

BFRDP Project #2021-06633 Objective 4 Process Report

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Development of the Farmers-to-Farmland Shared Land Access Model for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers (F2F Model or ‘the model’) has taken place in partnership with local organizations and farmers over the span of two years. The San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild (Ag Guild) is the project director for the 2021 BFRDP (#2021-06633). The Farmers-to-Farmland (F2F) Steering Committee, a core group representing the Ag Guild, was tasked with leading the research, design, and development of the model, as well as organizing and facilitating meetings. In addition, a Land Access Advisory Group was created to participate in the visioning process and development of the model and includes representatives from local organizations as well as beginning and experienced farmers in San Juan County.

Preparation and Participation

In order to prepare for project collaboration, the Ag Guild created a background overview for the project to outline identified needs as well as the goals and processes for the project.

- [Background overview for project](#)
- **Objective identified for group:** To research and develop a sustainable, ready-to-launch model of shared land, resources, and infrastructure for multiple beginning farmers at a single location, with possible collaborative management and services.

To form the Land Access Advisory Group, the Ag Guild wrote an invitation to stakeholders, outlining the project and asking for participation. The invitation was sent to a selection of beginning farmers and ranchers (BFRs) and experienced farmers in San Juan County, local organizations supporting agriculture, and local organizations dealing in shared land access.

- [Meeting/participation invitation](#)

Collaborators

At the project outset, the F2F Steering Committee and Land Access Advisory Group consisted of 14 members, with four participants representing socially disadvantaged groups. The group lost one BFR after two meetings but recruited another BFR by

meeting #4. In addition, other staffing changes occurred within the organizations at various points throughout the process.

Farmers-to-Farmland Steering Committee

Candace Jagel, San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild & Farmer, Snowberry Farm

Chelsea Thorpe, San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild

Emma Rastatter, San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild

Kristen Arnim, San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild

Peggy Bill, San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild

Stephanie Coffey, San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild

Land Access Advisory Group

Brook Brouwer, WSU Extension, San Juan County

Bruce Gregory, San Juan Islands Conservation District & Farmer, Mitchell Bay Farm

Charlie Behnke, San Juan County Conservation Land Bank

Faith Van De Putte, San Juan County Agricultural Resources Committee & Farmer, Midnight's Farm

Greg Meyer, Beginning Farmer

Lori Ann David, Farmer, Aurora Farms

Meike Meissner, Farmer, Stonecrest Farm

Rhys-T Hansen, Agrarian Trust

Sandy Bishop, Lopez Community Land Trust

Sasha Moghadam, Beginning Farmer, Joon Farm

Taylor Diepenbrock, Beginning Farmer, Morning Star Farm

Facilitator

Sarah Severn, Sarah Severn Consulting

Meetings

Starting in November, 2021, the F2F Steering Committee met weekly to review the BFRDP 2021 grant requirements, share research, create the agendas for the Land Access Advisory Group meetings, and begin to draft the language of the F2F Model. This group also met to debrief after each Land Access Advisory Group meeting.

Starting in January, 2022, the Land Access Advisory Group met once or twice monthly via Zoom for a period of six months between January, 2022 - June, 2022. A meeting facilitator was hired for this period. The group then met on occasion throughout the grant cycle, totalling 11 meetings as of April, 2023.

