

FoodHub in the News



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By Kate Rockwood

Eat-onomics With Deborah Kane of FoodHub, a Match.com for Locavores

Portland, OR – *Think of it as the Match.com for the locavore movement: FoodHub connects small and regional producers with food buyers for restaurants, corporate cafeterias, public schools—even state prisons. We spoke with Deborah Kane, VP of food and farms at the nonprofit Ecotrust, about bringing farm-to-table eating beyond high-end restaurants and to the masses.*

Fast Company: What is Foodhub?

Deborah Kane: Foodhub makes it possible for a food buyer of any kind—whether it's for a restaurant or a school or a hospital—to sit down at a computer, type in the word "broccoli" and get a list of all the local broccoli producers who might be interested in selling to them. If you type "broccoli" into Google, you get something like 4.2 million results. But when you type that into our search box, we immediately start autopopulating for you—specific variety, all about the farmer, what the minimum order amount is, whether they deliver on the Sysco truck.

FC: Ecotrust has been connecting buyers and sellers through product guides for years. What spurred the evolution to Foodhub?

DK: We used to print a guide. It was almost three inches thick, and the sad truth is it was obsolete the day it was printed. The peaches freeze or a raspberry crop comes in earlier than expected or any number of things. With FoodHub, buyers can print out their query and make updated, customized guides 24 hours a day.

FC: Foodhub came out in beta last October and officially launched last month. What has the response been like?

DK: We've seen tremendous support by the agricultural community, but one of the things that surprised me is the degree to which we're growing the buyer and seller side at a pretty equal pace. It's not just chefs and not just fruit and vegetable farmers, but hospitals, food carts, the Oregon State Prison, universities, the state organic agency, which is a roster of 1,400 producers. We registered all 32 of the food service accounts held by Bon Appetit Management, which includes Adidas, Amazon, Intel, Nordstrom's, and the Seattle Art Museum. This is not a tool for the precious.

FC: And when might we see a consumer-facing tool?

DK: It all goes back to our commitment to making sure the features are member-driven. In our region, the key roadblock in the minds of producers is wholesale sales. They said, "You need to help us get big players." The day they come to us and say, "Okay, we've saturated that market," is the day we'll flip that switch.

FC: Foodhub is focused on Oregon and Washington at the moment, but also serves Alaska, California, Idaho, and Montana. Are geographic expansion plans in the works?

DK: It's something we've considered from the beginning. We built it in open source, thinking it'd be easy to transport the base technology to another region if we found the right partner.

FC: And just for fun: what'd you eat for breakfast this morning?

DK: I had a perfectly appropriate breakfast for this interview: leftover Hoppin' John, which is black-eyed peas and ham hocks. It's a Southern tradition that you're supposed to eat it on New Year's Day for hope and good fortune. I would have answered oatmeal yesterday.

URL: <http://www.fastcompany.com/1575246/eat-onomics-with-deborah-kane-of-foodhub>