

Food Hubs, Resilient Food Systems, and Economic Development

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Economic Development Practitioners Network

Research Team

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Presentation Overview

- **Introduction**
 - Resilient Food Systems
 - What is a Food Hub?
 - Relationship to Economic Development
 - Our Regional Landscape
- **Research Project**
 - Overview
 - Preliminary Findings
- **Food Hubs & Economic Development**
 - Current Challenges
 - Emerging Ideas
 - Opportunities for Collaboration



What is a Resilient Food System?

Resilient Food System:

- Provides sufficient, appropriate, and accessible food
- Sustains the livelihoods of producers
- Adapt in the face of unforeseen disturbances

Food System: networks needed to produce, process, and distribute food

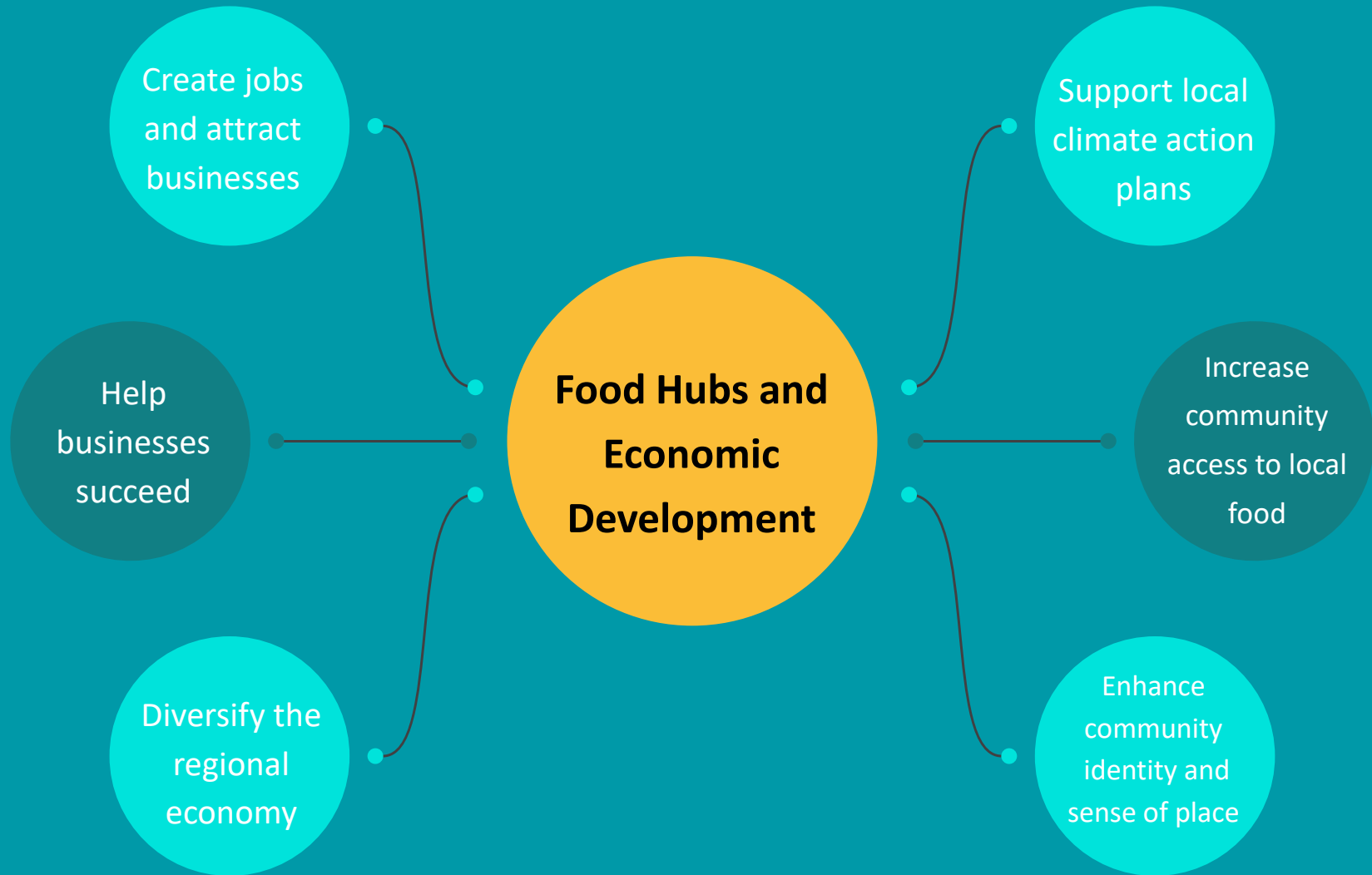
Importance of
Resilient Food
Systems?