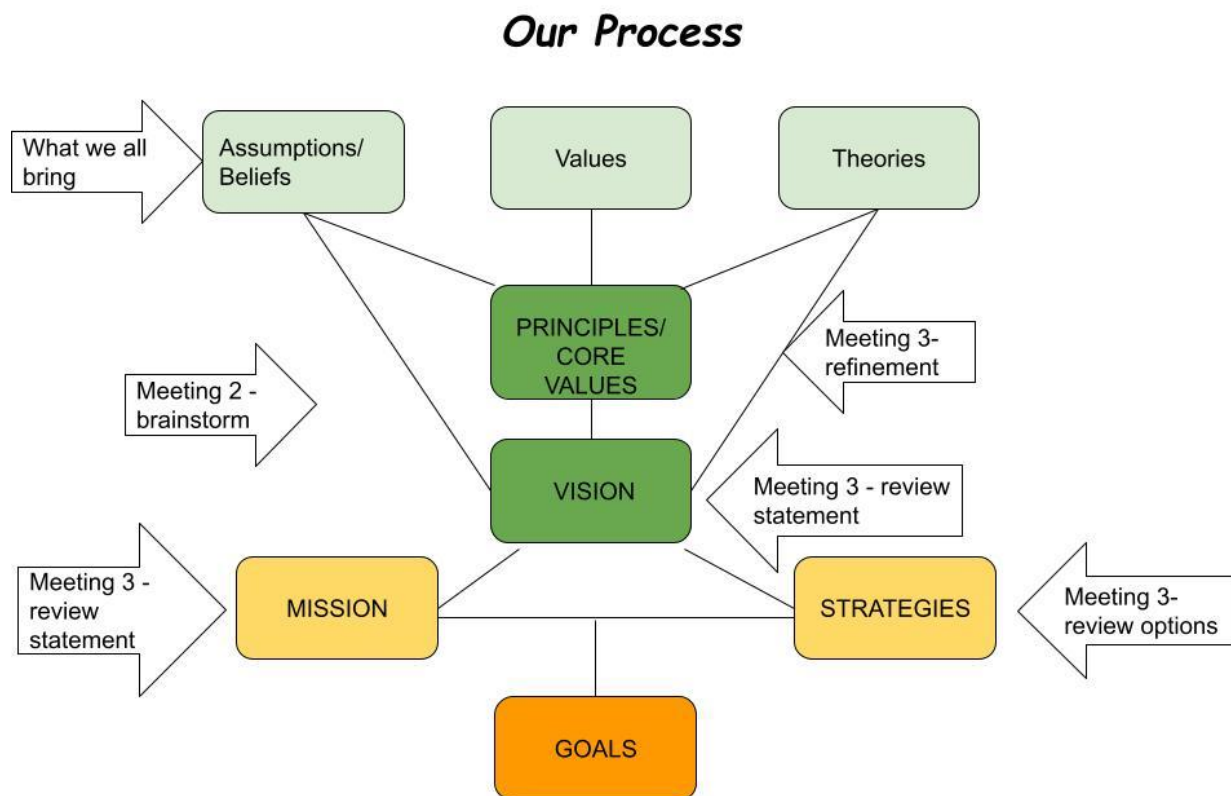
- Meeting organization

- Welcome, Agenda, Objective, and Outcomes discussed, Zoom chat utilized, Zoom breakout rooms utilized, homework assigned
- Meeting objectives
 - 7 Visioning (Meetings #1-3, 6-9)
 - 2 Discovery of existing farmland access models (Meetings #4 and 5)
 - 1 Model refinement (Meeting #10)
 - 1 Scenario planning (Meeting #11, in-person)
- [Land Access Advisory Group meeting notes and PowerPoint presentations](#)
- [Zoom recordings of each virtual meeting of the Land Access Advisory Group are available here.](#)

Resources shared with group for review

- [Ag Viability Matrix](#): Created in 2017 as part of the Voluntary Stewardship Program. Shared with the group to bring up local ag issues that overlap with the BFRDP objective and to kick off brainstorming.
- [Alternative Models to Land Access: 2022 San Juan Islands Agricultural Summit Session](#): Presentations given by a panel of experts during a local ag conference discussing model of land access. Shared with the group to expand knowledge of land access models.
- [A Review and Analysis of Coffelt Farm](#): A report created by the Conservation Agriculture Resource Team (CART) in 2021, detailing aspects relevant to work on the F2F Model. The report identified lessons learned; assessed agriculture potential and possible types of farm operations; and, most importantly, considered alternate models for management of public farm properties, including shared land access models.

Strategic Planning Process



Flowchart of strategic process created by meeting facilitator, Sarah Severn.

