

From Food Security to Food Sovereignty

On April 11th, 2026, the third *Food Security Town Hall Meeting* took place in the Great Hall of the Little Lake Grange in Willits, CA. 40 attendees gathered for this pivotal event to focus on fostering local sovereignty and expanding food security in the region. This meeting, the third of its kind, aimed not only to discuss key topics but also to set clear goals and initiate actionable steps for sustainable change.

The meetings have been organized by Annie Waters, Claudia Wenning, and Mike Adams. Little Lake Grange is the sponsor and opened the Great Hall for these community-focused events.

The two-hour session began with Brian Weller presenting a Mind Map on local food security. This visual representation highlighted six key areas that intersect with the central theme of food security, illustrating how they connect and support one another.

Following the presentation, participants split into 6 subgroups for an hour-long discussion to refine goals and outline action steps.

After the hour, each group presented their process and topics of conversation, as well as how to move forward constructively and sustainably to enhance food sovereignty. Below are the summaries, outlined agendas, and contact information for these 6 action groups.

Action Group Summaries:

A. Digital Media - Food Processing and Storage

Goal: Establish a network to connect food providers and consumers, and streamline management.

Action Steps: Develop an app to link stakeholders, create both a virtual and physical food hub, and compile a list of local infrastructure for long-term emergency food storage.

Contact: Laura Toomey Rowland, ljtrowland@gmail.com

B. Community and Backyard Gardens

Goal: Increase access to fresh, local food by connecting gleaners, backyard gardeners, small farms, orchards, and community gardens. Foster local food production through education and fundraising.

Action Steps: Revitalize Grateful Gleaners, support community gardens, build sustainable food-growing villages, promote backyard gardening, and advocate for "food, not lawns." Offer free classes.

Contact: Ryan de la Porte, ryan.farporte@gmail.com

C. Farm-to-School Grants

Goal: Identify funding opportunities, learn from successful grantees, and create a farm-to-school incubator.

Action Steps: CDFA to share grant opportunities with schools and connect grant writers with potential grantees. Learn from Humboldt County Food Council, explore additional grants, and educate farmers and cottage producers about selling to and growing for schools.

Contact: Wally Graeber, wagraeber@gmail.com

D. Nutrition and Medicinals

Goal: Promote healthy eating and the use of medicinal herbs.

Action Steps: Offer classes on food prep, herb harvesting, and processing. Provide educational films via Willits TV, collaborate with schools, and host canning/storage workshops. Educate on growing food and herbs and soil conditions, also in partnership with Zoe's Garden. The Grange Garden Project offers garden tours and classes throughout the year.

Contact: Diane Smalley, dancemolley@mcn.org

E. State Land Easement Grants

Goal: Provide resources and answers regarding land use, access, labor, and housing needs.

Action Steps: Contact Anderson Land Trust and Anderson Housing Association to learn from their models and apply relevant insights locally.

Contact: Buffey W. Bourassa, buffeywright@gmail.com

F. Collection, Storage, and Distribution Systems

Goal: Strengthen local networks for collection, storage, and distribution, and engage youth in these efforts.

Action Steps: Collaborate to research all aspects of collection, storage, and distribution. Meet twice a month via Zoom and in person at KLLG, on the 2nd and 4th Monday of the month at 4 pm. Find distribution hubs and storage spaces, and advertise these resources.

Contact: Jini Reynolds, gingereynolds@gmail.com

Future Town Hall meetings about these topics will be organized by WELL, Willits Localization, www.well95490.org. For more information, contact Laura Toomey Rowland at ljtrowland@gmail.com

This is the mission statement from the Little Lake Grange, which opened the doors for the 3 Town Hall Meetings about Food Security:

#Little Lake Grange provides opportunities to enhance our community today and for the generations of tomorrow by working to improve the health and quality of life and encouraging local food security, food production, farmland preservation, community self-sufficiency, love of family, education, and grassroots legislative action.”

And here is the mission statement from WELL, Willits Localization:

“Willits Economic Localization is dedicated to fostering a resilient local economy by offering educational and skill-building opportunities, including collaborating with other organizations in the Willits area. Our focus is on increasing community engagement and sharing vital information about food, water, soil, energy, and the local economy.”