



FoodHub in the News

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By Eric Mortenson

Portland's message: Good food connects rural growers to urban eaters and makes both healthy

PORTLAND, Ore. – It might not be at the top of other people's wish list, but when Deborah Kane visits the White House next week, she wants to visit Michelle Obama's vegetable garden.

Kane, vice president of food and farm programs for Portland's Ecotrust, is among 19 people invited to talk with the Obama administration about strengthening rural communities and promoting economic growth. She will meet with agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and other officials.

Kane is best known for her work in connecting Northwest farmers and ranchers with the restaurants, schools and other institutions that increasingly are looking for local food. In February 2010, Ecotrust launched FoodHub, a free on-line marketplace that links buyers and sellers. The system now has 2,248 members.

"It immediately created a direct connection between rural producers and urban buyers who have tremendous purchasing power," Kane said.

Farmers, ranchers and dairies create on-line profiles that tell who they are, what they grow, production methods, minimum order sizes, delivery options and other information. Buyers indicate what they're looking for, how much they need and when they need it.

Kane said FoodHub is kind of like an on-line dating service. "A school can go in and say, 'Hey we're planning for the next school year and we'd love to lock in a contract today for apples in October,' " she said.

Kane said she'll tell the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which funded FoodHub's development, that they program "absolutely works" and is "ready to go national."

"We hear from so many farmers who say they were invisible before, there was no way to find buyers before," she said.

The larger message goes beyond the administration's push to help rural America, she said.

"Don't forget about food in general as an economic driver," Kane said. "The market for food with a face on it -- food with a story -- is tremendous. If we invest in that story, then rural America wins but so do urban eaters."

Kane will visit the White House July 6. She's asking help in compiling a list of other ideas and innovations that can help rural America.

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