Maintain local connection to food
Food security
Emergency preparedness
Economic development and diversification

What is a Food Hub?

- “A business or organization that actively manages the **aggregation, distribution, and marketing** of source-identified food products primarily from local and regional producers...” – *National Food Hub Collaboration*
- “Shared-use food and beverage processing facilities that offer food and agriculture businesses access to **commercial processing space**, equipment, expertise and resources to support business development and growth.” – *BC Min of Ag & Food*
- “Grassroots, community-based organizations and individuals that work together to build increasingly **socially just, economically robust and ecologically sound** food systems that connect farmers with consumers” – *Blay-Palmer*





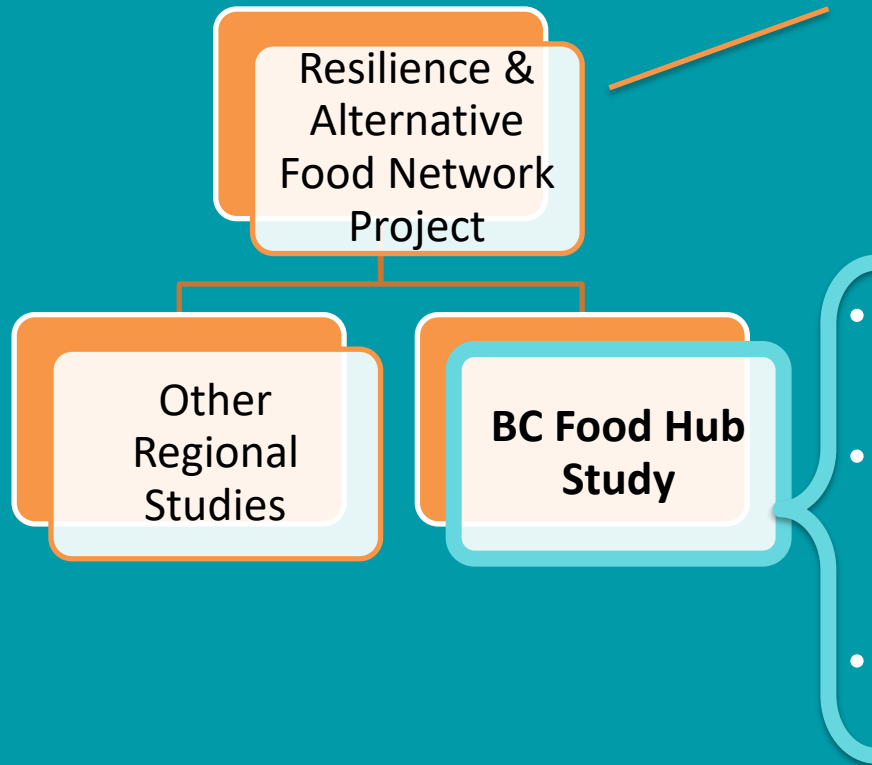
Our Regional Food Landscape

- Range of food business types and scale
- Agriculture Production / Practices
- Food business
- Food production supports and Economic development
- The wave of food hubs
- Ministry funded - Creston / Rock Creek
- Alternatively funded / interest stage
 - Revelstoke / Nakusp / Kaslo / New Denver / Slokan Valley / Cranbrook etc

Challenges: Vast distances and geography



Research Project Purpose



- Studying emergence of Alternative Agrifood and Seafood Networks that deliver local products.
- What roles do Food Hubs play within regional food systems?
- How do region specific conditions impact the ability of Food Hubs to be sustainable?
- What impact have major disturbances had?

Research Project Objectives

1. Track the evolution of the British Columbia Food Hub Community of Practice.
2. Detailed exploration of the role of two regional food hubs within their regional food systems.
3. Explore regional food systems through food supply chain modelling.
4. Compile and comparing the results of 1-3 to understand Food Hubs as form of Alternative Food Network.



