



Community Council

Final Report
of the

VALUE-ADDED AGRICULTURE

Implementation Task Force

October 2012

Mark James, Chairman

VALUE-ADDED AGRICULTURE

SUMMARY

Agriculture has been and continues to be a major economic engine for the region between Burbank and Dayton, from the Snake River to Milton-Freewater. Like other sectors of the economy, agriculture is facing a number of challenges:

- Profit margins for production agriculture are often very narrow.
- Government is moving away from direct support for the farmer. Without government support, some facets of agriculture could flounder.
- Most farmers are not young. Many of these producers are looking for ways to increase profitability so their children who have left the farm to find employment might return to farm, or as preparation for selling the operation.
- Some non-farmers are seeking ways to enter agriculture or related fields for the first time.

Community Council responded to these economic concerns by adopting “Optimizing Resources: Value-Added Agriculture” as its 2009-10 study topic. The purpose of the study was to explore how the region’s economic viability might be enhanced through the creation of value-added businesses that use agricultural resources. Value-added agriculture is the process of increasing the economic value and consumer appeal of an agricultural commodity.

The study committee’s report to the community, released September 2010, confirmed that many resources and opportunities exist for entrepreneurs with passion for producing value-added agriculture products and offered 11 recommendations intended to maximize the effective use of those resources. Several of the recommendations suggest improvements for the general business environment—helping existing businesses and offering every advantage for new entrepreneurs.

Mark James, a Walla Walla farmer, chaired the task force convened in October of 2010 to advocate for implementation of the recommendations. Task Force members include:

Sandra Cannon, Eco Purchasing Consultant, Walla Walla

Jennie Dickinson, Manager, Port of Columbia, Dayton

Elizabeth Humphrey, Banker, Walla Walla

Randy James, Farmer, Dayton

John Mathwich, Banker, Milton-Freewater

Julie Reese, Community Council Executive Director, provided staff support for the committee.

The task force is an advocacy team that serves as a catalyst for action by working with established community organizations to implement effective and sustainable solutions. Over a two-year implementation period, the team met separately in committee or with community members at least 25 times.

As many of the goals depend upon the same resources and complement each other, the recommendations were organized into five subgroups that reflect their commonalities: value-added business development, education, marketing, transportation, and economic development.

After identifying stakeholders able to make the suggested changes, the team organized a series of meetings to educate decision-makers about the study findings and to advocate for specific changes. These meetings generated communication among government-funded entities, government-assisted organizations, and private businesses and encouraged cooperative action.

The advocacy team then monitored actions taken by these entities to implement the recommendations.

Some of the recommendations targeted broad issues with multiple stakeholders; others were more narrowly focused. Some called for specific outcomes; others called for exploration and evaluation of opportunities. As is to be expected, implementation results were mixed. Of the 11 recommendations, seven were substantially implemented, and four were partially implemented.

The advocacy team accomplished several important tasks: elevating awareness of value-added agriculture opportunities and entrepreneurial issues, gathering decision makers to explore opportunities and to find new ways to work together, and recruiting advocates to continue promoting regional improvements recommended by the study committee. While the team does not claim direct responsibility for all of the achievements that helped address the recommendations, our efforts were instrumental in bringing greater focus to these issues and helped to influence favorable outcomes.

We also recognize that actions taken in the two-year implementation period are first steps. Implementation efforts throughout the region have inspired new economic development efforts, and we anticipate that advocates will continue to address the issues identified during the study.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND OUTCOMES OF ADVOCACY EFFORTS

VALUE-ADDED BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION

PROMOTE AWARENESS OF THE REGION'S HISTORICAL CROPS AND PROCESSING THROUGH SOURCES SUCH AS JOE J. LOCATI'S, **THE HORTICULTURAL HERITAGE OF WALLA WALLA COUNTY, 1818-1997**.

(Recommendation 1)

To offer entrepreneurs the opportunity to learn from the past and to take advantage of present opportunities, the task force made the history of the region's crops and processing publicly accessible in a centralized location.

