

FoodHub in the News



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By Mitch Lies

FoodHub focuses on connecting

Website reinvents itself to ease sharing of information

CITY, STATE – Within hours after starting the region’s first online resource connecting food buyers to sellers, Ecotrust staff realized last February visitors were using FoodHub in unanticipated ways.

“Immediately when we launched, farmers went in and started chatting about all the product they had available,” said Deborah Kane, a vice president for Ecotrust, the Portland nonprofit that launched the system.

FoodHub was designed for buyers to post requests for food from local farmers, Kane said, not for farmers to announce what they had on hand.

“We realized we had to make a change,” Kane said.

“We quickly realized that what we had done was create a really nice platform, and that this community, the more that it grew, the more it would use the platform to its advantage in ways we could not have predicted,” Kane said.

Buyers and sellers soon were using the website to announce they had an empty refrigerated truck going down Interstate 5, Kane said.

“There was a lot of activity around transportation and logistics coordination,” she said. Others used the system to announce the availability of a new take-home carton, Kane said. Soon, FoodHub’s offerings expanded into three categories, which were headlined “Products,” “Transportation” and “Other.”

This week, Ecotrust took another step forward, introducing FoodHub 2.0, an improved version that is more user-friendly and interactive and incorporates all of the changes that have been made since the February launch.

Buyers and sellers will now find it is easier to post what they have or are looking for.

“We’re actually suggesting connections and partnerships that we encourage them to explore, based on what we know,” Kane said.

The website also is more accessible to nonmembers who stumble onto it and want more information, Kane said.

“Our tracking tools are telling us we are getting a lot of views from nonmembers, but they only go so far into the system,” Kane said.

Also new, Ecotrust has hired Amanda Osborne as sales and marketing director of FoodHub. Osborne, who holds a master’s degree in marketing and communications from Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill., started last week.

“Amanda brings the two things I felt like we were missing internally,” Kane said. “That real solid sales and marketing background, but also the tech savviness and expertise.”

“My hope is to grow the FoodHub community, and enhance that community,” Osborne said. “I think there is a lot of opportunity to build on the connections and get those people who are members more attached to the community.”

FoodHub has 620 members almost evenly split between buyers and sellers, Kane said. It serves growers and buyers in Oregon and Washington.

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