Preliminary Findings: Case Studies

- Key Informant interviews
- Asking questions related to:
 - Vision and desired outcomes
 - Needs and challenges
 - Partnerships
 - Roles and relationships



Work to Date

- The Stir is operated by KFPC which has an expansive vision to leverage food hub for resilient regional food system
- Region impacted by wildfires/flooding
- Fewer direct connection with producers than anticipated
- Fewer businesses focused on shelf-stable, processed food products than anticipated

Emerging Themes

- Food system lens
- Strong values alignment across The Stir staff, KFPC as an organization, and businesses using The Stir
- Approach is emergent and experimental (i.e. revenue diversification, pilot initiatives)
- Collaboration within the region and across the Interior is a priority
- Partnerships with regional ec dev orgs; general business planning vs. food sector specific support



Work to Date

- Early challenges with business sustainability
- Revised focus and business planning
- Large agriculture base to service
 - o Adopted co-op model for larger processing equipment(juice press, freeze dryer, egg washer)
- Shifted greater focus to commissary / business dev services
 - o High turnover / cash flow
 - o Innovation
- Local ag impact from weather can have positive and negative impacts to hub

Emerging Themes

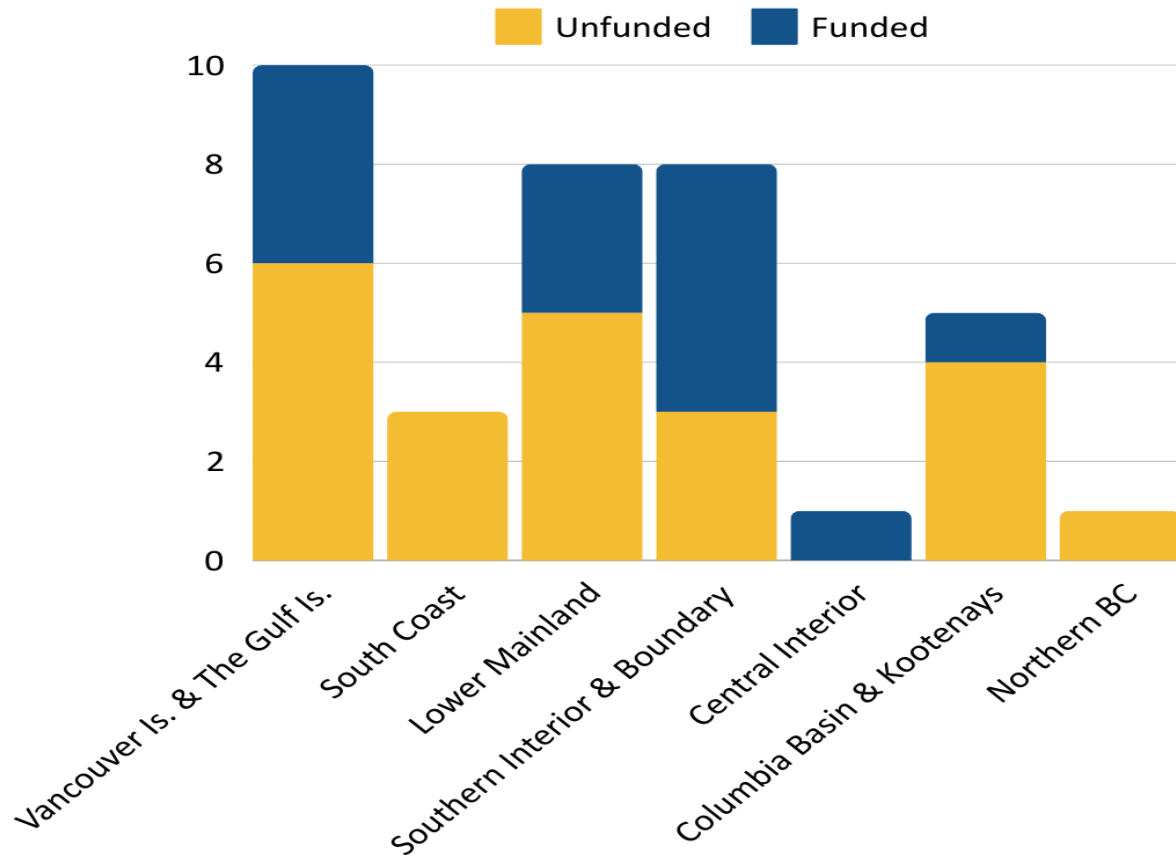
- Strong collaboration in Creston
- Emergent and responsive
 - o Adaptive to community needs
 - o Exploring revenue diversification
- Large equipment / unique to hub
 - o Thorough systems
 - o Creative business models
 - o Supportive to local ag scale



Preliminary Findings: Community of Practice

- Participation and observation
- Collecting details related to:
 - Who is participating
 - Levels of engagement
 - Relationships and flows of information
 - Topics discussed
 - Emerging themes and tensions

COP Attendance by Geography



Who is Participating?