The process of creating a shared land access model for BFRs began with strategic planning and visioning exercises, including:

- Visioning exercise
 - *Q: If the objective was to be successfully implemented, what would it look like in 10 years?*
- Defining core principles
 - *Q: What principles should guide the pursuit of our purpose? What guides us? What core values should be applied?*
- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis
- Vision and Mission statement development
- Exploration of existing shared land access models
- Local resource mapping (existing resources and gaps/needs in the county) using the Miro.com mind mapping tool

Working together through drafts and reviews, the Land Access Advisory Group agreed on the following mission statement, principles, SWOT analysis, and resource map for the project:

Mission

The Farmer-to-Farmland Shared Land Access Model’s mission is to increase the success of beginning farmers in San Juan County through shared land access, resources, infrastructure, and collaborative support.

Principles

The principles below represent the core values that guide us in our work to facilitate land access for new farmers in San Juan County.

Stewardship

We protect and cultivate the health of our food systems and the planet. We foster holistic land management and innovative stewardship practices such as permaculture, soil building, and carbon sequestration.

Transparency

To promote successful relationships among farmers, land owners, other stakeholders, and the community, we provide a clear vision and parameters for achieving our goals, and we practice open, professional, inclusive, and transparent communications.

Accessibility/Equity for farmers

We boost farmer success through a model that promotes long-term access to farmland, living wages for farmers, and the ability for the farmer to build equity over time.

Resilience

We identify and implement strategies that help farmers adapt to changes in climate, economics, working conditions, and societal needs, as they evolve.

Justice

We stand against racism and oppression of any kind. We believe there is no food justice without racial and economic justice, and we commit to advocating for equitable and just access to farmland in San Juan County.

