. How many farmers have done everything right to get their product to the market, only to have poor sales because of factors outside their control such as extreme weather conditions, inconvenient market hours for customers, or even traffic jams?

Our F2H program represents a new hunger relief model where agricultural stewards (that's you!) partner with April Joy Farm and Title 1 schools' Family Community Resource Centers (FCRC) to bring farm products directly to families facing food insecurity.

Our mission is to grow an equitable, inclusive, and resilient food system via four pillars: (1) remove systematic barriers that prevent families experiencing food insecurity from accessing regionally grown, culturally meaningful, organic food, (2) improve the farm viability and well-being of farmers experiencing racism, discrimination and/or marginalization, (3) support the widespread adoption of healthy land stewardship and reduced food loss and waste, (4) grow meaningful, lasting relationships between all co-creators of our food system.

We are determined to instill choice, kindness, and of course JOY at every turn, and with every decision we face.

We launched a three year pilot program in the spring of 2020 to test our model and three years later, I can tell you that it has been a transformative experience for our farm, so much so we're now determined to expand our network and impact. What we learned over the

past three years is that our model has enabled us to build relationships with a variety of community members we never could have imagined. So many of those who donate to fund our work have told us they are grateful we have created this opportunity for them to meaningfully effect change. They love F2H because they trust us, and they are 100% confident their funds are used entirely to help BOTH farmers and families.

And personally this program has been a game changer for us. In 2019, our on farm food loss was over 31%. The first year we shifted to growing for F2H, our food loss dropped to 6.5%. Just as importantly, the pride in our work, as well as the social connections we were building, slowly became a source of strength and renewing power for us. When climate change threatened our crops in 2021, our school partners told us, “We got you.” We went from having ‘market channels’ and ‘business transactions’ to having a resilient network of advocates and relationships full of high value reciprocity and gratitude.

And now, we want that for you too.

This Farmer’s Guidebook provides all the details about how our program works and clearly identifies expectations for participation. We hope it answers your questions and inspires you to take the next steps to become part of our community of caring.

There are fantastic organizations focused on hunger relief, and others on assisting farmers. It’s easy to want to isolate problems and try to fix them one by one. But nature doesn’t work in a vacuum, and neither do we.

F2H isn’t trying to fix a broken food system. We’re growing an entirely new system, one conscientious choice, one carrot, and one land steward, and one kid at a time.

I hope you’ll join us.



Farmer, April Joy Farm
Co-Founder, Farm to Heart

2023 Guidebook to the F2H Farmer Network Program

Farm to Heart Program Overview

Who runs this program?

Farm to Heart (F2H) is a CSA program partnership between the Fruit Valley Elementary Family Community Resource Center (FV-FCRC) and April Joy Farm (AJF). The FV-FCRC contracts with AJF to provide CSA shares to families at their school. AJF in turn contracts with regional growers to provide expanded food choices beyond what AJF currently grows. The FV-FCRC coordinator acts as a primary point of contact for our families. AJF acts as the overall F2H coordinator and is the primary point of contact for all producers.

[Here is a program picture](#) that shows how our program is structured and the outcomes we are focused on.

Despite the first two pilot years operating under COVID-19 restrictions, F2H flourished, and continued to grow in 2022. For both agricultural producers and recipient families, F2H played a significant role in mitigating the stresses and strains on our community.

In addition to AJF produce, farmers growing blueberries, apples, pears, peaches and winter vegetables participated in F2H. Sustainably-managed wild sockeye salmon, organic chicken, and certified organic beef were likewise purchased directly from farm-partners and distributed throughout the CSA season. In 2022, a variety of berries, mushrooms, and certified organic chicken were added to the offerings.



How many families does F2H serve?

In 2022, we provided shares to 25 families for 22 weeks, from late May through mid-October. We are also providing shares one time per month during the off-season from December through March. The food for these shares comes primarily from farm partners because AJF does not grow produce in the winter.

AJF also sets up a surplus table at our F2H distribution site that is open for all members of the Fruit Valley community, so there is some opportunity to help assist growers that have crops that are over-abundant.

In addition to our F2H families, AJF has an existing base of paying CSA members (Farm to Patron, F2P) of ~50 shares. We also purchase extras from some of our farm partners to distribute to our F2P members.



