Leveraging Technology to Support Resilient Local Food Systems

With Taylor Campbell, High Country Food Hub
and Stefanie Jaeger, Local Food Marketplace
Agenda

- Introduction to Local Food Marketplace
- Introduction to High Country Food Hub
- How technology can help overcome barriers facing producers
- What problems technology can solve for a hub
- How to maintain a connection to producers and customers in a virtual world
- Best practices for evaluating technology
- Q&A
Presenting Today

**Stefanie Jaeger**
Director of Sales and Customer Success
Local Food Marketplace

✉️ Stefanie@localfoodmarketplace.com
715-209-0362
About Stefanie

• Lives in Northern Wisconsin on Lake Superior
• Mediocre ultra runner + rock climber
  • Professional coffee addict
• CSA customer for over 10 years
• 4 years running wholesale departments for local bakery and coffee roaster
• 4 years running a producer cooperative with CSA, Wholesale and Institutional sales
• 3.5 years at Harvie (formerly Small Farm Central)
• 1.5 years (and counting!) with Local Food Marketplace
About LFM
Why LFM Was Started + Who We Are

The first version of LFM was built because our co-founders ran their own food hub and developed the technology to run it!

2009: We started LFM to re-localize our food system and enable small farms to compete and thrive

Today: We are the leading platform for local food sales.
Who We Work With

- 300+ Food Hubs & Markets
- 12,000+ Farmers & Producers

FOOD HUBS

FARMERS MARKETS

FARMERS, RANCHERS & PRODUCERS
How They Use LFM

- Wholesale
- Retail
- CSA/Subscription Programs
- Farmstands & Farmers Markets
- Institutional sales (schools, hospitals, etc.)
- Farm to school programs
- Farm to food pantry programs
About LFM
Our Staff

- Small team with DECADES of combined experience in the industry
- Everyone on the team has experience working in food systems on the ground as CSA managers, hub managers, farmers, market managers, etc.
About LFM
How We Operate

- We've grown our business through strong and lasting customer relationships
- Our shareholders are our customers!
- Our development road map is directly influenced by what our customers ask for
- We aren’t disrupters. We prioritize stability, measured growth, and working with local businesses to help shape their local food ecosystem.
- Long story short: we listen to our customers
Presenting Today

Taylor Campbell
Food Hub Manager
High Country Food Hub

TAYLOR CAMPBELL

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About Taylor

• Lives in Boone, NC
• Fledgling Banjo player, fair weather runner, and sometimes rock climber
• Grew up working on an array of farms, including milking cows at the Piedmont Research Station, wrangling animals at the Lazy 5 Ranch, and peddling berries at Patterson Farms
  • Owned a micro flower farm at the CFSA Lomax Farm
• 3 years building and managing a cut flower farm in Knoxville
  • 1 year with High Country Food Hub
About High County Food Hub
Our History: 2003 - Present

• Our founding mothers were looking for a space and a supportive network to share resources and information about creating a regenerative agriculture system.

• [https://www.zsr.org/articles/video-blue-ridge-women-agriculture](https://www.zsr.org/articles/video-blue-ridge-women-agriculture)
Mission
Supporting producers and cultivating community connections that educate, inspire, and increase the demand for local food.

Vision
We envision an equitable and sustainable High Country food system where producers are thriving, and local food is accessible to all.
2,300+ Unique items produced within 100 miles

252 Poplar Grove Rd.
Boone, NC

11,704 Orders placed

114 Producers supported
About High County Food Hub
Satellite Program

- **West Jefferson:**
  - Ashe County Public Library
  - Wednesday 4:00-6:00

- **Vilas/Zionville:**
  - High Country United Church of Christ
  - Thursday 4:00-6:00

- **Blowing Rock:**
  - Blowing Rock Market
  - Thursday 4:00-6:00

- **Banner Elk:**
  - WYN Avery Office
  - Thursday 3:30-5:30

- **Deep Gap:**
  - Bald Guy Brew Coffee Roasting Co
  - Wednesday 3:30-5:30
Local Food As Medicine (LocalFAM)

- Healthcare System Providers increasingly view “Food as Medicine” as cost-savings for insurers.