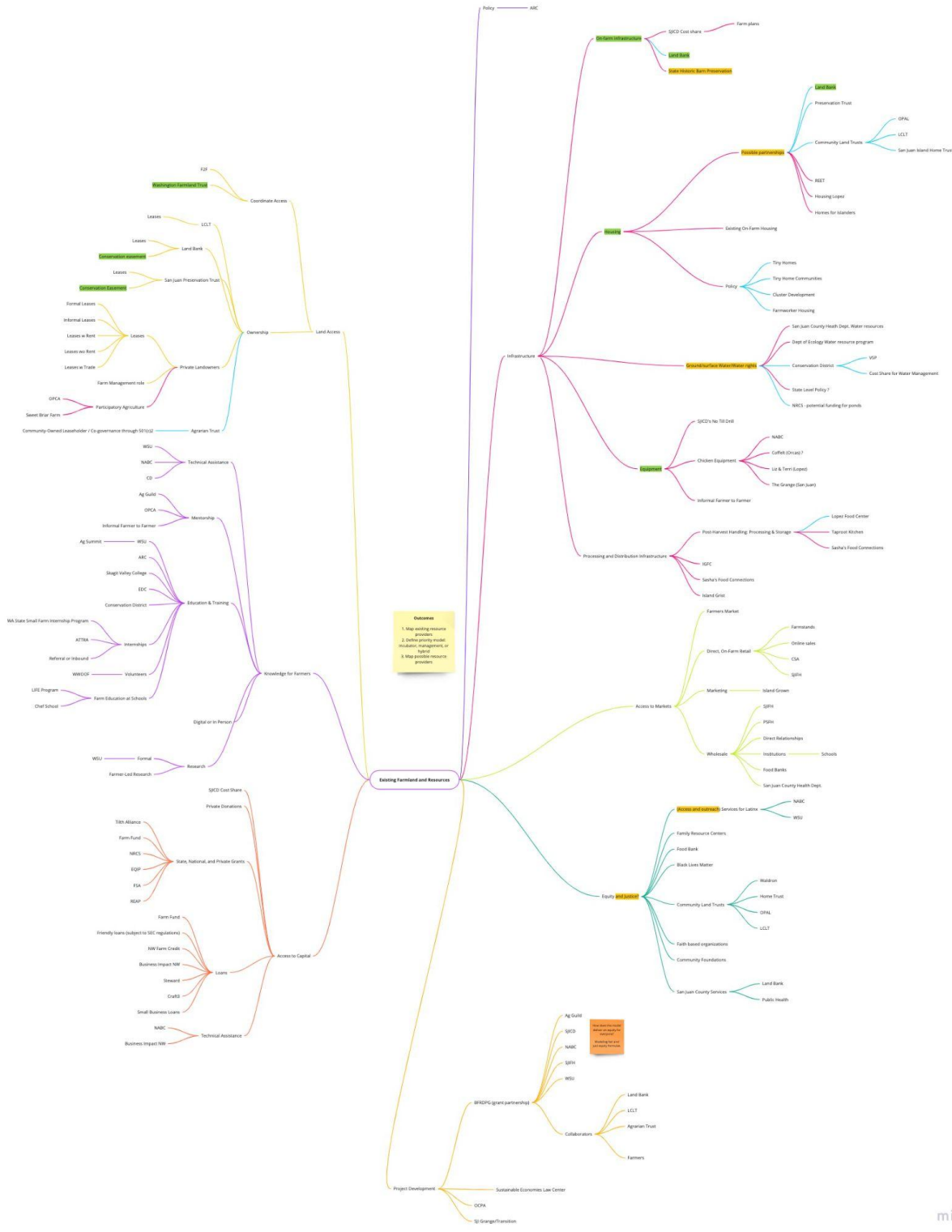
Agricultural Ethic

We foster a community culture that recognizes the social value of a thriving local food system; the importance of conserving farmland; the compatibility of resource protection and agriculture; the role of agriculture in community resiliency; and the need for farmers to have affordable, long-term access to farmland.

SWOT ANALYSIS		
	Helpful	Harmful
Internal origin	<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong group of collaborative, educational support organizations (WSU, Ag Guild, etc) that can help move this project forward • Community that believes in local food • Existing farmland access for lease now and in the future • Existing models like the Lopez Community Land Trust • Possibility of donors and economic support within the county • County is small and contained, lending itself to project management and visibility in the community • Temperate Climate 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ferry system • Island isolation • Geographic location • Cost of land • Cost of inputs • Lack of water • Lack of housing • Too much water • Perception of market competition • Community buy-in, lack of education and awareness of products • Costco - price competition • Producers competing for percent of market. Could collaborate to reduce prices and bring more customers • Lack of farm help • Accessing market share of local grocery stores • Cultural emphasis on individualism • Lack of experience working in groups • Lack of assistance for co-ops • In need of a well defined program

External origin	<p style="text-align: center;">OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cooperative model ● Scale - accessing local grocery stores ● Collaborations with Land Bank and other organizations ● A lot of knowledge base within the county that we don't know about - legal, marketing, etc. ● People with time ● Draw on existing strength of Island Grown local branding - iconic as a place ● Shared branding, shared marketing ● Attract beginning farmers and set up very positive experiences ● Well-run program will give people confidence to engage with a long-term lease 	<p style="text-align: center;">THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Costco ● Perception that agriculture is a threat to the environment - potentially farmable land coming under restrictions ● Realities of agriculture - smells, sounds, views, - changing demographics ● Land prices - desirability of this place to people who have a lot of resources ● Land degradation - stewardship levels not at a maximum ● Climate change, drought, lack of water, invasive species ● Rising cost of living expenses make food budgets tight. Hard for working class folks to buy local (which is necessary for farm success) ● Lack of interest/skill in cooking ● Few good examples of systems operating outside traditional capitalism - how to care for people at end of farm life, Defining equity that works for all parties. ● Lack of understanding of the positive attributes of animals on the land - animals = bad and vegan = good
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Resource Map ([best viewed through this link](#))



Existing Shared Land Access Models

The Land Access Advisory Group invited three existing organizations to present, discuss, and answer questions about their models of farmland access:

