

TEAM PROFILE

# Northwest Tribal Emergency Management Council

Based in Washington State on the traditional territory of the Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla; Yakama, Syilx (Okanagan), ščəl'ám̓x̓ (Chelan) and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation.



## F2FA PROGRAM QUICK FACTS

► **F2FA PROGRAM REACH:**

The Northwest Tribal Emergency Management Council (NWTEMC) regional chapter comprises more than 270 tribes across the states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, California, Montana, and Alaska. Their direct F2FA work is particularly focused on Snohomish County and the broader state of Washington, but they also facilitate food access for native communities in Alaska and other states, particularly with the purpose of upholding food sovereignty and ensuring traditional foods are available for native communities. NWTEMC distributes approximately 2 million pounds of food a month to 120,000 Native Americans.

► **FUNDING SOURCES:**

Farmer Frog, a nonprofit organization that grows food on its farm, serves as a food distribution hub, and provides hands-on education in Washington state.

- State funding
- Philanthropic funding
- Corporate Funding
- Individual donations

*The Northwest Tribal Emergency Management Council was formally incorporated in 2008.*

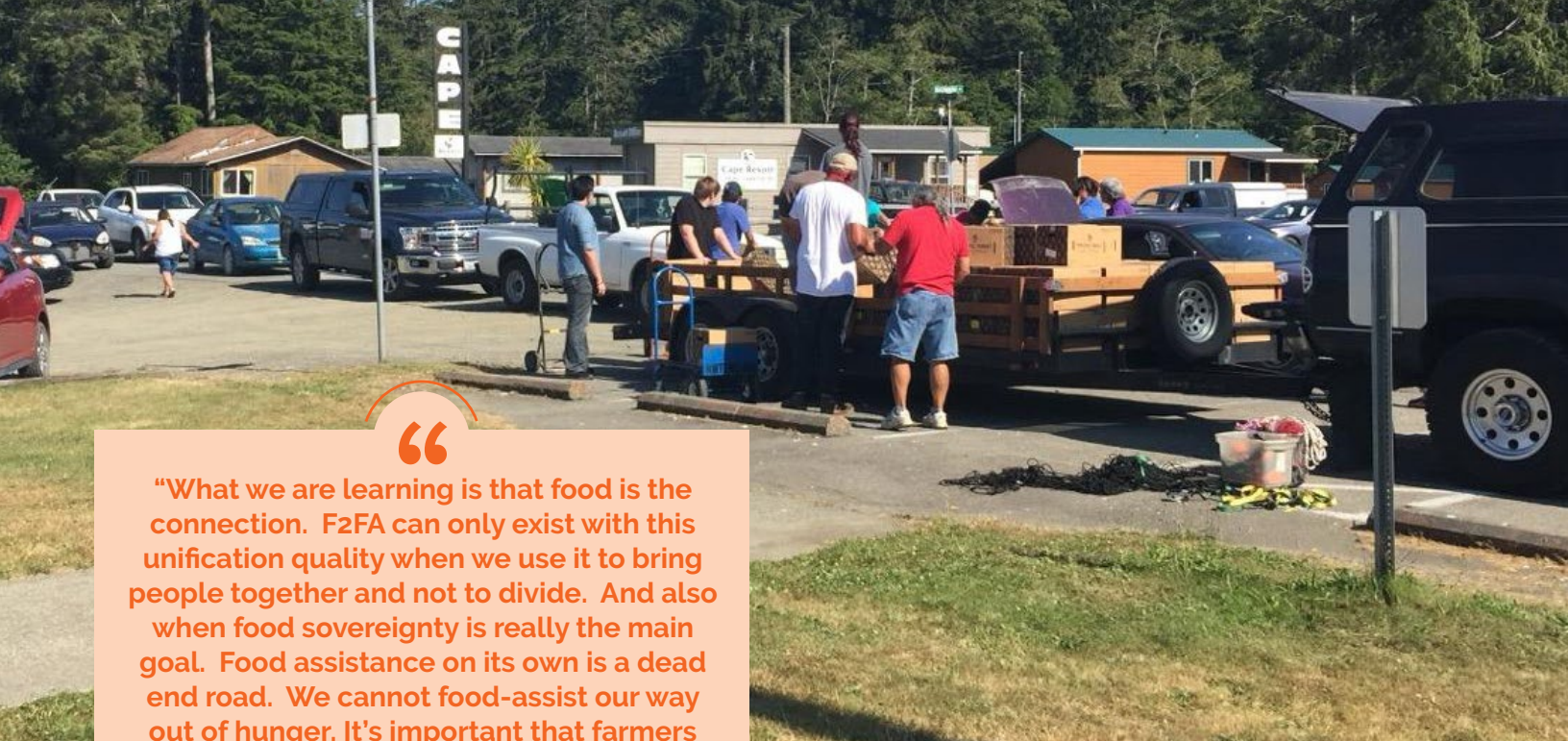
*Their F2FA program has been in operation since 2020.*

