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New Website Aims to Transform the Northwest Food Economy

*Ecotrust turns to technology to expand and simplify the connection between
food producers and food buyers of all scale*

PORTLAND, OR – Somewhere in the Pacific Northwest, there is a food buyer trying to find the perfect parsnip and a farmer looking for a home for his cranberries. Beginning today, 2009, FoodHub will help connect food buyers of all types and sizes with farmers, ranchers, fishermen and food manufacturers throughout the Pacific Northwest. A social venture business of the nonprofit [Ecotrust](#), FoodHub (food-hub.org) is designed to increase food trade in the Pacific Northwest. It is the only network of its kind that accommodates food producers and food buyers of every scale and production type across such a significant geographic range.

FoodHub will immediately provide benefits to both food sellers and buyers. For food sellers—like Northwest farmers, ranchers, fisherman, and smaller food manufacturers—FoodHub will offer an easy way to let buyers know what products are available and how to make contact to complete a sale. For food buyers—including local restaurants, public schools, grocery stores, caterers, universities and hospitals—FoodHub will provide a robust database of food products that are available. Customizable search features allow a buyer to hone in on the exact product specifications they are seeking.

“FoodHub is designed to be a one-stop-shop for the chef who needs six dozen artichokes for a menu special, the baker looking for a local source for flour, or the large institutional food buyer whose purchasing power could significantly stabilize a family farm,” said Deborah Kane, vice president of Ecotrust’s Food & Farms program.

Larger institutional purchasers such as public schools, colleges, hospitals and grocery stores are beginning to assign geographic preference to their purchasing criteria, right next to cost, quality, quantity, and delivery requirements. At the same time, farmers, ranchers and fishermen continue to struggle to find markets for their products, having not found a viable method for accessing and profiting from the burgeoning local food market. FoodHub offers a viable and effective solution for both sellers and buyers.

FoodHub takes the guess work and leg work out of finding buyers and sellers

Sophisticated search capabilities allow buyers, both large and small, to instantly discover ready suppliers with a few clicks of their computer keyboard. Conversely, sellers can use FoodHub search

features to identify new buyer leads and build targeted customer databases. All those registered on FoodHub complete an online profile that includes a detailed description of their operation and preferred methods for doing business. FoodHub supports both direct market relationships and leverages existing distribution channels to encourage growth in regional food sales.

With an annual membership fee of \$100, FoodHub is a cost-effective business tool. In addition to its search and connect functions, FoodHub can professionalize communications and transactions between parties with its message center, preferred contacts feature, and standardized purchase orders and invoices. FoodHub is offering a one time 20 percent discount off the annual membership fee to anyone who joins by December 31, 2009.

Creation of FoodHub

Developed using open source technology with private foundation, nonprofit and government resources, FoodHub is intended for broad use throughout the agricultural community. Backers expect FoodHub will strengthen rural communities and make it much easier to localize supply chains. Widely anticipated throughout the region, FoodHub predicts having 1,000 active users by February 2010. To achieve or exceed that goal, partnerships have been formed with organizations active in Northwest food buying and food selling circles, including agri-business councils, food product commissions, distributors, grocery retailers, chefs and restaurants, farm to school programs, Oregon Tilth, Gorge Grown Network, the Washington State Department of Agriculture, and the Oregon Department of Agriculture, among many others. View the complete list of funders and collaborators at food-hub.org/supporters. User feedback and an analysis of usage trends will shape the delivery of new features and improvements to ensure that the site is intuitive and successful for both buyers and sellers. In the future, FoodHub will evolve to allow users to conduct transactions through a secured shopping cart.

About Ecotrust's Food & Farms Program

FoodHub is an Ecotrust project made possible by the generous support and contributions of many. Ecotrust's mission is to inspire fresh thinking that creates social equity, economic opportunity, and environmental well being. With regard to our Food & Farms program, we improve public understanding of agriculture and the challenges it faces and increase the market share of locally grown, processed, and manufactured foods. Whether by introducing a farmer to a chef or a food processor to an institutional buyer, Ecotrust is a trusted "benevolent broker" that has been making connections between food buyers and sellers in the Pacific Northwest for a decade. Learn more at ecotrust.org.

Editor's note

Contact Amy Brown amyb@seed-pr.com for test password and temporary demo account. Images of screen captures are also available.

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