



# FoodHub in the News

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By Steve Brown

## **Online marketplace seeks national stance**

*Site aims to cater to all sizes of operations across the country*

PORTLAND, OR - FoodHub has proven successful on a regional scale. Now it's poised to go national.

The online directory and marketplace designed for wholesale food buyers and sellers in the Western U.S. has grown to 2,300 members. On July 12, the website launched several new features and search tools, video tutorials, libraries and display ads in preparation for stretching across the map.

FoodHub founder Deborah Kane, who recently attended a conference at the White House, said the upgrades and the enthusiasm she has witnessed should make the web service self-sustaining.

"The latest version has been engineered to benefit users of all sizes and types, from food carts to corporations, and ensure that navigation, making connections and doing business is faster and more intuitive," she said.

The online marketplace is designed to accommodate any size operation, Kane said.

"It's scale-neutral and practice-neutral, from smaller to thousand-acre operations, from certified organic to conventional. The same with buyers," she said. "We're ready to declare the test successful. Our plans are to take down the West Coast-specific aspects and expand across the U.S. in early 2012."

Producers considering moving from retail to wholesale direct marketing need to be aware they'll be working with professional food buyers, she said.

"There's a lot of information on the site concerning GAP certification and food safety. Both sellers and buyers need to ask questions and be ready to answer questions," she said. "Do your due diligence and be communicative."

Success stories abound of how FoodHub has helped farm businesses grow in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, California, Montana and Alaska, Kane said.

One of those is Lisa Jacobs, who produces European-style cheeses at her Jacobs Creamery near Chehalis, Wash. Through FoodHub, she has found buyers and recently found a source of goat milk to add to her already extensive line of specialty products, including feta, Gouda, cheddar, Jarlsberg, blue cheese, ricotta, crème fraîche, mozzarella, butter and yogurt.

Born in Dublin, Ireland, Jacobs attended the University of Oregon and went to law school in California before choosing the cheese business.

The 27-year-old works alone, with occasional part-time help. Having started out in farmers' markets, she has made the first steps into wholesale and has had requests to increase production, she said. To that end, she has invested in newer and bigger equipment.

"For one person, it makes sense to do higher volume," she said. "I hope FoodHub will give me more exposure. My main goal is to keep local, between Portland and Seattle."

"Before FoodHub, we were raising 30 different varieties of crops to take to the farmers' market and sell to consumers," said Phil Greifs of PD Farms in Eastern Oregon. "Now I grow 16 crops that do really well in my region, and I can sell everything because of the connections I've made on FoodHub."

Kane was invited to Washington, D.C., to explain how FoodHub helps rural economies. Joining her were 18 people from 16 states, representing farmers, Native American tribes and land-grant universities. USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack and White House domestic policy adviser Melody Barnes led the discussions. President Barack Obama dropped by for a few moments to greet the attendees and offer his encouragement, Kane said.

### **Online**

*FoodHub: <http://food-hub.org/>*

### **FoodHub funding**

*FoodHub, which is operated by the nonprofit Ecotrust, has received government grants and private contributions ranging from \$5,000 to \$250,000.*

*Among those government agencies and foundations helping out are the WK Kellogg Foundation, Bullitt Foundation, Newman's Own Foundation, USDA's Rural Business Enhancement Grant program, the Annenberg Foundation, Eugene Water and Electric Board, Farm Aid, Bill Healy Foundation, Oregon Department of Agriculture, Russell Family Foundation, Meyer Memorial Trust, Northwest Health Foundation, Lazar Family Foundation, Oregon Community Fund and the Washington State Department of Agriculture.*

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