

November 12, 2015 Food Hub Community Meeting Question & Answer Summary

What if a customer doesn't show up to pick up and pay for their order (especially if we don't have online credit card payment)?

- Policies to have some negative consequences for 'bad behavior'?
- This may be a considerable problem, as it's easy to place an order but easier to forget about it. Check in with other established food hubs to figure out how folks have dealt with this. We may want to consider paying for the merchant fees/account/etc during this pilot round while we have grant money to avoid this problem up front. We should at least get a dollar figure attached to the costs.

What if an institutional buyer comes in and buys out all the lettuce available for the week (for example)? How can you assure there will be enough variety and enough quantity to satisfy customers?

- We need more production! Hopefully this market outlet will help growers expand production.

Will there be any support for winter storage of root crops (i.e. community root cellar)?

- No - at this point we're looking to keep overhead costs as low as possible, which will entail having a very barebones operation. Other groups/growers/etc can definitely work on this otherwise!

What about winter revenue? How will the Hub make enough money during the winter to stay open?

- Hopeful for a diverse array of producers that can sustain it at a lower level through the winter months. "Cottage foods" (breads, jams, pickles, teas, etc) are all possible, as are other products that meet ADEC requirements. Winter crops, and non-food items will hopefully increase and help sustain.

How will the Hub deal with the logistical challenges of customer pick-up (i.e. boxing individual orders is really time consuming and tricky)?

- Still mulling over this. Some possibilities include customers bringing their own bags/boxes and picking up their individual items from each farmer/from a shelf dedicated to them/etc?
- Look to other established food hubs for successes.
- We will likely have some trial and error at the start while we figure out what works best.

Where will the drop-off/pick-up location be?

- Considerations: year-round, space needs, covered/shaded/wind protected (indoors would be ideal). rent-free to keep overhead low.
- Suggestions to explore: HERC, Methodist Church, Storage Unit

When will the drop-off/pick-up day be?

- Considerations: Saturdays are busy with HFM, Wednesdays FM producers don't come in until early-afternoon. Possible to do a Wed with a drop-off of 12-3 and pick-up from 4-7 (or something like that). A different day would possibly be challenging for HFM producers (adding a third harvest/delivery day).

How will the Hub impact CSAs? Farmers Market sales?

- Generally the feeling is that we have more demand than we have production, so should help everyone if we can grow production. Parking is limited/arguably maxed out at the HFM, and there are only a handful of CSAs available in town.

What will be the impact on specialty crops? The AK Div of Ag has a Specialty Crop Grant program that could be very relevant here and they don't get many applicants.

- http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag_grants.htm

How will the Hub ensure quality control?

- Products should all be labeled with their farm/vendor.
- Quality policies, similar to HFM/other food hubs.

How will the volunteer base work?

- Producers and customers
- Need community support to make this successful
- Consider training needs to keep quality high.

Will you accept food stamps/EBT?

- Yes, but need to figure out/go through the steps to get there.

How will you do marketing of the Hub?

- Easy to let people know about it in a small town. Radio/newspaper, flyers, community meetings and presentations to community groups (i.e. rotary, garden club, etc).

Is there interest in expanding to other communities?

- Yes, but at this point we'll be focusing on a drop point in Homer and working with SVT on getting orders to Seldovia during the summer month via the Seldovia Ferry.
- A possibility in the future is that growers could get together to sell to other outlets and then share the burden of transportation. The Hub isn't looking at trucking/transportation in order to keep overhead low.
- There is a group of folks in the Central Peninsula interested in a similar endeavor. We may be able to work with them to include them in our software but operating as a separate group of producers/customers with a different drop/pick up point. (i.e. no centralized aggregation and shipping Peninsula-wide)

Will there be an opportunity for vendor communication (i.e. an online forum, etc)?

- Not sure about that on the software. We could set up an email listserv.
- Annual meetings, facebook page, etc. Email newsletter for vendors & customers.

Customers won't be hard to come by - consider using marketing money to get more producers/high tunnel growers on board!

- Kyra - maybe have a high tunnel meeting this winter? That usually draws out a bunch of folks...

There may be some products (i.e. "organic" eggs) that are already expensive and so wouldn't really be able to swallow the 25% mark-up. Can certain products be excluded from that mark-up?

- No. It will be up to vendors to decide what and if the Hub is a good outlet for their products and how to price appropriately.