

## LOCAL, STATE &amp; REGION

## Farm to table

## Meeting the community's needs

## Northwest food hubs spell success for local farms, markets and restaurants

BY BRAD CARLSON

Capital Press

BOISE — Dave Krick talks with his employees at his three contiguous restaurants in downtown Boise on a late December afternoon during the post-lunch lull.

"I don't want to do the same thing twice," said Krick of his restaurants, each of which serves different menus. "I like the challenge of building something different and the spirit of things being unique."

Another challenge he has overcome is getting more local food to his customers. Restaurateurs, farmers and others are finding that food hubs — which serve as clearinghouses for produce, meat and other foods — along with reimagined farmers markets can help.

## A FARE deal

Krick is president of the board of the Idaho Independent Food, Agriculture, Restaurant and Beverage Alliance, which formed in spring 2020. The nonprofit, known as FARE Idaho, helps local farmers and independent food buyers connect in new ways, and identify challenges, such as livestock processing delays, a recent focus.

"We've created a trade association that connects the supply chain from farm to table, especially that intrastate 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," 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 problematic for producers. So one of the organizational goals is



Noah Thomas via Capital Press

Come Thru Market, a farmers market centering on Black and indigenous vendors, has gathered at The Redd Plaza in Portland summers since 2020.



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.

to connect producers with retailers."

FARE itself is not a hub. Krick said Idaho 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," 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 or-

ganization 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-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."

## Response to a need

USDA defines a food hub as actively managing aggregation and distribution, and marketing source-identified food products, mainly from local and regional producers.

The idea is to boost the hub's capability to meet local wholesale, retail and institutional demand.

"A food hub is a response to a community need," said Sydney DeLuna, who coordinates the Oregon Food Hub Network and is a community food systems consultant on contract with Oregon State University.

Needs driving a hub's cre-

ation can range from land-use patterns and economic development to scaling up distribution so small farmers can access larger-scale buyers.

*"Are you delivering on your programs? If you are about food access, then your key to success is, are you expanding access to quality food, are you serving your constituency? ... Constituencies are different for each food hub. They are born for different reasons and driven by different community needs."*

— Sydney DeLuna, Oregon Food Hub Network coordinator

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."

## 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."

## Adapting 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.

# Born in 2021



**James Ray**  
June 10, 2021

Parents  
Whitney &  
Daniel Isham

Grandparents  
Kelly & Jeff Isham  
Mimi & Paul Lewis

**Large - \$50**  
(4.831" x 2.532")



**Alivia Rose Santos-Hall**  
May 15, 2021

**Small - \$25**  
(2.33" x 2.5")

Celebrate the new babies in your family with our Born in 2021 special publication. Inserting in The Bulletin on Sunday, March 13 and The Redmond Spokesman on Wednesday, March 16, this special publication will reach over 30,000 readers and feature photos submitted by local families. An online contest will determine the most photogenic babies of 2021.

**Submission deadline:**  
**Friday, March 4**

Publishes in  
**The Bulletin Sunday, March 13 &  
The Redmond Spokesman Wednesday, March 16**

**The Bulletin** EMPOWERING OUR COMMUNITY **THE REDMOND Spokesman**

Call Debbie at 541-383-0384  
or online:  
[www.bendbulletin.com/born-in-2021](http://www.bendbulletin.com/born-in-2021)