The Oregon State University (OSU) Extension Service agent in Milton-Freewater agreed that <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/umatilla/mf/value-added-agriculture> would serve as a site through which entrepreneurs, researchers, educators, small business development offices, and the public can access resources pertaining to value-added agriculture, such as the region's historical crops, soils, weather patterns, and market information. Local agents for OSU and Washington State University (WSU) Extension Service and the director of Washington's Agriculture Center of Excellence suggested links to local, regional, and on-line educational offerings, as well as to the federal Farm Service Administration crop report archives.

One of the resources for historic crop information identified during the study was Joe J. Locati's **The Horticultural Heritage of Walla Walla County, 1818-1997**. A task force member secured permission from copyright holders to scan the full document and to place that copy online for public access. Oregon State University performed the scan, and the document can be found at the website above.

All agricultural instructors in the region's colleges and high schools have been informed of the centralized website and invited to incorporate the information into their curriculum. Milton-Freewater and Walla Walla high schools offered positive feedback, but no curriculum change commitments have been made.

Regional access points, such as small business centers, chambers of commerce, educational institutions, and the Agriculture Center of Excellence will direct information-seeking entrepreneurs and researchers to this site.

Another possibility for centralizing this information may be the Agriculture Center of Excellence, located on the Walla Walla Community College campus, <http://agcenterofexcellence.com/ace/>. To be part of this agricultural hub would require the establishment of an ongoing value-added agriculture advisory committee to fund the website and maintain its content. The task force did not pursue this course of action, but left the idea with the director for future consideration.

Task force members also discussed the potential for acquainting the public with the region's historical crops and processing industries through a series of articles to be published in local newspapers. One expert expressed a willingness to author the articles, but no action had been taken by the time the task force completed its work.

❖ **FINAL STATUS: SUBSTANTIALLY IMPLEMENTED**

IDENTIFY OR CREATE THE ORGANIZATION(S) THAT WILL TAKE THE LEAD IN FACILITATING THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL VALUE-ADDED AGRICULTURAL BUSINESSES.

(Recommendation 6)

During the two-year advocacy period, no one organization emerged as regional lead for developing local value-added agriculture businesses. Multiple entities within each county play a part in this role.

Columbia County

The Port of Columbia continues its efforts to facilitate value-added business development for Columbia County. Blue Mountain Station is being developed as a center to house and promote value adding businesses. The Port also coordinates a series of workshops to provide helpful information for entrepreneurs in value-added businesses.

Umatilla County

Blue Mountain Community College Small Business Development Center (BMCC SBDC) promotes value adding for Umatilla County.

Walla Walla County

No one entity in Walla Walla County is taking the lead in helping entrepreneurs with the details of business. A logical step for an entrepreneur to take in establishing a new business or enhancing a current business is to access as many resources as possible in one location, such as a small business development center. During the study, the center in Walla Walla closed. It served both Walla Walla and Columbia counties.

The advocacy team invited Walla Walla's mayor and the directors of the BMCC SBDC and the Walla Walla Valley Chamber of Commerce (WWVCC) to a meeting focused on reestablishing a small business center in Walla Walla. The mayor discussed the efforts being made by several area groups. The BMCC SBDC director provided operational and networking information about SBDC and offered to provide services or act as a resource until a Walla Walla center could be re-established. Funding was named as one obstacle for a Walla Walla center. A task force member noted that local financial institutions were willing to invest in the center because it was such an important resource for them and their clients. The information shared at the task force meeting energized the community discussion and contributed to the establishment of a new SBC, currently housed in the Walla Walla airport terminal.

The local wine industry is an excellent example of adding value to an agricultural commodity, and a number of entities are collaborating to facilitate the development and marketing of wine-related businesses. Walla Walla Community College's (WWCC) enology and viticulture program provides industry-specific technical training. Port of Walla Walla offers an incubator for new wineries. WWCC is developing a culinary program to complement and market the wines. WWVCC is promoting the area's culinary expertise and use of regional agriculture products. Tourism Walla Walla is promoting the whole package, and many other organizations and businesses play key roles.

