

THE HEALDSBURG TRIBUNE > NEWS

Ag hub moves forward

Print Page

Proposed facility would serve as access point for farmers, restaurants**By Lynda hopkins****Staff Writer**

Published: Wednesday, August 3, 2011 2:58 PM PDT

An Aggregation & Marketing Center (AMC) serving the farmers and food facilities of Sonoma, Napa, Lake, and Mendocino counties is in the works. According to organizers, the center would greatly enhance Sonoma County's local food system, expanding marketing opportunities for farmers and offering county restaurants a single access point for regional fruit and vegetables.

"The report indicated the need; after that we pursued a practical solution. That practical solution is about 80 percent accomplished," said Bob Corshen, project director from Community Alliance with Family Farmers.

A feasibility study funded by the USDA and executed by CAFF directly led to the development of a four-county hub concept, which according to Corshen will likely move forward in Petaluma through a partnership with Buckelew Programs.

"It's getting close and we're all sitting here anxiously waiting because the facility that they [Buckelew] have bid on is super. It will need a lot of retrofitting but it is a building that is very close to almost perfect," Corshen said.

The AMC feasibility study is one of three new reports on the state of local food and agriculture in Sonoma County.

Two of those reports were recently released, with a third—summarizing the results of February's Food Forum—to be presented to the Board of Supervisors next week. Local farming and food advocates say that it's an exciting time for local agriculture, with projects that have been under discussion for years finally moving forward.

"One of the things that came out of the assessment, the food forum report, and

the study that CAFF did... is that there's this incredible desire for more regionalized food systems. There's also an awareness that it's not just a fun fad, but there's some really important components of our society that can actually be addressed through the food system and that we don't want to leave behind. We want to have viable farm businesses," said Miriam Volat, Director of Alliance Projects at Ag Innovations Network.

Buckelew Programs is a local non-profit organization dedicated to providing jobs to people trying to reenter the workplace. Some programs are geared towards transition-aged youth, while others focus on helping adults with serious mental illness, substance abuse, or criminal convictions.

The hub would provide job opportunities for Buckelew Programs' clientele, while also fulfilling many of the goals outlined in the feasibility study and food system assessment report.

"Buckelew Programs, they establish businesses that hire the difficult employees,

people that have some kind of physical or mental problem or a lot of ex convicts. It's the perfect synergism for us to be with them. It's a community worthwhile effort on many, many levels," Corshen said.

Over the past few years, aggregation hubs have been proposed by various groups with potential sites in Santa Rosa, Sebastopol, and Windsor. Corshen noted that positive headway has been made on the Petaluma proposal, and that he hoped other groups would wait and see what happens with it.

"What's also important is there is still constant conversation about starting a hub...CAFF and Buckelew is a hundred miles ahead of everybody else, and if there is still conversation about the hub, there's going to be more confusion. At this stage of the game, I think people should—for lack of a better word—acquiesce to what we have started. Let's see if it develops and stop the conversation about how we need to solve the local food system. There's nothing broken about it. It's a matter of now saying CAFF and its farmers and its relationship with the community has come up with a solution. Let's see it start to work," Corshen said.

Copies of the two published reports can be found aginnovations.org/alliances/sonoma and caff.org/CAFF_RBEG3_Report_FINAL.pdf.

Lynda Hopkins can be reached at Lynda@hbqtrib.com.

Copyright © 2011 - Sonoma West

[\[x\] Close Window](#)