We currently work with two elementary schools (Lincoln and Fruit Valley) in the downtown Vancouver, Washington area. We would like to add a third elementary school as well as a middle/high school. To do that, we will need to grow our farmer network considerably.

For 2023, we are expanding our program to serve 30 families. We are also building a heated, enclosed packing area at our farm so we are able to extend our CSA season, create more opportunities for winter producers and provide expanded storage capacity for bulk purchases.

What's the ultimate vision?

Our long term vision is twofold: (1) a free choice, full diet, year round CSA program for our families; and (2) once we have proved this expanded model, create a playbook and resource guide for other communities so our model can be adapted and used in communities across the state. Think of how many creative ways farmers have tailored the CSA model to fit their needs. That is what we hope we can do with F2H. In order to achieve our vision, we're going to need a lot of wonderful, dedicated food, land, and water stewards. That means you!

How is the program funded?

Funds to purchase annual AJF CSA shares are provided by donations received by the FV-FCRC. These donations come through long-established relationships with individual donors and local businesses via the Vancouver Public Schools Foundation.

Funds to purchase food from regional farmers are fundraised by AJF and their farm partners. See the [promotions](#) section below.

Funds to coordinate the program and specifically to establish and grow our Farmer Network come from a 2022 Washington State Department of Agriculture Resiliency Grant and longtime Fruit Valley community partners Bob and Sharon Lewis.

F2H families receive all F2H food free of charge. We are adamant that there are no barriers for families who wish to participate. The only requirements are that the families have children at one of our partner schools and they have the desire to have and cook with our food. F2H is a choice-based CSA where families select every item in their weekly share.

About April Joy Farm

April Joy Farm (AJF) is a 24-acre, Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) certified organic and Animal Welfare Approved (AWA) diversified farm located near Ridgefield, WA. The farm was started in 2008 by April and now is stewarded by four farmers: Brad, Karen, April, and Lauren, along with several dedicated volunteers. Currently the farm exclusively direct-markets fresh produce (vegetables, fruits, and herbs), through our highly flexible CSA model with 2022 being the 15th year of operation.



Our CSA Model is Different

April Joy Farm operates a successful choice-based CSA program from May through October called “Pick Six, Custom Choice” (Pick6) where each week subscribers choose six items from 10 to 30 peak-of-the-season offerings. Unlike traditional CSAs where the farmer determines what items subscribers receive and in what quantities, Pick6 subscribers choose every item in their share, every week throughout the season. They even have the flexibility of allocating multiple picks to favorite items. Consumer food waste is minimized because subscribers have complete agency in terms of what items they will receive and in what quantities. The farmers benefit from receiving real-time data that informs and shapes their crop planning program year after year.

F2H families receive the same farm fresh produce as AJF’s paying members. At the beginning of each week, the families receive an email which lists 10 to 30 items and then they submit their Pick6 selection. The items are harvested, washed, packed, and transported to the FCRC for distribution later in the week.

About our School Partners

Fruit Valley Elementary is a Title 1 school serving an under-resourced community situated between the Port of Vancouver shipyard and the Burlington Northern/Santa Fe north-south freight corridor. At Fruit Valley, 86% of students qualify for free/reduced-price meals and 35% are English language learners. Latinx families constitute almost 50% of the student population. Therefore, all printed program information and communication is in English and Spanish.

In 2022, the program was extended to nearby Lincoln Elementary, a Title 1 school situated in a low income/low access neighborhood as defined by the US Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service Atlas.

What is the F2H Farmer Network?

At F2H, a guiding principle is food sovereignty. We believe food is an essential investment in families, communities, farmers, and land. Through this spirit of reciprocity, all of us can build a healthy community in which we all thrive.

“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.” – Declaration of Nyéléni, the first global forum on food sovereignty, Mali, 2007

We are looking for farmers, fishers, ranchers, and foragers who are aligned with our goals and values:

Our Goals

- We seek social justice through food sovereignty.
- We seek a vibrant, delicious, equitable food system in which farmers, fishers, ranchers, foragers, and all families thrive.
- We seek a more effective and nutritious solution than existing food donation distribution models.
- We seek to nourish families to expand their relationships with farmers, ranchers, fishers, and foragers, and to grow their food confidence.
- We seek a thriving, healthy food ecosystem in which food waste does not exist.
- We seek to catalyze the food system as a connective and restorative element of a healthy community.
- We seek an equitable and transformative food system which connects us across social, economic, and cultural structures.