❖ ***FINAL STATUS: SUBSTANTIALLY IMPLEMENTED***

ENCOURAGE AND RECRUIT TO THE AREA PEOPLE AND BUSINESSES THAT WILL CONTRIBUTE TO AN ENVIRONMENT OF CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION.

(Recommendation 11)

Creativity and innovation in the region are being generated in two ways. Business leaders recruit talent as needed to energize the environments of their own businesses. New programs implemented by others, such as the Port of Columbia and the Walla Walla Valley Chamber of Commerce, are influencing businesses and communities in a broader manner.

The business concept of Blue Mountain Station, Dayton, is to encourage the development of local value-added agriculture business and to recruit to the area similar enterprises. The facility is under construction, and its first building, including a commercial kitchen that will be available for to rent, will be completed spring of 2013. The Port of Columbia offers programming to help entrepreneurs with business development and marketing assistance.

“Plow 2 Plate” is an initiative of the Walla Walla Valley Chamber of Commerce launched in September 2012. The multi-year project pairs two of the Valley’s notable industries, farming (the Plow) and culinary arts (the Plate). The broad-based effort will:

- promote market development for smaller producers and explore ways to aggregate agricultural products from these farms,
- promote the Valley’s blossoming culinary scene by showcasing local agriculture and culinary talents,
- expand Walla Walla’s reputation for excellence to include both the agricultural commodities and the cuisine to which they contribute,
- establish Walla Walla’s reputation for progressive leadership in food production and on culinary topics and issues,
- identify innovative ways to develop secondary and value-added agricultural products, and
- develop agro-tourism by making the Walla Walla Valley a destination for cuisine and agriculture.

❖ **FINAL STATUS: PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED**

EDUCATION

WORKSHOPS TO TEACH GRANT WRITING, BUSINESS PLAN DEVELOPMENT AND MARKET RESEARCH SKILLS SHOULD BE OFFERED IN THE REGION.

(Recommendation 2)

There are many ways to access workshops and business development, and marketing research training in the region.

Grant writing workshops are available from a variety of local and on-line sources, however few grants are available to individual entrepreneurs. Small business centers and economic development districts can also serve as the fiscal agent for government funding (e.g. USDA rural business grants and Washington Department of Agriculture producer program funds).

The Agriculture Center of Excellence, located at Walla Walla Community College, enhances the agricultural industry in Washington State by supporting the agriculture and natural resource programs offered at community and technical colleges. The Center is a resource to promote agriculture and natural resource education, create and share curricula, expand and strengthen degree/certificate programs, and facilitate professional development for college faculty. The Center also works with groups to obtain grants for their entrepreneurial projects and manages the funds once received.

Certified staff members of small business centers provide on-demand counseling, tailored to the needs of each business: training in business fundamentals, business plan development, marketing, expansion, going “global”, and succession planning. They provide access to commercialization models so that entrepreneurs can determine the feasibility of their business ideas and help very small producers to “elevate their business to the next level”. Many of their trainings use webinars. Seminars can also be arranged. Walla Walla’s SBC director is developing training to help agricultural businesses market their products to local restaurants.

OSU and WSU Extension Services offer a number of resources helpful to entrepreneurs, but staff size limits the training and consulting available locally. Pre-start-up information is offered to the entrepreneur at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/umatilla/mf/>.

Other access points confirmed by the task force were small business development centers, Washington Center for Agriculture Excellence, OSU and WSU Extension Service, farmers’ cooperatives, chambers of commerce, port districts, Blue Mountain Station, conferences (e.g. Women in Agriculture), financial institutions, brokerages, retail markets, chemical companies, etc.

