



FoodHub in the News

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By Ed Merriman

Website connects ag sellers, buyers

FoodHub designed to expand market for locally grown, produced products

BEND, OR – McMenamins Old St. Francis School in Bend is one of 60 McMenamins locations featuring locally grown produce, beef, fish and other ingredients purchased partly through a new website to help Oregon's farmers, ranchers and processors sell their products across Oregon and the West.

"We try to use local products here all the time," said Blake Moore, chef at McMenamins in Bend. "We get 99 percent of our produce from Aloha Produce, which is right here in Bend, and all of the beef we use is grown and raised in Madras."

Moore turns to the new website, FoodHub, when he is looking for local and regional specialty ingredients, such as the quail eggs he purchased for a Scottish dish he prepared for a Scotch whiskey tasting event earlier this month.

The website was founded by EcoTrust.

Deborah Kane, vice president of EcoTrust's Food and Farms Program, said FoodHub has earned a reputation "as a Craigslist of local foods" in its first year. The website is <http://foodhub.org>.

"It offers something to the small-acreage farmer who shows up once a week to a farmers market, as well as giving an opportunity to the large operator," Kane said. "It can give a local chef a list of ingredient providers as well as provide a large processor with sources of Northwest-grown products."

The Oregon Department of Agriculture described FoodHub in a Wednesday news release as an online marketplace that brings buyers and sellers of local agriculture together.

"FoodHub is capturing the interest of many in the community — both food producers and food buyers," said Gary Roth, administrator of the agricultural development and marketing division at ODA.

The ODA provided funding to help launch the FoodHub website to help farmers, ranchers and Oregon food processors and manufacturers meet the growing demand for local produce, meats and other agricultural products, Roth said in the release.

"I think it provides a marketplace for farms, wholesalers and distributors to connect with each other," said Tyler Vetter, vice president of Aloha Produce of Central Oregon.

"We'd like to do more business with local farmers, but in the past there's been a lack of organization," Vetter said. "It looks like this (FoodHub) will give smaller companies like ours the chance to do more with small, local farms."

FoodHub is celebrating its first year of operation this month, and EcoTrust is making some changes to boost membership during its second year, including waiving the \$100 annual membership fee for the next three months.

EcoTrust reports 800 active members, mostly in Western and Central Oregon, but with some spread out across the FoodHub territory of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Alaska and California.

"The membership fee has been a barrier for some people," Kane said. "The best thing we can do right now is open up FoodHub to as many people as possible to gain critical mass and active engagement among members."

In response to a survey of the current members, Kane said FoodHub also is launching a new associate category of membership open to commodity commissions, trade associations, farmers markets, extension offices, nonprofit groups and service suppliers.

"For example, farmers market managers can use FoodHub to find new vendors; commodity commissions can use the connection to educate food buyers about their commodity; feed and grain stores can join FoodHub's ready-made community of people to locate new customers," Kane said.

She said more than 100 school districts representing more than 400,000 students are currently using FoodHub, which she said is playing an important role in advancing farm-to-school efforts in Oregon and other Western states.

A look at the online posts shows a business called Hummingbird Wholesale looking for a farmer who would like to raise Runner Cannellini beans in the 2011 growing season on contract for about 10 acres; that Wahluke School District in Mattawa, Wash., would like to find a regional supplier for two to five cases per week of grape tomatoes for student lunches, and that Burgerville is looking for a local supplier for a promotion this summer focused on green beans.

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