Our Values

- We are committed to creating a sustainable system by working in conjunction with nature rather than against her.
- We are actively working toward implementing practices that improve soil health.
- We are providing humane, enriched conditions for the animals in our care.
- We are determined to reduce our carbon footprint, and create a more viable, healthy, and balanced farm system.
- We are continuous, humble learners who provide leadership for our communities through our work to incrementally improve everything we do.



Guidelines for Program Participation

On the following pages, you will find an outline of our program's cornerstone elements. Please read each section carefully to understand what we expect from our F2H network partners and what you, as a Network Partner, can expect from us. Our intention in providing this information is to help you determine if a partnership is a good fit.

Please note: We understand that farmers are doing the best they can, with the resources available, given the challenges they face. If you do not meet all the criteria below, it absolutely does not mean you cannot participate. We would welcome the opportunity to talk with you specifically about the specific barriers and challenges you are facing because we are dedicated to supporting food producers on their journey.

Market, Pricing, and Logistics

What you can expect

- A flexible collaborative market channel with equitable sharing of risk. Contracts with farm partners are based on living-wage prices. You set the price, not us. We want you to remain viable so you can continue to care for your farm and your family. We want you to have the resources to invest in practices that support the health of your farm in the long run, not at the expense of short-term market gain.
- A supplemental market for your products. F2H is not meant to replace any existing markets you love to serve, but rather to provide an additional, supportive outlet for items you and your operation are particularly suited to growing or raising. F2H can also provide a potential outlet for your surplus items.
- A guaranteed fair market price for your product that is agreed upon at the beginning of the season. We will not try to negotiate discounts for volume, guilt you into subsidizing food you provide or expect you to donate any items because it's going "to a good cause."
- We cover delivery costs.
- We understand that every farm financial model is different. We will not compare your prices to anyone else's because your farm system is not like anyone else's.
- Flexibility. You (the producer) decide the optimal time and how much you can make available to offer us each week as the season unfolds. This is intended to make it easier for a farmer to more deliberately plan their farm operations; knowing there is a market for their product and a stable distribution channel. Please note, the quantities F2H can reasonably expect to purchase are determined pre-season and are driven by demand from the families and our network. The F2H team will do whatever we can to distribute surplus items you may have available, but we can't guarantee a market for everything.

- Timely pickup of product. Farmers can focus on their work, leaving to F2H the responsibility of some or all of the transportation and delivery if that is of value to the producer.
- When possible F2H will arrange to purchase in bulk (i.e., a whole beef cow) for reduced sales effort on the part of the producer.
- We will also help to find a home for any surplus product that may not be used at F2H through our network of community partnerships.

What we expect

- You will be honorable and transparent with your pricing.
- You know your total costs of production and what you need to earn to make a fair profit.

Philosophy

What you can expect

- You are joining an incredible community of people who care deeply about food, community, and building lasting relationships. You are not just a producer to us, you are a valued part of our family. We want to support, encourage, and celebrate your work. We want to know your goals and dreams so we can broaden our impact.
- We vow to be honest, ethical, and trusting.
- We are committed to treating everyone with dignity and respect.
- We are open and affirming.

What we expect

- You are committed to high quality and take pride in your work. As one of our growers said, “I love participating in F2H because you understand that my blueberries are an extension of me. They represent me and what I care about.” We expect that you don’t cut corners.
- You care deeply about your community, your own health and well being, and you are eager to build a long-standing partnership built on honesty.
- F2H will follow state/governmental guidelines and take all precautions necessary during a pandemic situation such as masks, social distancing, proper packaging of product. We don’t cut corners and we expect that you will be diligent about maintaining the health and safety of our community.



Growing Practices and Sustainability

What you can expect

- We are dedicated to helping you be successful and grow your farm's sustainability in ways that are meaningful to you.
- We will support your work to move towards more sustainable growing practices and reduce your carbon footprint. If the farm strives to be certified organic or animal welfare approved for example, we are willing to help with the technical and network development to make this a possibility.