❖ **FINAL STATUS: SUBSTANTIALLY IMPLEMENTED**

WORK WITH ENTITIES TO DEVELOP A GENERIC CHECKLIST OF STEPS TO ASSIST ENTREPRENEURS IN PLANNING VALUE ADDED BUSINESSES.

(Recommendation 3)

Because every business is different, one checklist does not work for every potential business. With the goal of assisting as many businesses as possible, the task force focused on a checklist for steps to be taken by an entrepreneur who is determining feasibility of a potential business through finding funding for that business.

Advocacy by task force members caused the Walla Walla SBC to institute a checklist document that the director and entrepreneur work through together. The center also offers a one-page questionnaire to help entrepreneurs make the most of Access Washington, a statewide list of resources.

The Oregon Small Business Development Center website is a valuable resource for new businesses. <http://www.bizcenter.org/>. Blue Mountain Community College Small Business Development Center http://www.bluecc.edu/busind_sbdc also offers a variety of assessment tools and business information. Contact information for director of the Walla Walla Small Business Center can be found at <http://www.wsbdc.org/advisor?empid=501&locid=38&s>. Another resource is the value-added agriculture webpage of resources, <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/umatilla/mf/value-added-agriculture>.

❖ **FINAL STATUS: PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED**

MARKETING

EDUCATE BUSINESSES ABOUT THIRD PARTY CERTIFICATION AND THE POTENTIAL FOR AN ASSOCIATED PRICE PREMIUM.

(Recommendation 4)

Third-party certification entitles businesses to market their products with labels indicating that the product has been produced under specific conditions. For example, to be Salmon Safe certified, growers must follow land management practices linked to protecting agricultural and urban watersheds, keeping the watersheds clean enough for salmon to spawn and survive. While the costs of meeting certification requirements may increase retail prices for the products, many consumers are willing to pay the premium because they support the goal of the certifier.

To fulfill this recommendation it was necessary to identify third party certifiers and values associated with going through their programs, to develop a plan and access points for distributing that information, and to identify a lead agency to maintain this access.

Task force members reviewed a long list of third-party certifiers, requirements for program participation and potential benefits to the agriculturalist for undergoing certification.

In the fall of 2011, Salmon Safe, www.salmonsafe.org, made the commitment to serve as the lead agency for third party certification in this region. Salmon Safe, already actively working with the Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance and Oregon State University, agreed to develop a list of third-party certifiers, to identify businesses that may benefit from certification, and to educate the owners of those businesses about possible benefits and drawbacks related to certification.

By spring 2012, a well-designed presentation was being field tested with local businesses and workshops were held in the Milton-Freewater area.

One of the challenges with implementing this recommendation was to determine how to make the material easily accessible. Salmon Safe's marketing plan includes access points through the internet, small business centers, National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), industry groups such as the Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance and Walla Walla Sweet Onion growers, and consultants who work with producers.

❖ FINAL STATUS: SUBSTANTIALLY IMPLEMENTED

EVALUATE THE INTEREST IN AND NEED FOR A WALLA WALLA REGIONAL MARKETING BRAND, SUCH AS "WALLA WALLA, TWICE AS NICE".

(Recommendation 5)

Regional branding has been successful for Walla Walla sweet onions and Walla Walla Valley wines. This branding has led to increased marketing opportunities for these products.

Task force members met with the Walla Walla Valley Chamber of Commerce, Port of Walla Walla, Tourism Walla Walla, Downtown Walla Walla Foundation and several business owners to consider the value of expanding the Walla Walla brand to other products. The opinions expressed varied substantially. The consensus was that developing a marketing brand is worthwhile but requires an extensive investment of time and money, and

businesses must promote their own products, win awards, be recognized, etc. before regional branding can be effective.

Key considerations in developing a brand include:

- To be successful, the products being branded need to be identifiable or unique from generic products.
- There is benefit in marketing products known to be grown or produced locally.
- Individual businesses need to promote their own products, but may not have the extensive resources necessary to develop a regional brand. Individual businesses should consider aligning themselves with marketing groups or producer associations for brand development.
- Favorable consumer recognition of a brand takes time, continued advertising and product quality control.

