



FoodHub in the News

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Locally Produced Food Gets Boost Through Food Hubs

The USDA is helping small farmers connect with people who want to buy locally produced food by fostering "food hubs."

These hubs remove some of the most onerous, time draining chores for farmers, who typically reach consumers by driving long distances to farmers markets and restaurants. Even running a CSA (community supported agriculture) farm takes a lot of administration.

By aggregating local produce from many small farmers, food hubs can sell to large buyers that want locally and regionally grown food, such as schools and hospitals.

"As I talk to farmers across the country, regardless of what they produce or where, they all share one common challenge: how to best move product from the farm to the marketplace. This is especially crucial for small and midsize farmers who may not have enough capital to own their own trucks, their own refrigeration units, or their own warehouse space. They might not have the resources to develop sophisticated distribution routes, build effective marketing campaigns or network with regional buyers and customers," says Kathleen Merrigan, Deputy Secretary of the USDA, on its food hub website.

Grist points out some of the food hubs:

Online aggregators are popping up, such as FoodHub, which connects growers, buyers, and distributors in the western U.S. Others are FarmsReach and Local Dirt.

California's Capay Valley Farm Shop offers an assortment of produce from 35 farms to 26 Bay Area schools, cafes and companies like Ideo and Adobe. It also sells wholesale to company kitchens and neighborhood markets.

Local Food Hub distributes wholesale produce to 150 public schools, hospitals, nursing homes, restaurants and grocery stores.

"We really try to focus on those big institutional markets that small farmers have been traditionally locked out of," Emily Manley, Local Food Hub's director of outreach and development, told Grist.

Big buyers like hospitals need to place an order from one place - they can't coordinate deliveries from lots of small farmers. And the food hub guarantees a farm's sales, but

committing to purchase a set amount each week, giving them the security they need to grow more food.

The USDA offers funding, is doing research, and collaborating with groups like the National Good Food Network to provide webinars and other resources to help food hubs get off the ground.

The few hundred million dollars, spread across 27 programs run by nine different agencies, is a drop in the bucket compared to the tens of billions the USDA puts toward the "big five" commodity crops - corn, soy, wheat, cotton, and rice, but it's a start, says Grist in an article about the program.

Learn about USDA's food hub program:

Website:

www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/ams.fetchTemplateData.do?template=TemplateA&navID=WholesaleandFarmersMarkets&leftNav=WholesaleandFarmersMarkets&page=FoodHubsandOtherMarketAccessStrategies

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