

FoodHub in the News



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Events link sellers, buyers

Farmers, chefs look at ways to work together

Portland, OR – Buying directly from local farmers is good business, restaurant owners and others say, but other challenges remain.

“Our goal of connecting local farmers and chefs has been a huge success,” said David Yudkin of Hot Lips Pizza at the 10th annual Farmer Chef Connection, held in March at Clackamas Community College. The event drew 115 buyers and 80 producers.

Nicolette Hahn Niman, keynote speaker and author of “Righteous Porkchop,” hit on a larger challenge.

“I’m not interested in niche livestock production nor an elite food system,” she said. “I think we need to rebuild the entire food system.”

She previously worked as an environmental lawyer for Waterkeeper Alliance, an organization formed by Bobby Kennedy, Jr. Now married to Bill Niman, a long-time cattle rancher in Marin County, Calif., she advocates pasture- and range-based agriculture as an important part of a sustainable food system.

The Niman Ranch sells beef, pork, lamb and poultry and includes a network of 650 independent farmers and ranchers.

Concerning the more immediate challenge of creating a regional food economy, an online market called Food Hub, developed by Ecotrust, was introduced at one of the workshops.

“This takes the place of the large directory we used to distribute at the Farmer Chef Connection that was out-of-date as soon as it was printed,” project director Erika Polmar said.

“It won’t do the transaction,” said Polmar. “It’s like Match.com ... you still have to go on the date and have the conversation.”

The Food Hub site allows members to search by product, either from the buyer’s or seller’s end, within a specified distance.

Members create a profile, and producers can list all their products.

If a farm is selling through a mainline distributor, it can still use Food Hub. Buyers can contact the distributor and ask for that farm’s specific products.

After one month in operation, Food Hub has 371 members at an annual fee of \$130. For more information go to: <http://food-hub.org>.

Growing demand for natural meats drew many ranchers to the event. There were numerous questions in the licensing and regulation workshop about processing issues and agreement on the need for more poultry processors.

John Neumeister, owner of Cattail Creek Lamb in Junction City, said, "I've been coming to this meeting for 10 years. It's the best in the state. The restaurant buyers are here to talk and make connections. It's better than knocking on doors individually."

Building relationships is also important. At a recent Farm to School meeting in La Grande, Ore., they were advised to go to the school, to take samples and to show off their products, said coordinator Andi Sexton.

"In Union County there are six different school districts, and we learned it's like dealing with six different businesses with different purchasing requirements and different philosophies," said Sexton.

URL: <http://www.capitalpress.com/orewash/pm-farmers-and-chefs-040210-w-art>