❖ **FINAL STATUS: PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED**

TRANSPORTATION

THROUGH PRINTED MATERIALS OR AN AWARENESS CAMPAIGN, CORRECT THE PERCEPTION THAT THIS REGION IS HANDICAPPED BY TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES.

(Recommendation 7)

This area is served by air freight companies, national and short line railroads, trucking, and barges on the rivers. After gathering information about these modes of transportation, the task force did not discover unique regional challenges.

Conclusion: passenger air service, especially as it refers to the marketing of our region, is the main area of public focus.

Fly Walla Walla, a collaborative effort of the Walla Walla Valley Chamber and the Port of Walla Walla (and more recently the Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance and Tourism Walla Walla), has actively promoted passenger travel to and from the Walla Walla airport for more than 10 years.

During the implementation period, the Walla Walla's air carrier changed from Horizon Air to Alaska Airlines, a new plane size increased the demand for ridership, and costs of providing air service threatened Walla Walla's role as a passenger stop.

To counteract these changes, Fly Walla Walla's lobbying and marketing activities increased significantly. The Port of Walla Walla has waived fees to make a Walla Walla stop more affordable for the airline. The Port is also using a \$250,000 federal grant to fund a marketing campaign about the benefits of using the Walla Walla airport.

A Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance promotion, "the first case (of wine) flies free", is encouraging people coming for wine to travel by air rather than car.

The task force determined that others in the region were aggressively working in this area and has monitored the activities.

❖ **FINAL STATUS: PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED**

INVESTIGATE THE POTENTIAL FOR IMPORTING BY RAILEX PRODUCTS THAT COULD BENEFIT VALUE-ADDED BUSINESSES.

(Recommendation 8)

Railex is an innovative company that offers expedited, temperature-controlled shipping of perishable commodities and imports between the west and east coasts of the United States. They can also accommodate non-perishables and tailor their services to shippers' specific needs. Ancillary services include inventorying, packing, re-grading of product, warehousing, and distribution at both ends of the line.

The company currently operates on a business model of one-way travel, eastbound. Westbound shipping fees are lower than are those for eastbound service. Shippers can band together into one account to take advantage of discounts for volume. Westbound cargo, mostly food packaging materials and finished goods, does not fill the train.

Expansion of the company is underway. In August 2012, Railex broke ground for a major expansion at its Burbank facility. When Railex opens a hub in Florida (or Georgia) in 2013, goods from the southeast United States will be shipped to Washington for distribution on the west coast and for export to Asia. Middle-America hubs are also planned. As volumes increase, the frequency of shipping will also increase and will benefit local shippers.

The Railex business model, high-speed transport to New York with no mid-trip stops, is both a selling point and constraint for shippers.

❖ **FINAL STATUS: SUBSTANTIALLY IMPLEMENTED**

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRUCTURE

EVALUATE THE BENEFIT OF A UNIFIED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ENTITY FOR WALLA WALLA COUNTY.

(Recommendation 9)

Team Walla Walla, comprised of the county, cities, port, and private businesses, formerly helped coordinate economic development activities in Walla Walla County. It ceased to function in 1995. Currently, Walla Walla has an innovation partnership zone through which the City of Walla Walla, Port of Walla Walla, and Walla Walla Community College (WWCC) promote business development. This zone recently expanded to include Columbia County and northern Umatilla County.

To explore the benefit of a unified economic development entity for Walla Walla County, the task force organized a series of informational sessions and invited representatives of the Tri-City Development Council (TRIDEC) and the Benton-Franklin Council of Governments (BFCOG) to present.

County economic development entities (county, port, cities, WWCC, the Downtown Walla Walla Foundation, and Tourism Walla Walla) were invited to participate, and representatives of several of the entities attended this and other meetings held to discuss study recommendations 9 and 10.

