



# HUMMING NEWS DECEMBER 2009

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## Building a New Food System Through Innovative Collaboration by Chris Petersen

“Food security’s last line of defense, especially in times of crisis or for the less fortunate, is often at the neighborhood level... local communities... have the potential to provide. The creation of neighborhood buying cooperatives, neighborhood staple storage, community gardens, regular community meals, and neighborhood incubator kitchens are key pieces to achieving that potential.” <http://www.mudcitypress.com/beanandgrain2.html>

Julie Tilt and Clint Lindsey have jobs that involve canyons of stacked bags and boxes. Forklifts often hum in the background. Their livelihoods are directly dependent upon the soil, but their businesses are very different. Hers is contained within the walls of a metal warehouse in a small city. Her workspace is measured in feet. His workspace is 40 miles away, measured in acres. He spends as much time between soil and sky as she does at a computer. She distributes natural foods throughout the Pacific Northwest. He’s a grass seed farmer, his product going around the world.

Until recently, Tilt and Lindsey had no reason to meet. But, tough times create unlikely partnerships. Theirs is one. Lindsey’s bank started legal proceedings to take possession of farm assets when his grass seed crop didn’t sell and he fell behind on loan repayments. Tilt attended the hearing to testify on his behalf, confirming

that they were partnering in a plan that Lindsey’s family had written for the farm. If successful, the farm will change course and, at the same time, will help Tilt fulfill the mission of her business and bring to fruition a business model some scoff at as idealistic.

It’s a risky venture with no guarantees for either of them.

### The Farmers

Lindsey’s story starts a generation ago when his father, Mike Robinson, moved as a child from Canada to western Oregon with his parents. The family bought land south of Philomath and started farming. Later, as an adult, Robinson was hired to manage the nearby farm of a family friend. When the friends retired, he bought their farm, named it A2R Farms and, in 2004, set up a seed cleaning and storage facility on it. At the time, he was farming almost 1,500 acres, which included leased land. He has

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## Monthly Sales, January - March

The following items will be on sale early next year. Please log into the website for detailed pricing and product information: [www.hummingbirdwholesale.com](http://www.hummingbirdwholesale.com)

### January

- Organic Poppy Seed 15% off
- Organic Mango Fillets 8 ½ % off
- Organic Long Grain Brown Rice 12 % off

### February

- Organic Moyer Prunes, LOCAL 12% off
- Organic French Lentils 12% off
- Salt, Himalayan, Fine Ground\* 12% off

### March

- Organic Yellow Popcorn 15% off
- Organic Goji Berry 15% off
- Bee Pollen, LOCAL 12% off

\*Organic Handler Certified

## Building a New Food System (cont'd from page 1)

since scaled back to just over 650 acres, over 85% of which has been in grass seed. The rest was in wheat and oats.

Why, city folk wonder, is over half of the Willamette Valley's crop land devoted to grass seed? Lindsey explains that ideal climate and soil type are key. Grass seed is planted in fall, thrives in western Oregon's mild wet winters, then is harvested in summer. No irrigation is required. For years the market was stable, bringing a decent price. So, farmers became experts at growing and processing grass seed. Although many grass seed growers also grow some grains as rotation crops, grains are trickier to grow in this climate and their markets have historically paid far less than grass seed.

### The Wholesaler

In 2003, Julie and Charlie Tilt bought Honey Heaven, an estab-

lished wholesale business in Eugene, and changed its name to Hummingbird Wholesale in 2007 to reflect the broader versatility they brought to it, as well as its gentle impact on the environment. They strive to buy their products locally, and directly from the farmer whenever possible. In fact, they are so committed to localizing the food they distribute that, more than once, they've shared risk with farmers by investing in a crop before it's planted or harvested. It's a business model you rarely see but one they are willing to practice when possible to fulfill the mission and vision of their business (see [www.hummingbirdwholesale.com](http://www.hummingbirdwholesale.com))

Hummingbird distributes mostly organically-grown natural foods throughout the Pacific Northwest.

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## A Word From Our Very Own Cuckoo Bird by Kristie Steele

When I was little my mom decided she was going to be vegetarian, and for some reason that meant the rest of the family was vegetarian too. This was my first introduction to a "healthy diet". Unfortunately, back then, everything my mother cooked came out of a box, a can or the freezer, so it was neither healthy nor appetizing. And of course, I could still count on Grandma to take me to Mc Donald's, so my mother's efforts were mostly wasted. The family's vegetarian diet didn't last long.

Oddly, I managed to learn a few things about a healthy diet while eating iceberg lettuce –which I always complained tasted like wet paper- and TV dinners. Despite the fast food industry's pervasive insistence that it was in the meat, and the government's insistence that it was in the grains, I somehow knew that these awful tasting vegetables were where it's at.

