



FoodHub in the News

Champions of Change Blog

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By Deborah Kane

Supporting Regionally Grown Food

Ed. Note: Champions of Change is a weekly initiative to highlight Americans who are making an impact in their communities and helping our country rise to meet the many challenges of the 21st century.

At the Rural Champions of Change roundtable, I had a chance to tell President Obama about FoodHub – a dynamic online marketplace that helps regional food buyers and sellers find each other, connect and conduct business. When I likened it to a matchmaking service, President Obama laughed and called FoodHub “a great idea.” Certainly in the context of rural development, he’s right.

Consider the following scenario: Susan Barker, the school food service director at Beaverton Public Schools, wants to bring more locally produced food into the school lunchroom. Knowing that berries are plentiful in the Northwest, she’d like to buy blueberries from a local farm. Before FoodHub she’d have been at a loss, not knowing where to begin.

But because FoodHub exists, Barker walks to her computer, pulls up the FoodHub website and types in the word “blueberry.” Up pops a list of the twenty blueberry producers registered in FoodHub. Because Barker is serving 22,000 meals a day, she narrows her results to only those large enough to meet her volume needs. Now she has two choices. She can peruse the profiles of producers whose products are available through regional mainline distributors or she can select a producer with capacity for direct sales and delivery.

In this case, Vincent selects an operation set up for direct deliveries, Springbank Farm in Lebanon, Ore. She sends owner Brian Driscoll an email through FoodHub’s message center and by the end of the day, they’ve settled on terms, a delivery date, exchanged a purchase order and invoice and Driscoll has agreed to visit three schools and talk to the kids about his farm on the day his blueberries are served. He even invites the kids out for a farm visit.

FoodHub makes this kind of exchange possible not just for farmers and schools, but for food buyers and sellers of all kinds every day. As a result, we’re creating income opportunities for rural producers and getting great regionally grown food into the hands of enthusiastic buyers.

A USDA Economic Research Service report, Local Food Systems: Concepts, Impacts and Issues (PDF), notes the economic impact of buying regionally grown food, as in the scenario described above, is most likely felt in the form of income and employment growth, particularly where import substitution – either of regional food products or of regional food services such as processing – results in more money staying within the region as opposed to being diverted to products or services bought outside the region. We recently documented exactly this effect in the Northwest when we invested an additional 7 cents for every meal served in two Oregon school districts.

Meeting President Obama at the Champions of Change roundtable was a thrill and I do hope he'll pass on my regards to the First Lady, a great champion for increasing interest in food and agricultural issues. But equally thrilling is the idea that we can create reliable prosperity in rural America simply by investing in American agriculture.

Deborah is the Vice President of Food and Farms at Ecotrust, a non-profit organization based in Oregon.

URL: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/07/21/supporting-regionally-grown-food>