- ALL producers with qualifying products are automatically included in the program

- 2020-2022 partners include:
  - Casting Bread
  - Junaluska Community
  - Blowing Rock Cares
  - Piney Creek UMC
  - Hunger & Health Coalition
  - Hospitality House
  - Boone Service Workers Coalition
  - Samaritan Kitchen of Wilkes
  - Wilkes Ministry of Hope
  - Children's Council of Watauga (special project)
  - Hardin School Summer Feeding Program
  - Shiloh Methodist Church
Let's Jump In!
An Introduction to High Country

The story of how High Country Food hub is unique. You've shared a bit about the organization but let's dive into some more specifics about how and why it started, and its evolution.
How Did the Food Hub Start? :

- Started by female farmers as a grassroots project in 2003
- Aimed to create a supportive network of female gardeners and farmers operating small-scale farms
- Create equitable access to local food
- Provide skill share and education
What software and technology does the hub currently use?

- Coolers have WiFi temperature gauges through iMonnit
- Keela for email marketing
- Google Voice
- Local Food Marketplace
How do these key pieces of technology help the hub?

- Ensure peace of mind that coolers and freezers are working properly
- Customer communication
- Online storefront to manage orders, producer inventory, pricing, reports, etc.
Barriers to Entry

Selling products and finding local customers is often mentioned as one of the top challenges producers face across the country.
What barriers did farmers and producers face in selling their products locally?

- Lack of access to long term storage of product
- Lack of regional processing facilities
- Limited by proximity to towns with large populations
- Competitive farmers markets
What barriers do they continue to face?

- Stretched thin by being expected to own many roles such as:
  - Marketer
  - Bookkeeper
  - Delivery Driver
  - Employer
  - Farmer
How does using technology help overcome these barriers?

- Provides ease of use by streamlining processes
- Farmers can upload product and availability while standing in their field
- They can check their sales
- Communicate to the hub
- Sell their product to over 350 consistent customers
- ....all in one place
How has using technology helped producers scale?

- Reports that utilize listed vs. sold
- Using this data to crop plan
- The hub had multiple programs producers can sell through
How has it helped you, as a hub, scale and fulfill your mission?

- Ability to scale up with LFM, as needed
- Ability to take e-check and reduce fees
- Increase food equity by having the ability to manage SNAP/DUFB programs on LFM
"Tech Support"

A common question I hear a lot from folks is how to set up systems for producers and customers that don't require a lot of tech support.

It's a normal hesitation – change is hard, and how do folks want to know how to navigate that for their stakeholders.
Tell us about the different stakeholders that your hub works with and what supports you've put in place to help them adopt technology?

- Producers – utilizing an onboarding process
- Customers – comprehensive FAQ
Communication and Connection

When a farm or producer decides to sell through a hub, a common concern is losing that direct connection to the customer which we all know is a key to a thriving local food system.
Can you tell us how using technology has changed your customer connection and communication strategies?

- An online storefront reduces the face-to-face interaction you'd see at a farmers market
What strategies have you implemented to maintain that relationship between producer/farmer and customer?

- Producers rotate tabling duties on pick up day
- Schedule periodic events for customers to meet producers
Similarly, how has technology impacted your relationship with producers?

- Gives producers transparency and control into their operations by providing:
  - Pick lists
  - Sales reports
  - Consistent payment from the hub
- Weekly communication from the Hub
Using Tech to Overcome Challenges

With success comes challenges! A lot of folks we worked with saw many challenges during the pandemic as it related to increase demand for local food.
Can you talk about some key challenges the hub faced, and how you overcame that?

- Increased demand during COVID from 100 orders per week to 500+ orders per week
- Additionally, retaining those customers once supply steadied at grocery stores
  - Opened a new satellite location to increase access
- Logistics involved with distribution, coolers, supplies, etc.
  - Having software that grows as you grow
Researching and Implementing

There are a lot of folks looking at this food hub model and know they need software tools to manage it but aren’t sure where to start.
What key features and requirements should not be overlooked?

- Reports and access to data that is specific to your business needs
- Payment processing
- Integrations
  - QBO
Any advice on how to get started with evaluating technology/software implementations?

- Make a list of requirements
  - Who is your target customer?
  - How do your customers like to purchase from you? Is the site optimized for mobile?
  - Can producers manage their own products?
    - If so, is that easy for them?
- What is the support like?
- Is it an experienced team who has been there?
Key Takeaways

The right technology can support local food systems by:

- Reducing barriers to entry for producers
  - Marketing
  - Distribution
  - Reach
- Giving producers ownership of their business while at the same time, participating in food hub model
- Reduce the non-farm work producers have to do
Key Takeaways

The right technology doesn't have to:

- Be hard to implement or support
- Reduce the farmer to consumer connection
Q&A
Get in Touch!

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THANK YOU!