

Local: ‘A food hub is a response to a community need’

Continued from Page 1

supply chain from farm to table, especially that intra-state supply chain,” he said. A goal is to “bring together those farm, food and beverage providers with the markets that are most likely to sustain them.”

Katie Baker, FARE Idaho executive director, said helping members understand and access COVID-19 relief programs was a focus in 2021. This year’s emphasis is to “connect producers with retailers to create a more resilient food system.”

“My hope is to really build a community around this organization so we can together create positive change for the industry,” she said.

For Krick, buying local food was an early interest. He opened the first of his three downtown Boise restaurants, Bittercreek Alehouse, in 1996. The established concept, prime location and good staff aid viability “and allow us to take some risks and do fun, creative projects,” he said.

“I had some friends who were local farmers that sold at a local farmers market I helped set up” downtown, Krick said. “I got introduced to more local farmers. I realized we could be part of the solution as a restaurant simply by buying from them. It’s been a long journey. The movement has grown.”

The state does not have a large food hub. The last was Idaho’s Bounty. Hailey-area farmers and consumers in 2007 founded the cooperative, which ultimately grew to include about 90 producers. It opened a Boise-area warehouse as part of an aggressive 2016 expansion plan. The expanded hub did not sustain viability and ultimately had to downsize before closing its doors in 2018.

Baker, who worked as an Idaho’s Bounty volunteer and staff member for eight years, said challenges included distribution management and expenses in an inherently low-margin business. Staff and board leaders struggled with the strategic plan and operating model.

She said FARE Idaho “realized that distribution, marketing and sales were still



Brad Carlson/Capital Press

Rabiou Manzo, Global Gardens program manager, with yield from central Boise’s Treasured Mushrooms, one of Global’s 14 farms. “People have seen how important it is to have local produce” in the era of COVID-19, he said.

problematic for producers. So one of the organizational goals is to connect producers with retailers.”

FARE itself is not a hub. Krick said the state has some successful small hubs, such as Global Gardens in Boise, “but on the macro level we have not been successful. It takes some regional density to make that work.”

Food hubs

John Klimes, a FARE Idaho board member who owns Agrarian Harvest in Buhl, said a small food hub is succeeding in Bellevue, south of the Sun Valley area. For the much larger Idaho’s Bounty, “a big challenge was space and distance. ... When you start putting two hours of drive time in a refrigerated truck on the road, that distance starts costing a lot of money.”

Managers of sizable food hubs in the Spokane and northern Puget Sound areas in Washington state and in Portland continue see many opportunities and have overcome challenges.

At the Local Inland Northwest Cooperative, known as LINC Foods, in Spokane Valley, partnerships director Brian Estes said revenues grew more than five-fold between 2017 and 2021, helped by its members and staff and a successful barley malting enterprise.

“Having the right people, both growers and the staff of the co-op, going in the right direction with the right resources, that’s what it takes to seize opportunities efficiently enough to be viable,”



Brad Carlson/Capital Press

FARE Idaho board president Dave Krick with executive director Katie Baker at Krick’s restaurants in downtown Boise. “I got introduced to more local farmers. I realized we could be part of the solution as a restaurant simply by buying from them,” Krick said.

he said.

At Puget Sound Food Hub Cooperative in Mount Vernon, Wash., general manager Andrew Yokom said they plan to scale up this year. The organization also plans to fine-tune production plans for specific crops so the grower at planting has a better idea where the crop is going, in what quantity and at what price.

The hub will also emphasize “working hard and getting out there, telling people about our work and our mission,” he said.

The Ecotrust nonprofit opened The Redd on Salmon Street, a Portland food hub, three years ago.

“It’s beneficial to have food hubs everywhere,” said Emma Sharer, Ecotrust operations director.

But, she said, analysis is crucial.