Amazingly, I survived my childhood diet and went on to college. Perhaps even more incredible, I survived my first three years at college with a diet consisting mainly of junk food (isn't the human body remarkable!). I have to confess, when a real positive shift first occurred, it was not inspired by health and wellness but rather by my increasingly intensifying desire to avoid the frustrating experience of trying to complete a successful transaction with the typical fast food employee.

Shortly after I began boycotting certain fast food chains, I was hired on at the natural foods market near my college. I remember having to read a book about nutrition during my orientation there, which informed me that iceberg lettuce has virtually no nutritional value (see mom, I told you!). At this market, and also at the homes of friends I met in school, I discovered the value and the pleasure of quality ingredients.

Pretty soon I had given up fast food entirely, and I was making bets with my boyfriend over it. He successfully avoided eating burgers for two months, and when he re-introduced cheeseburgers to his belly it put up quite a fuss, but only for the first four or five...

My healthy eating education didn't *really* begin until I left my hometown of San Diego and moved to Los Angeles, however. During my three-year stay, I learned about veganism, raw foods, super foods, probiotics and beneficial microorganisms, farmers markets and co-ops, food miles and eating local.

I have now been in Eugene, at Hummingbird Wholesale, for almost three years. My food education has again been taken to a whole new level. I have learned which grains, oils and sweeteners are good and which to avoid, about fermented foods and growing my own food in the garden. And I am still learning more!



## Building a New Food System (cont'd from page 2)

### The Collaboration

The grass seed industry has been one of the big dominoes to fall in the economic crisis. It has left countless farms just like A2R with warehouses full of unsold seed. Banks once happy to make loans for seed and equipment have locked their vaults.

### *Field of black beans*

Lindsey has worked on his father's farm seasonally for 10 years, and full-time for the last season. When he started assuming more of the administrative responsibilities, grass seed prices were becoming more volatile. He and his father had long talked about growing more food crops but, because of the investments in seed cleaning and storage, weren't compelled to change until the grass seed market began to tank two years ago.

Lindsey's research into alternative crops led him to fellow Valley grass seed grower, Harry Stalford, whose wife, Willow Corberly, had not only researched food crops, but was growing grains and beans for local markets. She was part of a newly-organized group of farmers and individuals involved with the emerging local foods movement called the Southern Willamette Valley Bean & Grain Project. Ten Rivers Food Web is a

partner in the Project. The group's goal is to find and help farmers willing to transition to food crops for local distribution and consumption, and thus strengthen food security for consumers and job security for farmers. (See "Farmer Meetings Mull Progress of Local Bean & Grain Growing <<http://tenriversfoodweb.org/home/?p=4310>>" by Carla Wise)

Tilt is a member of the Southern Willamette Valley Bean & Grain Project.

Less than three months after meeting, Tilt found herself in a hearing at the new Federal Court House in Eugene in front of A2R's bank representatives. Lindsey and Robinson had worked out a plan to transition to more stable food crops. Tilt came to verify that Hummingbird had agreed to help sell the crops.

"It was the strangest environment to be discussing farming," Tilt said. "The new Federal Court House feels like a space ship, and they were up against three lawyers, a judge and an accountant from the bank, all in suits and ties."

This was but a first step in the process of convinc-

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## New Products

**Locally Grown Teff, No Spray**—Teff is a whole grain that is typically grown in the Ethiopian Highlands however we were able to find a local Oregon grower. Our Teff was grown using organic practices, without the use of herbicides or pesticides. It is not certified organic due to the farmer using a commercial fertilizer called carbamide which is a nitrogen release fertilizer. \* See Recipe, p.6

**Locally Grown Brown & Gold Flax Seed**—The flax was grown in Oregon using Organic growing practices and on organic land. Unfortunately the certification expired so the product was not officially certified organic. On an exciting note, this now makes Ariel's Om Grown Granola 100% Oregon grown!

**Organic Beans**—We now carry Organic Fava Beans grown in California, and Organic Pink Beans grown in Washington.

**Organic Virgin Coconut Oil—2 lb. jars:** We know that many people out there love our Virgin Coconut Oil, which is offered in a 16 oz jar or a 2 gallon bucket. We have even heard stories of customers buying 10 jars or more at a time. So, we decided to begin selling it in a 32 oz jar!

**Organic Maple Syrup**—We are now offering our Organic Maple Syrup from Vermont in a lovely 32 oz. bottle for the Grocery Department.

**Holy Kakow!** - Hummingbird is now distributing two Cacao Powders made by this Oregon business. Both items, the Organic Raw Cacao pow-

der and the Organic Roasted Cacao powder, are available in both Bulk and Grocery sizes. These powders can be used wherever cocoa powder is used; the company just prefers to use the pronunciation "cacao" to respect the Spanish speaking people who provide their company with their raw materials.