► **WEBSITE:**

[www.nwtemc.org](http://www.nwtemc.org)

## ABOUT THE NORTHWEST TRIBAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

The Northwest Tribal Emergency Management Council (NWTEMC) is a consortium of more than 270 tribes that work together across the Pacific Northwest. NWTEMC provides guidance and tools for emergency planning, disaster preparedness, homeland security, and public health for tribal nations across the states of Washington, California, Oregon, Alaska, Idaho and Montana. They share information and best practices, and offer training, planning, and other resources.



“

“What we are learning is that food is the connection. F2FA can only exist with this unification quality when we use it to bring people together and not to divide. And also when food sovereignty is really the main goal. Food assistance on its own is a dead end road. We cannot food-assist our way out of hunger. It’s important that farmers participate and that they are valued and they get a good return, but at the same time, farm to food assistance can only be a stepping stone to a real solution.”

– ZSOFIA PASTZTOR,

FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE CO-DIRECTOR, FARMER FROG

## FARM TO FOOD ASSISTANCE IN TRIBAL NATIONS: FORGING NEW PARTNERSHIPS IN A TIME OF CRISIS

With the COVID-19 pandemic, food insecurity among tribal communities in Washington State soared. A statewide survey conducted during the height of the pandemic found that 67% of tribal households had experienced food insecurity during the past 12 months. Additionally, 46% of respondents reported that their use of traditional foods had decreased, including in shellfish, wild game, fish, and traditional roots, berries, teas, and plants. Similarly, traditional food distribution channels—like sharing food with family and community members and bartering—decreased during COVID1.

The USDA and federal government were experiencing difficulties in getting food to tribes. Many tribal nations closed their borders to protect their communities from the pandemic, and supply chain disruptions led to sky-high prices at stores that served remote reservations. Supply chain disruptions were also impacting farmers in the state, who were plowing under their crops as their market channels collapsed.

In its emergency support capacity, the NWTEMC began to respond to the acute food insecurity faced by many tribal households in Washington State and its broader six-state region. A newly formed partnership with the nearby nonprofit organization, Farmer Frog, was key. Since 2009, Farmer Frog had been operating their own farm, providing hands-on education, and supporting school and community gardens in the Puget Sound Region of the state. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization quickly pivoted to become a central hub for connecting local producers—many of whom had lost their traditional market channels—with community organizations and people in need.

The connection between NWTEMC and Farmer Frog felt serendipitous—a tribal leader from Makah Tribe had seen a brief Farmer Frog commercial advertising free potatoes and onions, and within 24 hours, NWTEMC Executive Director Lynda Zambrano was at Farmer Frog’s farm and distribution center to pick up the produce. This initial meeting led to a deep and lasting partnership. Farmer Frog’s capacity to procure food has worked in lockstep with NWTEMC’s network for communications and distribution across member tribes, which had been developed over its years of creating emergency management infrastructure with tribal nations.

Through their current F2FA efforts, Farmer Frog aggregates local products and NWTEMC picks up produce, poultry and meat from the farm for distribution to tribal nations across the regional chapter on a weekly basis. The emergency manager for each tribe is responsible for coordinating food distribution within their community. This approach ensures that food gets to individuals and families who can’t get to a food bank,

<sup>1</sup> SOURCE: Chapter 3: D (uw.edu)



## WHO'S AT THE F2FA TABLE?

The Northwest Tribal Emergency Management Council (NWTEMC) is a consortium of Northwest Tribes guided by a charter and governance structure that aims to ensure all voices are heard. For their Farm to Food Assistance work, their structure has facilitated communication and coordination across tribes, with NWTEMC taking the lead from individual tribes on how to meet their needs and support food sovereignty. Tribal nations share information with NWTEMC about what foods are important for their particular communities to guide procurement and sourcing. They also ensure the food sovereignty of fellow tribes by harvesting and sharing foods that reflect those communities' traditional diets, ensuring a supply of traditional foods across tribal nations. Lynda Zambrano, Executive Director of NWTEMC, notes that every day they learn more about what foods are important to particular tribes. Farmer Frog has been a key partner for NWTEMC's Farm to Food Assistance work, collaborating closely on planning and implementation of this work.

for example due to lack of transportation or health issues—people who, as Lynda puts it, have “gotten left behind” by traditional food banking approaches.