“The food hub we built at The Redd is perfect for last-



Puget Sound Food Hub Co-op

Puget Sound Food Hub Cooperative General Manager Andrew Yokom. The co-op, which plans to scale up its operations, is “telling people about our work and our mission,” Yokom said.

mile logistics — bringing in food from rural producers, aggregating food from small-scale urban producers and distributing it out in a tight radius,” Sharer said. “But if we look at another location in, say, The Dalles, the opportunities look so different.”

One key to success is, “Are you delivering on your programs?” DeLuna said. “If you are about food access, then your key to success is, are you expanding access to quality food, are you serving your constituency?”

All food hubs are not created equal, she said.

“Constituencies are different for each food hub,” DeLuna said. “They are born for different reasons and driven by different community needs.”

Helping refugees

Global Gardens, based in central Boise, is a program of the Idaho Office for Refugees and the nonprofit health and human services organization Jannus Inc. Its food hub connects 14 immigrant and refugee farmers with buyers.

To do that, it distributes produce to local restaurants, grocery stores and institutions, and via drive-thru sales at a farmers market.

A separate community-supported agriculture subscription program has eight pickup sites.

Program manager Rabiou Manzo said Global Gardens’ volume grew partly because, since COVID-19 arrived, “people have seen how important it is to have local produce.”

Global Gardens has challenges — including land availability — and opportunities such as growing more types of vegetables, aggregating food

from other local farmers and getting more produce to lower-income consumers.

Fair return

At LINC Foods in Spokane Valley, Carl Segerstrom, the procurement director, said an inherent challenge is that local food often is more expensive than food from elsewhere.

“But at the same time, we are very focused on giving a fair return to farmers,” he said.

LINC’s Estes said a founding premise more than seven years ago was to help growers increase sales, not simply to act as an intermediary. The team “has been able to work with growers to really seize that opportunity and make sure we are truly creating new value for our producers by opening up those marketing opportunities.”

At The Redd in Portland, navigating COVID-19 remains a challenge.

“Our operations and facilities teams hold all these parts together, supporting our anchor tenants in their businesses, filling vacancies through equitable leasing processes and bringing in and supporting businesses that are serving our local food community,” Sharer said.

With FARE Idaho, Baker said, businesses across the state “had an opportunity to come together and share ideas, issues, concerns and to help each other through the process of operating in the pandemic.”

Farmers markets

As for selling and delivering local food in bigger quantities, Krick, the restaurateur, said farmers markets could expand on the order-ahead model, which has found success during the pandemic.

He said equipping a farmers market with cold storage, a small processing or packaging area and a shipping-and-receiving setup would be more viable than developing a food hub, and could bring new opportunities for the market and participating producers.

“Local food is going to be more nutritious and sustainable, including when we have supply-chain hiccups,” Krick said of the idea.

Violations: Property owners, land use experts at odds over liability for cannabis fines

Continued from Page 1

“Sometimes landowners know exactly what they were doing and then try to put all the blame on the growers. Other times, it’s clear the landowners are clueless,” said Roger Pearce, land use attorney and Jackson County hearings officer.

Whether landowners knew they were leasing to an illegal operation or not, Pearce and Sickler say they may be liable for violations under state and county law.

In the Wetzel case, according to Jackson County public records, on June 10, 2021, Oregon State Police raided the Wetzels’ home after obtaining a search warrant.

Officers entered the house with guns drawn, searched for evidence and seized property. The Wetzels say they were frightened while handcuffed for about four hours.

“They searched this place from top to bottom,” said Gloria Wetzel, her eyes watering.

During the raid, the tenant and his workers fled the approximately two-acre grow site leased from the Wetzels far from the couple’s residence.

Using equipment designed to detect THC levels, Oregon State



Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press

Jerry and Gloria Wetzel, longtime cattle ranchers, drive to a piece of acreage they own that they leased out last year, about a 10-minute utility vehicle drive from their house.

Police determined the operation was growing marijuana.

Mark Taylor, founding board member of the Southern Oregon Hemp Co-Op, said he knows the Wetzels to be “honorable people” and said he feels it is inappropriate for officers to raid the home of the landowners rather than targeting the

tenant’s grow site.