What we expect

- You love soil. Organic is not just a label, but a baseline for how you treat your soil and your food. We don't expect you to be certified organic or AWA approved (if you are, great!). We do expect you to be actively working toward incremental changes that move you to a more sustainable, resilient farming system.
- You are committed to stewarding the highest quality food. Our families deserve well cared for food. We pride ourselves on providing food that is not 'leftovers' or 'someone else's seconds.'
- You are exceedingly careful with post harvest handling and storage to maximize the quality and life of your products.
- Absolutely no herbicides, pesticides or chemical fertilizers that degrade soil and contaminate water and food. Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI)/Organic approved inputs are acceptable.
- You are eager to eliminate one-time use plastics, reduce your carbon footprint, and improve your farm system to close the loops.
- You are willing to work with us to provide items plastic-free or find alternative ways to help reduce the impact to our environment on our farming systems.
- Year after year, you are committed to making positive, incremental changes in your operation.



Food Safety

What you can expect

- We will handle your product as if it were our own, which means we will handle, store, pack, and deliver your items with strict attention to storage temperatures, the use of clean packaging, and a high attention to best practices.
- We will keep up on evolving best practices regarding food safety.

What we expect

- There are many risks in farming outside of one's control. You understand that food safety is a big risk to your farm's viability and one that you *can* and do manage.
- You have completed or are willing to complete Federal or State level food safety training. That can include Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) training or for fruit and vegetable growers, the PSA Grower Training Course. If you have not received any food safety training, you are willing to do so OR work directly with AJF and WSDA food safety staff to make progress towards this goal.
- You provide annual food safety training to all your workers.
- You have a written food safety plan that includes a written list of the food safety risks for your farm and product(s) and you have put in place solutions to manage these risks.
- You use clean, new containers for packaging. You do not reuse boxes from the grocery store or used cartons returned from other customers.
- You have an adequate temperature controlled facility/cooler as well as clean, dedicated spaces to washing, packing, and storing your products.

Communication

What you can expect

- High level of communication. This is key to making sure F2H is thriving at its full potential. This includes everything from delivery coordination to constructive feedback.
- We will check in with you consistently throughout the season.

What we expect

- You will be timely and efficient in your communication. The nature of our highly flexible Pick6 model demands consistency. Our weekly schedule requires that you

are able to confirm availability and quantity only 5 days before delivery/pickup. We expect you will answer your phone/emails in a timely manner.

- You will follow through with what you say you are going to do. We create the availability list for our CSA families based on what you tell us you have ready to harvest that week. We trust you to follow through so we aren't left holding the bag.
- You will be open and honest with us about any challenges and concerns you encounter and that you will share your successes with us so we can celebrate with you!

Packaging

What you can expect

- We are able to purchase bulk items from you and we can handle the packaging of products as makes sense. For instance, we purchase blueberries in 10 lb bulk flats and we will handle the expense and labor associated with weighing and filling pint hallocks.
- We will always use the least amount and most environmentally friendly packaging available.
- We will always use new or cleaned and sanitized packaging.

What we expect

- You will always use new or cleaned and sanitized packaging.
- You will use the least amount and work toward eliminating single use plastics for your products distributed through our program.

Program promotion and fundraising

What you can expect

- Donations received from your customers and your existing farm network will be used for future purchases of your products.
- We will provide promotional materials for you to share in newsletters, social media, and any other outreach.

What we expect

- Because all food purchased for our program is currently funded by private donations, we rely on a community of supporters to continue to make this work possible. We expect you are willing to share information about F2H with your

current customers and community and invite them to donate to help continue our work- to the level you are comfortable doing so.

- You are willing to act as an ambassador and advocate of our work in the larger community.

Program Metrics, Tracking Requirements

Systemic inequities exist in our community; families a mere eight miles from our farm cannot afford nor access the incredible bounty of food produced in our region. That is what is compelling us to build a new hunger relief model - one that honors families and centers farmers by providing agency and equitably sharing risk.

F2H is built on a foundation of partnerships. Most critical to the success of our model is the partnership between AJF, Fruit Valley and Lincoln FCRCs, our F2H families and farmers. Throughout each harvest season, we intentionally gather feedback and listen to learn. What do our families and farmers need and how can we adapt our program to guarantee we are building an inclusive program that respects the right to sufficient, healthy, and culturally appropriate food?