Geography:

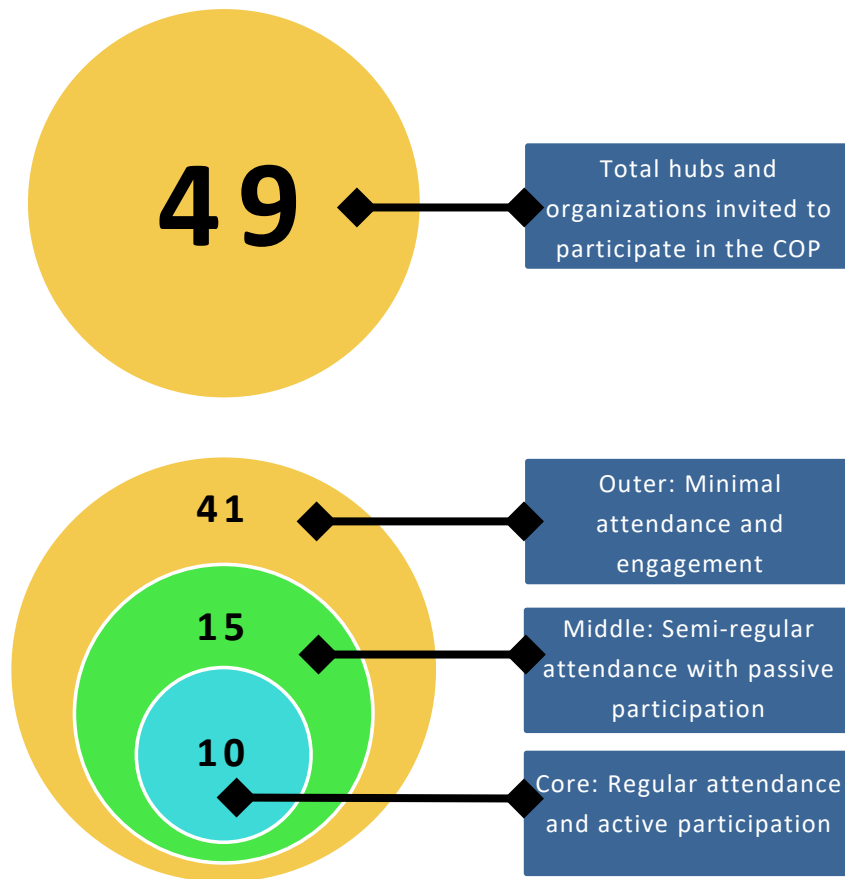
Contrast between:

- North and South
- Population density
- Local Ag/food sector

Participant Ratios

Hubs vs. other groups

COP Attendance and Engagement

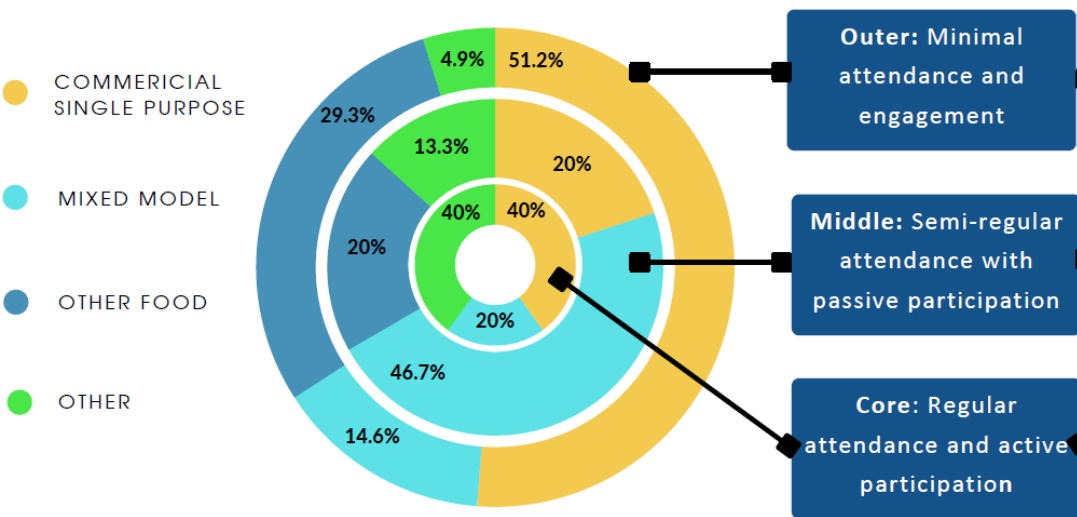


**COP YEAR
ZERO - 2023**

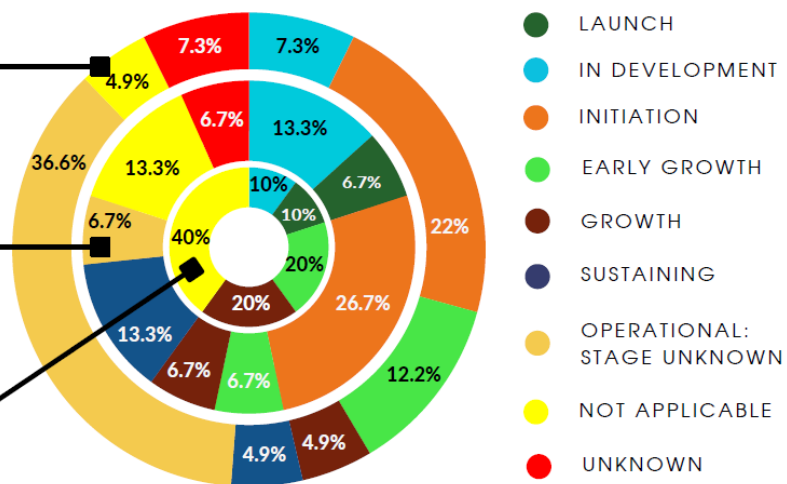
**COP YEAR
ONE - 2024**

Exploring Potential Influences on Engagement: Organization Type and Development Stage