Taylor said he is also upset that the couple is being fined for violations committed by the lessee.

“The whole case smells of government overreach,” he said.

Jerry Wetzel said that when he and Gloria started leasing acreage to someone they thought was

a hemp grower in 2020, they knew hemp was legal in Oregon but did not know operations required permitting. Thus, they didn’t ask to see permits.

The illegal grower, at his own expense, constructed 54 greenhouses and installed electricity, also without permits. The lessee, Jerry Wetzel said, told him the structures were temporary.

“We weren’t told to ask for a license to prove it’s legal hemp or legal greenhouse(s),” he said.

When the growers fled, the Wetzels were stuck with the fine.

The Wetzels say they believe laws that punish landowners regardless of intent for the actions of their lessees are unjust.

Annick Goldsmith, the hemp co-op’s small farms adviser, said she believes the county shouldn’t “cast such a wide net that (it) victimize(s) people like Jerry and Gloria.”

Land use experts, however, say liability laws placing the burden on the property owner are standard.

“It’s pretty straightforward. In most cases, ultimately the person who owns land is responsible for compliance with all laws that deal with the use of that land,” said Jim

Johnson, land use and water planning coordinator for the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

Pearce, the attorney, said landowners may be held liable for state and county violations, potentially for pollution, illegal water uses, construction of unpermitted structures and failure to register farm labor camps.

Sickler, the sheriff, said landowners should verify an operation is legitimate “to prevent a criminal organization from setting up shop in our county.”

The Wetzels, who received \$150,000 in rent between March 2020 and April 2021, say they thought they had taken sufficient precautions because they were not business partners of the tenant and had worked with an attorney to create an agreement in 2020 to protect the farm’s interests.

Now, the Wetzels say they wish they had also known to ask for permits. They, along with Taylor of the co-op, advise landowners to check permits, conduct a background check, ask for an up-front security deposit and engage a seasoned real estate attorney before leasing to hemp growers.

WOTUS: EPA committee offers recommendations on defining navigable waters

Continued from Page 1

jurisdiction under the Clean Water Act by using the term “navigable.”

Any definition of WOTUS should be limited to traditional navigable waters and territorial seas. Jurisdiction over non-navigable tributaries should be limited to those tributaries containing clearly discernible physical features, as well as consistent flow into traditionally navigable waters. Any consideration for adjacency must be limited to wetlands that directly

about WOTUS.

• Define WOTUS using clear terms that are easy to interpret and apply. The most important aspect of any definition of WOTUS is it must be easily interpreted by farmers, ranchers and leaders of rural communities and interpreted with clear lines of jurisdiction. It is necessary that a new WOTUS rule avoid vague terminology that both landowners and regulators cannot apply without engaging in burdensome analyses.

Accurate and current online

interactive tools should be considered for the purpose of mapping jurisdictional waters to provide an informal guide to farmers, ranchers and leaders of rural communities. Agency determinations, however, must be made in the field to ensure a holistic approach in arriving at an accurate determination and provide for adequate due process.

• Define jurisdictional features with an eye toward allowing farmers, ranchers and rural communities the necessary flexibility to

implement innovative environmentally beneficial projects that do not adversely impact the function or water quality of WOTUS.

• Retain exclusions that are critical to farmers, ranchers and rural communities and recognized regional differences. The most important exclusions are prior-converted cropland; groundwater; farm ditches, road ditches, canals, ponds, playas, stock ponds, prairie potholes and other isolated features.

In addition, storm water deten-

tion, tail water recovery or other environmentally beneficial practices should not be considered WOTUS. Wastewater, reclaimed water or recycle water systems should not be considered WOTUS.

The committee also recommends the agencies reconvene the round-table process and retain previous public input processes to include all stakeholders. It also emphasized the importance of ensuring USDA is in lock step with the regulatory process surrounding WOTUS.