



FoodHub in the News

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Local ingredient trend spreads

PORTLAND, OR – Portland-area restaurateurs are watching warily as national chains rush to highlight local ingredients on their menus.

Portland has long been ahead of the curve when it comes to using local, sustainably grown foods. Many of the area's locally based, mid-sized operators — Burgerville, Shari's, Hotlips Pizza, for instance — have long sourced everything from beef to lettuce to berries from regional farms.

Now national restaurant chains are getting in on the action. In November, Nations Restaurant News reported that Chipotle plans to feature locally sourced ingredients at all of its 1,000-plus locations.

Portland operators worry it will strain the supply chain, but ultimately welcome anything that strengthens local agriculture.

Jeff Harvey, president of Vancouver-based Burgerville, owned by The Holland Inc., said competing with companies like Chipotle is one of the biggest challenges when it comes to keeping local ingredients on the menu.

Burgerville, which built its reputation on Northwest ingredients and has a decade-long history of developing vendor relationships. Today, about 70 percent of items sold at its 39 restaurants are based ingredients grown in the Northwest. The company recorded about \$45 million in revenue last year.

Harvey said Burgerville's long-term relationships with vendors such as Country Natural Beef will help ensure its restaurants are stocked with what they need. Country Natural Beef, a cooperative brand produced by 120 ranchers spanning 12 states, is based in Vale, Ore. It entered into an agreement with Chipotle earlier this year to supply the chain with locally raised beef.

In a sign that restaurateurs are eager to solidify their links with their farmer partners, Portland-based Ecotrust's FoodHub program has grown to 692 members in its first year of operation. The program links buyers and sellers.

David Yudkin, co-owner of Hotlips Pizza, said he's used locally sourced ingredients since 1989, including the fruit for a new line of sodas. He likes the competitive edge it offers and the positive publicity it generates.

He generally welcomes players such as Chipotle — a competitor — to the local food movement, saying growing demand for locally raised ingredients strengthens local farmers and cuts the distance food travels. That's good for the environment in the long run.

Beaverton-based Shari's Restaurants uses numerous Northwest vendors, including Farm Fresh Eggs and Umpqua Dairy. It hasn't always highlighted its local sourcing. Shari's, owned by New York private equity firm Circle Peak Capital LLC, doesn't disclose revenue.

Michael Kiriazis, vice president of marketing for the 104-unit chain, said the company is doing more to tell its story as it works to boost its profile with younger diners.

It's also increasing its commitment to Northwest farmers and ranchers. This fall, it added a premium hamburger sourced from a ranch in eastern Oregon.

Kiriazis said Shari's size and six-state profile give it a buying advantage.

"We have the muscle to get some great regional products," he said.

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