



# FoodHub in the News

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**Community Vitality**  
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## **FoodHub helps buyers, sellers find each other**

*The online match-making service offers a free basic membership*

### **PORTLAND –**

It's all about making connections, and FoodHub, Oregon's online matchmaking service between food buyers and food sellers, has been making tasty ones for more than a year. The electronic directory and marketplace (<http://food-hub.org/>) connects food buyers of all types and sizes with farmers, fishers, ranchers, growers and food manufacturers throughout the greater Northwest.

The idea for the site was sparked by the popular Chef's Collaborative events, where restaurant professionals and food suppliers mingled to share each other's wares, but where everyone went home at the end of the day.

"We wanted to create a tool that could be used 24/7 and managed in real time," says Deborah Kane, vice president of Food & Farms for the nonprofit organization Ecotrust. "It was a combination of really understanding the limitations of the print directories, and the opportunity lost in not providing a chance for people to connect throughout the year."

### Corporate cafeterias

Food-buying members include corporate cafeterias, dining halls, restaurants, school districts, hospitals and market co-ops. Food suppliers are big and small, ranging from makers of organic nut butter to herb farms to cattle ranches.

The stories of connections made are inspiring. When the Gervais School District needed lettuce in a hurry, the food services director sent a message out through FoodHub and, by the end of the day, found a new supplier just six miles away. Salvador Molly's found a rural Washington County farm to grow 80 bushels of peppers for the Portland restaurant's spicy menu. Besides buyers and sellers of food, the site also caters to those who teach — the EVOO Cannon Beach Cooking School uses its FoodHub connections to fill guests' plates with Oregon's finest ingredients.

The Bon Appetit Management Company, which provides café and catering services for businesses and colleges, signed up all of its Northwest regional team for FoodHub memberships. These new food buyers include corporate cafeterias at Adidas, Amazon, Nordstrom, Mentor Graphics and OMSI, along with colleges and universities such as

Seattle University, Reed College, Lewis & Clark College, George Fox University, College of Idaho and many more.

Kane encourages the use of FoodHub by buyers and sellers in the rural Northwest. “We believe the tool could be a great benefit and service to rural communities,” Kane says. “Right now we have a large membership group along the I-5 corridor, but the tool is for everyone.”

In December, the first anniversary of FoodHub, organizers made a major change: The membership fee of \$100 was dropped. “The fee has been a barrier to entry and now that we are introducing free basic membership, we expect membership on the buyer-seller side to grow exponentially,” Kane says.

FoodHub also began accepting memberships in a third category — associate members, which could range from nonprofit organizations working on food issues to managers of farmers markets or commodity commissions.

After FoodHub’s first year of operation, what’s the verdict from buyers and sellers? “The reaction has surpassed our expectation, honestly,” Kane says. “It is entirely clear that there is a tremendous interest in sourcing local products. Without a tool like FoodHub, it is a daunting process to find the right match.

“Given the great interest and complexity of navigating regional food system landscapes, FoodHub is the right tool at the right time.”

The electronic directory and marketplace can be found at <http://food-hub.org>.

URL: <http://www.three60com.com/CVSpring11/FoodHub.html>