The guest speakers discussed the role of effective economic development councils and explained how their own organizations are structured and how they work separately, yet collaboratively, in their region.

TRIDEC originated as the Tri-Cities nuclear industrial development council. Its focus is to maximize the community benefits of Hanford and to diversify the local economy. The council includes both Benton and Franklin counties because the founders recognized their economies are interdependent, and regional collaboration would be more effective.

Organized as a 501(c)(6), TRIDEC contracts with four major cities, three port districts, and the two counties to provide business retention and expansion services, industrial recruitment services, and marketing services. They attend trade shows and represent the contracting agencies for recruitment purposes. Based upon a commissioned study, their marketing focuses on food processing, value-added agriculture and renewable energy manufacturing, and research and development.

TRIDEC does not own or manage property. Their primary focus is coordinated marketing efforts. The cities focus on retail, often working together to recruit businesses to the region. The cities and ports hold and develop industrial property. The county commissioners have little to do with economic development, except for designating the Associate Development Organization (ADO). TRIDEC is a designated federal Community Reuse Organization.

Each spring, as part of its contract with the Economic Development Administration, BFCOG prepares a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). TRIDEC and BFCOG participate together in this regional economic development plan. Annual preparation of the CEDS includes solicitation of community input and project applications from urban cities, rural cities, and the business sector. These are mostly infrastructure projects, but they may also include planning and technical assistance. The projects are prioritized according to likelihood of being funded by the Economic Development Administration (EDA). To be eligible, projects must be ready to start and be prepared to match EDA funds. BFCOG promotes those projects to the EDA. Many times, projects on the list

GLOSSARY of ACRONYMS

- ADO** Associate Development Organization, funded by Washington Department of Commerce to coordinate countywide economic development activities
- BFCOG** Benton-Franklin Council of Governments serves as EDD for the two-county region
- CEDS** Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, a regional, Prioritized development plan completed annually by an EDD
- EDA** Economic Development Administration, federal agency that authorizes formation and provides financial assistance to EDDs
- EDC** Economic Development Council, formally organized local or regional association of agencies
- EDD** Economic Development district, authorized by EDA to plan and receive federal funding
- GEODC** Greater Eastern Oregon Development Corporation, an EDD comprised of Umatilla County and six other counties
- IPZ** Innovation Partnership Zone, an economic development collaboration that partners research organizations, workforce training and private sector participation that leads to new technologies, marketable products, company formation and job creation.
- MCEDD** A bi-state, multi-county economic partnership headquartered in The Dalles, Oregon, that serves as EDD and EDC
- SEWEDA** Southeast Washington Economic Development Association, serves as EDD, ADO, and EDC for Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, and Whitman counties
- TRIDEC** Tri-City Council of Governments, an economic council that focuses on marketing for Benton and Franklin counties

are not funded by the EDA; however, going through the process and being listed on the CEDS is important to other funders.

BFCOG also operates several loan funds, including a USDA lending program called the Columbia Regional Economic Development Trust. It provides gap loan funding for businesses in rural communities in Walla Walla, Columbia, Benton, and Franklin counties.

Once each month, Tri-Cities economic development entities hold a closed-door meeting to talk informally about projects. The Walla Walla Valley Chamber of Commerce Executive Alliance holds a similar roundtable meeting of port, college, city, and business leaders.

This session provided specific information about what has worked in other communities for Walla Walla County's economic development leaders to consider when planning.

❖ **FINAL STATUS: SUBSTANTIALLY IMPLEMENTED**

ENCOURAGE WALLA WALLA, COLUMBIA, AND UMATILLA COUNTIES TO EVALUATE THE BENEFITS OF BECOMING A FEDERAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION DISTRICT.

(Recommendation 10)

Walla Walla Valley's functional economic area has been defined as Walla Walla County, Columbia County, and northern Umatilla County. The area does not operate as a federally funded Economic Development District (EDD).