- [Viva Farms](#), Michael Frazier, Executive Director
 - Farm incubator and training program located in Skagit County, WA
- [Friends of the Farms](#), Heather Burger, Executive Director
 - Management entity for publicly owned farmland located on Bainbridge Island, WA
- [Agrarian Trust](#), Rhys Thorbold Hansen, Puget Sound Agrarian Commons Advancement & Communications
 - Holds land in the Agrarian Commons subsidiaries, operating as farmland commons nationwide

Questions for organizations

1. How was your organization created?
2. What services do you provide?
3. How many acres do you manage?
4. Who is your target population?
5. How many farmers do you work with?
6. Who are your collaborators?
7. How are you funded?
8. What is your organizational structure?
9. How do you provide services? Do you have help from collaborators?
10. Do you provide housing?
11. If your program serves as an incubator, how do farmers transition from the incubator?
12. How do you measure success?
13. What do you consider your biggest success/biggest challenge?
14. If you were beginning again, what would you do differently?
15. What is the most important thing needed to start a program like yours? First phase?
16. What pitfalls should we try to avoid?

17. What do you consider to be your community? Is community outreach an important part of your program? If so, how do you do this?
18. Are there any other land-access models you would suggest we examine?

Shared Land Access Model Development

To create the scaffolding for the F2F Model, the group focused on three main elements needed in a shared land access model: access to land, governance of the program, and collaborative services for BFRs. Various types of models were compared and pros and cons discussed. The model elements were then applied to the [resource map developed by the group](#). Various models of governance were reviewed from existing organizations, including board makeup, structure, and bylaws. Services were discussed in relation to the resource map and narrowed down to what would be best suited to achieve our objectives.

Model Definitions and Comparison

<p>Menu of elements</p> <p>Elements to a shared land access model that may or may not be included in the model we create.</p>	<p>Incubator</p> <p>A land-based multi-grower project that provides training and technical assistance. Master lease held by incubator entity on a static piece of land.</p>	<p>Rolling Incubator (Hybrid)</p> <p>A shared land-based, incubator model that secures short-term leases (3-5 yrs) to help a cohort of new farmers get experience and then they take over lease. A mediator (entity) will be subleasing, assist with long-term lease options and managing farmers.</p>	<p>Hybrid (Version 2)</p> <p>A combination of elements to be determined.</p>
<p>Pros:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could include long-term housing at a site that allows it • Easier to share infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can include multiple islands • Farmers can build equity in a property 	<p>Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibly more farmers on one site for support and knowledge sharing • Could incorporate pea-patch as part of education and pipeline into farming 	<p>knowing that they will not have to move</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land options can change according cohort needs • Can have multiple cohorts going at the same time 	
Cons:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers want to use shared equipment usually at the same time • Farmers have difficult time moving to their own land • Farmers do not build equity into their business • Only one island • Managing entity invests in infrastructure • Need a bigger site to accommodate more farmers right from the start 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land Bank cannot have a cohort take over an existing lease • Housing options land dependent and variable • Complexities with setting a cohort up as LLC and/or one farmer buying out the other cohort members • Sharing equipment is difficult if among islands 	
Land Access <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operate on a specific site or sites • Provide shared infrastructure, equipment, resources, marketing • Provide multiple leases at one site (shared access) • Provide short-term, 	Does: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operate on a specific site or sites • Master lease held by incubator entity • Provide multiple sub-leases at one site (shared access) • Provide short-term, fixed-length leases • Provide shared infrastructure, equipment, resources, marketing • Provide technical assistance and peer-to-peer support 	Does: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operate on a specific site or sites with option move to other sites over time • Provide multiple sub-leases at one site (shared access) • Provide shared infrastructure, equipment, resources, marketing • Provide technical assistance and peer-to-peer support • Allow farmers to take over the lease 	Does:

<p>fixed-length leases</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow farmers to take over the lease • Provide land access for an unlimited amount of time • Provide access to small parcels of land • Charge market-rate rent, at least in the beginning years of operation • Allow farmers to take over the lease 			
<p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide technical assistance and peer-to-peer support • Collaborate with other entities for support and resources • Collaborate with other entities to secure housing • Provide infrastructure directly • Train people to become farm 	<p>Does not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide land access for an unlimited amount of time • Charge market-rate rent, at least in the beginning years of operation • Allow farmers to take over the lease • Train people to become farm workers, apprentices, or interns • Provide housing 	<p>Does not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charge market-rate rent, at least in the beginning years of operation • Train people to become farm workers, apprentices, or interns 	<p>Does not:</p>

workers, apprentices, or interns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide housing 			
	Examples: Viva Farms, Cloud Mountain Farm Center	Examples:	Examples/Possibilities : Friends of Farms

The Farmers-to-Farmland Shared Land Access Model for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers

Based on discussion and findings of the research and presentations, the group decided to pursue a shared land access model, eliminating other approaches to land access such as farm incubator, single farmer lease, farmland commons, and educational and research farm.

A farm incubator was strongly considered by the group but eventually rejected. Though a farm incubator can support multiple beginning farmers, there may not be a clear way to “graduate” and move on from the incubator. Additionally, a farm incubator requires investment in establishment of an ongoing training program, infrastructure, and educators. Because of the limited land and housing market in San Juan County, an incubator model would not solve the problem of accessing land in the long-term. In addition, the F2F Model was created with the flexibility to be applicable to communities without the resources to start a farm incubator, provide professional education or training, or to access financial support. Lastly, the F2F Model is designed to keep farmers on the same piece of land for the long-term, enabling them to find stability and build equity in their business without the threat of having to acquire and move to a new piece of land after a certain time period.

The authoring of the model was completed by the F2F Steering committee and can be viewed here:

- [Farmers-to-Farmland Shared Land Access Model for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers](#)

The main contents of the model address:

- Governance
- Site assessment
- Lease tools and elements
- Management plan

- Outreach plan
- Evaluation and metrics
- Future replication

Once a draft was completed, the model was shared with the Land Access Advisory Group for review and comment. The group then met virtually to discuss the draft. The following key questions were populated by the F2F Steering committee throughout the document to spur further discussion:

- Does the organization of the document clearly define the program goals and key components?
- How and where should the issue of equity be addressed for the BFR?
- Should the Ag Guild act as the umbrella organization, while seeking feedback and guidance from partner organizations?
- Should the Advisory Committee have governance and fiduciary responsibility or solely offer guidance?
- How can accountability be established regarding finances and decisions?
- While there are numerous criteria to be considered in site selection, what are the top priority criteria that should be available?
- Should a long-term lease agreement be prioritized? How long? What is realistic?

In preparation for launching the pilot project, the F2F Steering Committee and Advisory Group developed an exercise of hypothetical case studies, applying the model to specific pieces of land in San Juan County. The purpose was both to inform the continued development of the model, as well as to identify farmland site characteristics appropriate for the pilot project and to anticipate the elements needed for management of the pilot project.

Lessons Learned & Key Findings

- **Meetings**
 - Meetings were primarily conducted over Zoom, which worked well. They enabled safe communication during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowed communication with members located on each island of San Juan County, and saved travel time.
 - Including in-person meetings on occasion was positive. Being in-person built camaraderie, allowed more dialog, and varied the exchange.
- **Participants**
 - Farmers participating in the process should be paid for their time and participation. Input from both beginning and experienced farmers was

invaluable to the process and deserved compensation for the time they took away from their other work.

- **Process**

- Beginning with strategic planning helped to define goals and needs.
- Mapping exercise was a good tool to identify the unique existing resources and needs of the region. Identifying these elements helped to narrow down what was specifically needed from the model. Miro.com was helpful but not specifically necessary to complete this task.
- Looking at existing and successful formal shared land access arrangements in our region was helpful. It would have also been helpful to look at existing informal land sharing arrangements.
- Working through a case study was valuable to flush out the processes built into the model and the many what-ifs.

- **Other Findings**

- Each property/farmer/landowner will have varied and unique needs, and the model will have to be flexible to address each instance.