

FoodHub in the News



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By Charles Redell

New site connects farmers, buyers

PORTLAND, OR – Local food advocates are searching for methods to help local food systems scale up. In some cases, producers are forming cooperatives and purchasers are signing exclusive deals with them. But these are aimed at stabilizing the producers' bottom lines, not the entire system. In November, Portland-based nonprofit Ecotrust launched FoodHub to help bring transparency and ease connections for both sides of the transaction.

FoodHub is an online destination for regional buyers and sellers of food products to search each other out, make connections and, eventually, transact business, regardless of size, says Deborah Kane, Ecotrust's vice president of food and farms. Designed to work like a cross between Facebook and Craigslist, FoodHub is meant to be comfortable for urban, tech-savvy buyers and for rural farmers who might be intimidated by new technology.

It aims to create transparency so buyers and sellers have the same information and the same opportunities to connect. "Rural producers typically have a hard time figuring out who is buying and selling what in any urban market," says Kane. "It takes time and labor to do research on things like slow food. It is a barrier to entry."

The site's features include the ability to search for specific products and types of buyers, find local items available through large-scale distributors, and request them specifically. It also eases the distribution of fresh sheets and helps farmers to professionalize their invoices, Kane says.

FoodHub is exclusively for the wholesale market in Alaska, Washington, Oregon and the states that border them. Membership costs \$100 per year. Launched in Beta at the beginning of November, it logged 85 registered members by Dec. 1 and averages about 39 user sessions per day, according to Kane. Ecotrust wants to have 2,000 users registered by the end of 2010 and to launch the ability to buy and sell on the site by 2Q 2010, she says.

URL: <http://www.sustainableindustries.com/breakingnews/78243547.html>