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Tech feeds local food



Photo by JENNIFER KEIRN

Cullen Naumoff (left) and Laura Adiletta are co-founders of Farm Fare, an e-commerce platform that connects region-wide food hubs, food producers and food buyers.

The onset of warmer weather means summer farmers markets throughout Northeast Ohio will be ramping up with freshly harvested produce, baked goods, dairy, proteins, ancillary products and much



more. For restaurants and other businesses with bulk food quantity needs, procuring the bounty from local growers and artisans can be tricky, even unrealistic. An inefficient local food distribution system often makes it challenging for high-volume food buyers to source local food in the quantities they need. They often find it easier to order through giant food service conglomerates that import produce from halfway around the world. That food is more expensive and less nutritious. Meanwhile, precious dollars are exported away from the local economy.

Enter Farm Fare, a sales, order and inventory management software solution. Launched in July 2017, Farm Fare is an e-commerce platform that connects region-wide food hubs, food producers and food buyers.

“A lot of restaurants, businesses and other institutional buyers say they want to have more local food on their menus, but there are not comprehensive solutions for businesses to navigate the local food scene,” said Farm Fare co-founder Laura Adiletta. “Buying locally often requires multiple deliveries, multiple invoices and a lot of coordination with farmers. With Farm Fare, you get one invoice and one delivery.”

Farm Fare’s co-founders — who also include Oberlin Food Hub co-founder Cullen Naumoff and Great Lakes Brewing Co. co-founder Dan Conway, developed their custom software in part by leveraging the food industry’s existing resources.

The Farm Fare mobile app and web site gives buyers access to seasonal produce; dairy; meat and eggs; mixers; herbs and spices; condiments; flours and grains; and vegetarian proteins.

Food hubs located in Ashtabula, Oberlin, Cleveland, Wooster and Youngstown aggregate the food and manage inventory.

“Food hubs are a big part of the equation. They have rich relationships with local farms and know the agriculture supply well,” Adiletta said.

Idle farm and food service delivery trucks are used to coordinate Farm Fare deliveries.

Several local restaurants and schools are among current Farm Fare clients.

“We really think Farm Fare’s sweet spot is the institutional customer base,” Naumoff said. “From a regional perspective, this gives larger customers access to larger inventory supply.”

The sustainability and economic implications are vast for shoring up the local food supply chain, Farm Fare’s leaders say.

A stronger local food system improves the region’s resiliency against severe weather events that impact the global food system. Reducing the storage, transportation and distribution required of imported foods also contributes to lower greenhouse gas emissions.

Meantime, Ohio is the fifth-largest specialty food producer in the U.S. Northeast Ohioans spend nearly \$11 billion annually on food and beverages, although few of those dollars support local farms or businesses, according to a 2014 report by Salem, Ohio-based Bush Consulting Group. Shifting just 2% of the food spend into the local economy results in about \$100 million in regional economic investment.

Plus, local businesses circulate three times more money than chains into the local economy, according to Project Equity, an employee ownership advocacy group.

“The local food system is so close, but so far away,” Naumoff said. “Shifting 2% of that spend is totally doable. We have the resources. Farm Fare’s premise is to connect those existing assets.”

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