ABSTRACT
Access to healthy and affordable food, while central to a vibrant community, is a concern for many households in Skagit County facing hunger and under-nutrition. Skagit Food for Skagit People (SFSP) was a year-long USDA/FNS-funded Community Food Planning project with the goal of bringing together food system stakeholders to develop and promote a comprehensive response to local food access, farm and nutrition issues in Skagit County.

OBJECTIVES
A key component of this project was to actively engage the low-income consumer in listening sessions. Using Appreciative Inquiry, participants were asked to describe what is functional and currently working in the current food system and to create a vision that would provide easy access to healthy foods. Mind maps were used to illustrate themes in three main areas: what is working currently, barriers to healthy food access, and participant visions for the future.

Listening session results were presented to local stakeholders to create a common understanding of food access concerns and inform a planning process for a comprehensive response. Using the socioecological model as the framework for discussion, stakeholders identified how their work influences and impacts each sphere of the socioecological model as the framework for discussion, stakeholders identified how their work influences and impacts each sphere - from the personal (skills, values) through policy levels (bus schedules) to identify current efforts to build upon and gaps where more work is needed.

METHODS
• Six listening sessions were held in geographically distinct, low-income areas of Skagit County.
• Listening sessions, one in Spanish and one in English, were conducted by a trained facilitator using Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Audio recordings and written notes were analyzed for emergent themes.
• Two all-day Stakeholder facilitated work sessions were held to present findings from listening sessions, share current data on food insecurity and health status, and establish a forum to exchange information and ideas among participants.
• 55 stakeholders, representing 39 organizations attended the work sessions; 20 stakeholders attended both meetings.
• The social-ecological model was used as a framework for discussion for participants to consider how spheres of influence impact individual food choices from the personal through policy levels.
• Thinking about their own work in the community, participants identified how their work impacts each sphere of influence within the model.
• Small groups, based on geographic location, looked at the current work being done and identified where more work is needed to take the community closer to realizing the vision of the listening session participants. The gaps identified became the starting point for collaborative solutions.

Creating Collaborative Solutions to Food Access Concerns among Food System Stakeholders using the Socioecological Model

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RESULTS
• Food system stakeholders engaged in the process identified how their work in the community impacts each sphere of influence within the socioecological model. This activity demonstrated the breadth and depth of food access issues across multiple spheres of influence and identified collaborative opportunities.
• Listening sessions identified five methods that currently facilitate access to healthy food: 1) home gardening; 2) smart shopping (using coupons, bulk buying, etc.); 3) cooperative systems (producing garden produce, transportation sharing to food outlets); 4) being in an agricultural area; and 5) food banks operating a shopping model.

• Participants identified four main barriers to accessing healthy food: 1) limited availability at food banks (long lines, limited hours, lack of culturally appropriate foods); and farmers markets (limited hours and expenses); 2) food is expensive (higher cost of healthy food and lack of sufficient food assistance); 3) transportation (high cost of personal vehicle and limited public transportation options); and 4) no space to garden.

• Figure 1 provides an example of stakeholder response utilizing the Socio-Ecological Model for one theme.

CONCLUSIONS
• Combined information from listening sessions, assessment of food and farming in Skagit County and input from food system stakeholders created a compelling call for action. With special regard to social justice, food sovereignty and food security, the opportunities identified as possible solutions based on participants’ vision of future food access not only address the needs of low-income Skagitonians, but also build collaborative coordination among the individuals and agencies that are working to meet that need.

• The socio-ecological framework identified personal and system change opportunities for community-driven solutions to address community-level problems and allowed discussions to remain focused on solutions rather than becoming mired in barriers.
• A strategy to engage low-income consumers in the process beyond the initial listening session is needed. Questions include: How to create community of belonging? How to build community when you are calling out a group based on economic status? Future efforts need to employ strategies which build on community capital and create deeper community involvement.

IMPLICATIONS
The act of convening people in listening sessions and stakeholder meetings created new connections. The sociological model anchored the discussion and generated a ripple effect which led to additional healthy food access activities outside the scope of this project. Information gathered helped to identify priorities for community health strategies and guide policy planning. As a result of Skagit Food for Skagit People, an ad hoc committee has been formed to investigate options for implementing the recommendations that comprise the comprehensive response developed from this community planning process.