The increasing homelessness and rising unemployment ("Almost 40,000 People out of Work in Sno County" [http://www.redcounty.com/unemployment-snohomish-county-hits-record-highs]) has resulted in increasing numbers of people seeking food at food banks. There was a sharp rise in calls to the WSU Snohomish County Extension office from both families and groups wanting to grow gardens for their own use or to donate fresh produce to the food banks. In response to this need, Sharon Collman and Bick Hang, organized the WSU Snohomish County Growing Groceries Project to build the capacity of families and communities to grow healthy food.

We assembled a team from our WSU Snohomish County Extension office: Bick Hang, Healthy Families; Sharon Collman, Horticulture; Jana Ferris, 4-H youth and adult development; and the WSU Snohomish County Master Gardeners.

We involved other community organizations that already have some food garden expertise and connections to community needs. Organizational support came from the Snohomish County Human Services Department and County Executives office.

We organized:

- WSU Snohomish County Growing Groceries Volunteer Mentor Training workshop series (10 months)
- 190 people attended the WSU Growing Groceries Garden Expo (Everett, 1/30/2009)
- Existing WSU Snohomish County Extension Master Gardener Demo Gardens to focus more on growing food
- Growing Groceries Community Coordinator’s Forum (Everett, 6/11/2009)
- WSU Growing Groceries Community Conference (Marysville, 10/10/2009)
Outcomes

- 44 mentors completed the training and taught community classes or organized gardens
- Established 11 new community gardens in Everett, Mukilteo, Stanwood, Lynnwood, Lowell, & Snohomish
- 70 classes were taught by about 30 mentors and others on garden topics
- 799 interested novice gardeners attended those classes
- Growing Groceries website was developed
- 40 fact sheets on all aspects of gardening are now available on the web [http://snohomish.wsu.edu/garfact.htm](http://snohomish.wsu.edu/garfact.htm)
- $10,000 was set aside by the Snohomish County Master Gardener Foundation for start-up grants to new gardens
- Created the “Growing Groceries with Families” pilot project to reach low income ECEAP families. (Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program) Expansion planned in 2010
  - mentored families to grow their own produce in the family school garden
  - facilitated garden/nutrition education with cooking demos
  - created labels/signage in Spanish and English
  - families used new knowledge and skills to replicate gardens in their home setting
- WSU Sno Co Extension Growing Groceries program was a 2009 Finalist for the KSER Independent Public Radio’s “Voice of the Community” Award [http://www.kser.org/community](http://www.kser.org/community)
- 12,685 pounds of freshly picked, organically grown produce (vegetables, fruits, berries, and herbs) were donated to area food banks and another 60,000 pounds were donated in a farmer/gardener partnership to 8 local food banks
- Current program model is being replicated in other counties