Umatilla County is part of the Greater Eastern Oregon Development Corporation (GEODC). Walla Walla County is not part of an EDD, but the board of commissioners has designated the Port of Walla Walla to act as the county's Associate Development Organization (ADO).

Columbia County is part of the Southeast Washington Economic Development Association (SEWEDA) that serves as a federally funded EDD, a state funded ADO, and a regionally funded economic development council (EDC) for four counties, Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, and Whitman, that work together to coordinate economic development in their region. SEWEDA operates under the belief that the tasks required to serve as an ADO and as an EDD mesh well.

Each of the 39 counties in the State of Washington has the opportunity to designate an ADO for coordination of countywide economic development in return for funding from the Washington State Department of Commerce. The role of an ADO is to provide business recruitment, business retention and expansion, business start-up, community asset building, and regional planning and collaboration services within the county.

EDDs receive federal funds from the Economic Development Administration (EDA) for planning. The primary purpose of an EDD is to coordinate the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for their region in order to secure funding for economic development projects.

Task force members organized a series of informational meetings with guest speakers to explore the structure and opportunities associated with various economic development organizations. Regional leaders were invited to attend, including representatives of the governing commissions for Columbia, Umatilla and Walla Walla counties and ports; the cities of College Place, Dayton, Walla Walla, and Milton-Freewater; Walla Walla Community College

(WWCC); SEWEDA; GEODC, the Downtown Walla Walla Foundation and Tourism Walla Walla. Several of these entities were represented during the meeting series.

The executive director of the Mid-Columbia Economic Development District (MCEDD, a bi-state, multi-county economic partnership, spoke about the criteria for forming EDDs and EDCs, as well as the programs, funding sources and benefits of being part of an EDD or EDC. MCEDD has been very successful in combining the attributes of both.

An official of the EDA traveled from the western regional office in Seattle to discuss possible benefits and/or drawbacks of being part of an EDD and explained the requirements for realigning or forming new districts.

The EDA provides financial assistance for local and regional economic districts to develop innovative projects that support free market enterprise—creating jobs and attracting private investment. These districts, rural or urban, must be “distressed” as defined by per capita income, unemployment, or disasters. Grants are available for planning and for implementation of projects with broad geographic significance, such as infrastructure development, capacity building, and business development. The speaker touted planning as the principal advantage of an EDD.

The possibility of forming a new EDD with the same boundaries as the Walla Walla Valley functional economic area was discussed, but it was discovered that a “partial county” could not be included. All of Umatilla County would have to decide to leave GEODC to join a new EDD, and the Umatilla County commissioner in attendance stated that they were not interested in doing so. The Port of Walla Walla also seems satisfied with their current structure and does not seem to be interested in changing status. Others in attendance indicated that a regional approach might be beneficial. The option for Walla Walla County to join SEWEDA, thus forming a five-county EDD, was also mentioned. The viability and benefit of that option would need further research.

Leaders of the Tri-City Development Council (TRIDEC) and the Benton-Franklin Council of Governments (BFCOG) explained how their organizations are structured and how they work separately and collaboratively in their region. (See recommendation 9.)

These sessions brought together leaders of the region’s economic development organizations and provided specific information about EDDs and EDCs and examples of what is working in other communities. The sessions exposed some of the gaps that exist in this region’s current structure and provided information to help local leaders with future economic development coordination decisions.

❖ ***FINAL STATUS: SUBSTANTIALLY IMPLEMENTED***

Community Council's Implementation Task Force wishes to thank and provide contact information for those who have been actively involved with implementing recommendations developed as part of the Value-Added Agriculture study.

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David Woolson, President/CEO, Walla Walla Valley Chamber of Commerce, <http://www.wwwchamber.com>



Community Council's Board of Directors recognizes that the study process it facilitates is citizen-driven and funded through the generous support of the regional community. Donations, grants, memberships, and special event revenue provide essential financial support for each 3-year study-action cycle. This community support contributes to the success of the Community Council study process and is greatly appreciated.

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For a copy of the study report and more information:

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