

# Food Connects: Radically Rural

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# Brief Intro

- Food Hub founded in 2009 with a vision of a 30 mile radius food system.
- Started small, with visionary farmers and strong community partnerships focused on wholesale.
- Added strong “anchor tenants” with high production capacity to help cover rural transportation costs.
- Trial and Error, learning mentality, evolving as outside world also evolved.
- Lean and green model, shying away from ownership.
  - Shared vehicle
  - Same day pick up and delivery, no inventory!
  - Lots of mistakes
  - Modest impact



# At a glance

- Part of a 501c3 with educational programming
- We make it easy to buy wholesale from over 75 farmers and food producers, with one online ordering platform, one delivery, one bill and one customer service experience.
- Our food is source identified from the farm to dock
- Maximize return to producers: they set their prices. Not price takers!
- Sell to over 150 wholesale customers, independent retailers and institutions are top.
- 4 Vehicles
- ~4,000 sq ft facility
  - 2 Walk-in coolers, walk-in freezer, dry storage
  - Office space
- ~ 9 FTE



# Lessons Learned

- 2017, tired of being on a shoestring!
  - i. highly vulnerable to disruptions
  - ii. not serving producers and customers as well as should be or wanted to.
- 2018 to-date, big push on growth!
  - i. Sales doubled from 2017-2019
  - ii. And doubling again in 2020
- Partnerships of all kinds really important esp in Rural areas!
  - i. Learning networks of similar business models
  - ii. Collaborative funding opportunities to meet shared outcomes
  - iii. Be open minded



## Changes needed to ensure the success of your food hub

- Start small, build success and momentum
- Take the next step up from a strong foundation
  - a. No trucks, to owning a truck, to 4 vehicles
  - b. Shared cooler, to our own facility, dry storage, walk in coolers and freezers, equipment
  - c. Software updates, to improve systems.
  - d. Hiring from passion and training, adding more relevant professionals
- Continue to learn and evolve, network with similar enterprises.



# Food Hub Networks

- Share information
  - Nuts and Bolts
  - Market Trends
  - Etc
- Transactions
  - Move surplus around the region
  - Unique value added products
  - Leverage competitive advantages
  - Increase seasonal availability
- Bigger Impact
  - Fundraise together
  - Collaborative marketing
  - Advocacy
  - Etc.



## Transitioning from local to regional

- Transition to regional continues to be challenging, but tons of opportunity!
- “We want to sell to other places but not have them sell into our area.”
- Also, financially, logistically, and environmentally, we want to have full trucks all the time, so exporting to another area requires importing something to have full trucks.
- Clear on decision making, amount, product types, competition
- Can't be everything to everyone



# Advice?

- As the saying goes, when you've seen one food hub... you've seen one food hub.
- Do what makes the most sense based on assets and needs in your community.
- Build strong and diverse partnerships
- Take calculated risk. Be bold but do your homework!
- Learn from your mistakes!
- Remember, its not easy or profitable!
- But NOW is the time for this type of meaningful work!





## Resources to recommend

Wallace Center: [National Good Food Network](#)

[New England Food Hub Network Study](#)

Kathy Nyquist: [FOOD HUB NETWORKS: THE LOCAL FOOD MOVEMENT'S FUTURE?](#)