The scale of the F2FA work is impressive. Between NWTEMC and Farmer Frog, they are purchasing from about 450 small farms and producers on an annual basis in Washington State—including ranchers and fishers. Many of the producers are native. Lynda shares, “We strive to source our Indigenous foods at their prime. The King Salmon are running in the Puget Sound, and through this last month alone have purchased more than \$200,000 worth of King Salmon for distribution to our members for free. We also distributed fresh Dungeness Crab and will be distributing bison meat next.”

NWTEMC's F2FA efforts are being used to increase food sovereignty for tribal nations and expand access

to traditional foods. This has meant providing rabbit meat for tribal nations in eastern Washington, procuring bison meat from native ranchers, securing several types of salmon and crab from Tribal fisherman, and foraging for nettle to be dehydrated for tea. Through a unique relationship, fishermen in Washington responded to a call from NWTEMC to help native communities on Kodiak Island in Alaska replenish their supply of seal meat and seal oil. Tribal fishermen in Washington have responded. They are using their seal quotas to catch and preserve seal meat which will then be shipped by boat to Alaska. This connection underscores how the concept of “local” procurement has a different meaning for Indian nations. As Lynda says, “We consider local tribe to tribe, not tribe to county or tribe to state, but tribe to tribe.”

NWTEMC and Farmer Frog have more plans underway. Last year, the organizations planted 5,000 fruit trees on farms throughout the Snohomish County region, creating “community orchards. We have just finished planting another 5,000 this spring.” Household food production and preservation is also on the horizon. As Lynda shares, “COVID really kind of brought home gardening back to the forefront, where it hadn't been there for a long time. But now, we're contacted every day from people that want to learn how to smoke fish, can, dehydrate, freeze dry.” To meet this interest, they plan to start teaching food preservation techniques to community members. These efforts will help to ensure food sovereignty and resilience for tribal nations for the long term.

## IN THEIR WORDS



### KEY SUCCESSSES

Meaningfully improving food security among tribal members.

Building the internal infrastructure and capacity for tribal nations to be able to manage emergent food shortages and have greater access to needed resources.

Building community by bringing large groups of people to work together. As Lynda says, "When you are able to recreate these relationships and the bonds that develop between people in the community, I see that it blends over into every other aspect of our lives."



### KEY CHALLENGES

Lynda Zambrano: "Funding is a challenge. Keeping people employed is a challenge. Because when the funding runs out it's really hard to keep what was a paid employee motivated to stay on as a volunteer for too long before they have to find gainful employment."

The cost of food processing infrastructure (e.g. USDA-certified butchering facility, currently there are only 2 in the state of WA).

Lynda Zambrano: "We feel that it's really a blessing when we're able to find vendors that will work with us and give us good pricing, so that we can make that dollar stretch for as far as we possibly can to build the infrastructure and bring as much multi use to that that single infrastructure that we can, that it benefits multiple programs across the board".



### VALUES IN ACTION

Supporting food sovereignty for tribal nations by purchasing from native growers, ranchers, and fishers and by providing culturally important foods to tribal nations.

Building coalitions with organizations supporting LGBTQ, Black, immigrant and refugee communities, and other marginalized groups.



### LESSONS LEARNED

You can be a force multiplier through this work: "As one person we don't always have all the answers. But together we have a lot more answers... The more of us that work together, the more work we get done, the more we're able to really have [an] impact on a lot of these areas that we're trying to be impactful on." -Lynda Zambrano

The Farm to Food Assistance Learning Lab was made possible through a 2021 USDA Local Foods Promotion Program (LFPP) grant, with supplemental support from The Rockefeller Foundation. This profile features one of ten participating teams who served as co-investigators in the Wallace Center's research on the field of Farm to Food Assistance.