AJF farmers themselves deliver each week's share specifically so we can meaningfully connect and learn from and with the F2H families. At every turn, we ask, what are the barriers and what part can we play in removing them?

This ethos also applies to our farmer networks. We see our partnerships extending far beyond crop yield, to the health and wellbeing of our farmer partners. To that end, our FNC will work to connect our farmers with both production and non-production agricultural networks and resources.

We recognize the fundamental right to healthy foods grown in sustainable ways. We work to keep our families, our farmers, and our partners in conversation, because we know these social connections are central to our collective wellbeing. Our systems-based approach leverages relationships and builds partnerships to ensure that our community is not only fed, but nourished.

We have a long-standing partnership with Clark County Public Health (CCPH). CCPH leads the F2H program evaluation. Having clear information about the impacts of F2H is a most important feedback loop for us as we grow our program. In addition, this information is crucial to help us create a sustainable funding model. This is why your support to help us document the impact of F2H for your operation is so valuable.

What are the F2H Farmer Network Metrics?

We are focused on three categories of evaluation for our farmer network: Food Loss, Producer Viability and Social Health and Wellbeing. We will work with you to keep the required recordkeeping to an absolute minimum. Our focus is on documenting how participating in F2H has affected your farm's viability as well as the health and wellbeing of you and your family.

What is Food Loss versus Food Waste?

“Food waste occurs along the entire spectrum of production, from the farm to distribution to retailers to the consumer. Reasons include losses from mold, pests, or inadequate climate control; losses from cooking; and intentional food waste.

This waste is categorized differently based on where it occurs:

- *Food “loss” occurs before the food reaches the consumer as a result of issues in the production, storage, processing, and distribution phases.*
- *Food “waste” refers to food that is fit for consumption but consciously discarded at the retail or consumption phases.*

Wasted food has far-reaching effects, both nationally and globally. In the U.S., up to 40% of all food produced goes uneaten, and about 95% of discarded food ends up in landfills.”

~[Harvard School of Public Health](#)

How does F2H reduce food loss and food waste?

One of the hallmarks of F2H's choice-based hunger relief model is its effectiveness in decreasing food waste: With Pick6, families select the items they want to receive rather than a generic box of food. Therefore, a significantly higher percentage of the food is consumed, and thus less food going to waste.

Similarly, for annual producers, food loss can be minimized because they receive crucial data regarding customer preferences which informs the following year's crop planning. AJF has increased crops of onions, radishes, hot peppers, fresh herbs (e.g., cilantro, parsley, dill, oregano) due to their popularity, and decreased output of tomatoes and some root crops. This give-and-take between farmers and families is the essence of community. Just as farm crop planning is adapting to families' preferences, families are also adapting to what grows well on our local farms. For example, sweet frying peppers and collards were new to some families in the first year of our pilot program, but orders have steadily increased due to sample tasting at our weekly pickup. These are two crops that thrive in our farm system. The idea is that F2H is building a community of savvy seasonal eaters that appreciate crops

that are well suited to grow in our region. Food loss is also reduced for perennial crop producers because of the flexibility of F2H. Our focus is on providing a supplemental market that helps move farmer's perishable products when they are available, not based on rigid contract dates.

These are examples of how F2H and the Pick6 model has benefited our farm. We want this for you too! Tracking food loss is one element of documenting the impact of our program.

What you can expect

- We are committed to the success of F2H and a big part of that success is documenting the impact our program has for food producers. We will work with you to create records and processes that keep the record keeping to a minimum for you.
- We will meet with you annually to discuss what went well and what needs improvement so that our partnership works better and better each subsequent year.

What we expect

- You are willing and able to devote time to recording all agreed upon program data for your farm. That program data includes metrics on:
 - Food Loss
 - Producer Viability
 - Social Health and Wellbeing
- You are willing to complete annual pre and post season evaluations. Example surveys are included in the appendix.
- You are willing to share data and information about your farm ONLY as it relates to F2H with AJF and our partners at Clark County Public Health.



APPENDICES

1. Contracts / Letter of Agreement Template

[AIF-F2H-FarmerContractAgreementTEMPLATE .docx - Google Docs](#)

2. Pre and Post-season Farmer Evaluation Surveys

[Farmer Network Pre and Post Season Surveys - Google Docs](#)