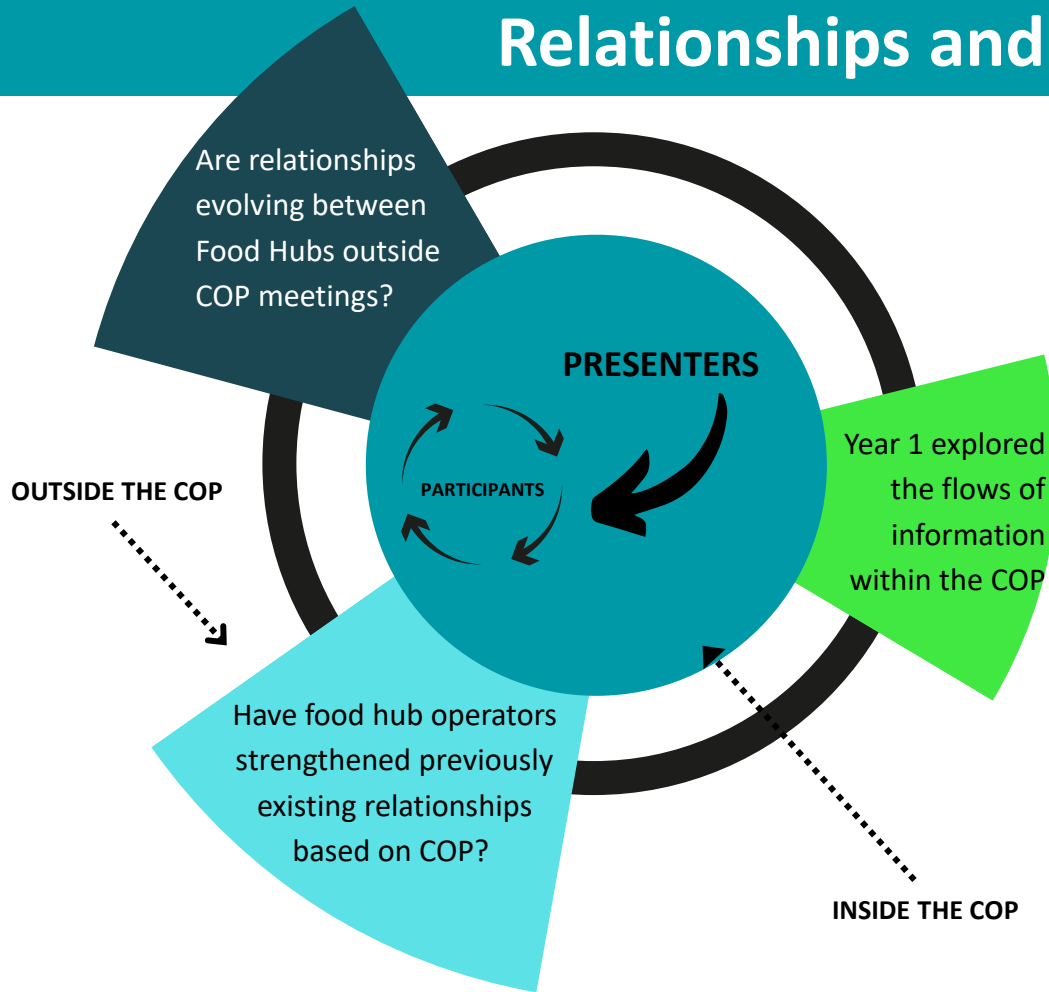
Engagement by Organization Type



Engagement By Hub Development Stage



Relationships and How Information Flows



In Year One, we observed the types of interactions that occur **inside the COP**.

In Year Two, we want to include the types of interactions that occur **outside of the COP**.

COP: Topics

- Each COP meeting had a different topic. Topic selection was based on:
 - Engagement with food hub operators completed by Tapestry
 - Input from BC Min of Ag & Food
- Underlying and reoccurring topics emerged from COP members – primarily related to financial sustainability and funding for hub operations
- Several meeting topics related to economic development:
 - Learning from a successful food hub: Diversifying revenue streams & having committed markets for food hub services/ equipment
 - Recruiting and supporting food entrepreneurs
 - Aggregation/Distribution as potential revenue streams
 - Fostering economic development partnerships and increasing investment in food hubs

COP: Emerging Themes & Tensions

- Influences on Participation
 - Organizational values
 - Organizational capacity
- What is a Food Hub?
 - Broad range of organizations
 - Evolving based on place and sub-sector
- Future COP Direction
- Tensions
 - Internal: Hub values versus financial and human capacity
 - External: funding priorities versus community needs
- **Emergence of needs and ideas that overlap with Economic Development**

Current Challenges

- **Food Hubs as financially self-sustaining** --> expectations vs. reality
 - Lack of core/operational funding = limited capacity
- **Economic development approach** --> Min of Ag, food specific vs. local scale, non-sector specific
 - Complex network of overlapping programs and supports
 - Program issues: audience, timing, location, access, eligibility
- **Food Hubs need:**
 - Supportive partnerships – with other hubs AND with local economic development
 - Improved understanding of available programs and services & gaps to fill
 - Easily accessible market trends and research
 - Diverse investment in operational funding
- **Hub Clients need:**
 - Early stage supports with low barriers and minimal eligibility restrictions
 - Help navigating the network of available programs and services
 - Guidance informed by sector expertise and knowledge



Emerging Ideas

- New Ministry supported business planning for Food Hubs
- Pursuing alternative revenue streams and funding sources
- Ideas to develop (and receive funding for) in house business supports at Food Hubs, including:
 - Business planning support
 - Ongoing business advising
 - Venture accelerator programs

Emerging Risk: Unplanned duplication of existing supports and programs

Emerging Opportunity: Collaboration with Economic Development partners to leverage existing programs and support Hubs to address sector specific gaps.

Opportunities for Collaboration

- Why is this important?
 - Reducing duplication and creating resilience
 - Streamline business development path
 - We only have economies of scale collectively
- Ideas
 - Cross network communication, relationship building, and knowledge sharing
 - Partnerships between Economic Development and Food Hubs
 - Leverage and promote existing economic development programs
 - Specific sector expertise to existing or new programs
 - Shared resources
 - Shared program delivery
 - Help navigating programs and services



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Thank you!
For more information visit



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