All of the cacao beans were grown under the canopy of the rainforest, a natural environment for cacao. This not only ensures that a good quality bean is produced; it also supports the ecosystem better than growing the beans out in the open, which can be harmful to the environment. Growing without the canopy can inhibit fertilization and pollination since the insects thrive in the humid shade the canopy provides.



## Mycelia Connections by Karl Benedek

*This year, I attended the Provender Alliance Conference for the first time. The Alliance is an outreach and educational organization for the natural foods industry in the Northwest. This year's conference was held in Bellingham, WA.*



Inspiration can take many forms, but at this year's Provender Alliance conference, the word on everyone's lips was "mycelial," especially after mycologist Paul Stamets' keynote talk, "How Mushrooms Can Save the World (you can see an abbreviated version of this talk at the TED website: <http://bit.ly/stamets>). Mycelia can be loosely defined as the underground part of mushrooms, the branching threads and tubes that sustain the organism. The mycelium is at once a communications web, a nutrient transport network and a filtration system. While mushrooms are familiar to all, they are like icebergs, in that their larger part lies hidden below the surface.

You can recognize the basic form of the mycelial web reflected at all scales of existence, from the branching structure of the neurons in our brains to the shapes of galaxies. The structure itself suggests communication and interactivity. Think of the branching nature of a deep conversation, where ideas are traded, expanded and riffed upon. Think of the hyperlinked structure of the Internet. This network

concept resonated with the assembled group, gathered at the conference to learn from each other, to trade ideas and to expand the branches of our experience.

As members of the natural foods industry in the Northwest, the notion of a nutrient transport network was not lost on us. We are all aware of the importance

of ensuring a supply of healthy, natural foods to our communities. We believe that this network will build stronger, healthier communities from farm to table.

As a filtration system, mycelial networks have the power to rehabilitate soil polluted with bacterial agents, petroleum compounds and other toxic chemicals. Similarly, expanding the reach of organic foods (a topic further expounded by the weekend's second keynote speaker, Tim LaSalle of the Rodale Institute) is a key part of rehabilitating our watersheds and topsoil as well as our own physical and mental health.

During Stamets' talk, the unlikely-seeming parallels between mycology and our work as members of the Provender Alliance became clear to all. The mushroom, one of the most ancient organisms on the planet, is still giving up its secrets and it is evident that we still have a lot to learn.

## Doug Lang by Karin Sundberg

Doug Lang, Head Chef at the University of Oregon's Central Kitchen, has a strong commitment to serving healthy food and supporting local growers whenever possible. His enthusiasm for his work, and ability to track countless details and provide nutritious food choices, is inspiring. He likes to try out new ingredients; for instance this fall he added Emmer Pumpkin Muffin Tops to his menu (using our organic Emmer Farro flour).

Recently, Doug helped coordinate a "Farm to Table" dinner featuring a lavish gourmet-quality menu comprised of local ingredients. Over 600 meals were served. The dinner grew out of



"Project Tomato," where ten freshmen from the U of O went to local farms in September and picked 900 pounds of tomatoes, then hand-processed each one to make a week's worth of pizza sauce for the campus dining hall. (The kitchen prepares 144 pizzas per day – that's 2,300 slices!)

While students waited in line for their meal, they had a chance to ease their hunger with snacks provided by local farms and businesses, including Hummingbird Wholesale. We served local organic dried fruits, nuts, and filbert nut butter, and enjoyed seeing their eyes light up as the students tasted our local pumpkin seeds.

Doug, an accomplished chef, said there were many challenges – from placing orders manually (without the normal computer help to calculate quantities), to preparing an elaborate array of food along with regular menu items (more than doubling their work in the kitchen), to hearing last minute from certain farms that the crop wasn't available. But the food was beautiful, delicious, and well-appreciated, and the students and staff thoroughly enjoyed their meal. "When people like it, it's all worth it," said Doug.

We appreciate working with Chef Doug, for his interest in student health and for being an advocate for local food. And for his artistry in carving a local apple into a lovely swan!

## Building a New Food System (cont'd from page 4)

ing the bank their investment in the farm would pay off and it was encouraging. The next hearing is in December.

Why would Tilt be willing to testify for someone she's just getting to know? "We cannot afford to lose these kinds of people," she said. "They already have the skills and experience of farming. Those of us who have never farmed have no idea of what it takes. Over the last seven years, I've been buying crops directly from farmers and have had a glimpse of their reality. It's been quite eye-opening for me. Farming is risky business. There is no way to control the weather and the weather has been particularly erratic in the last ten years. Competition from the international marketplace can all of a sudden force farmers to radically drop their price, or prohibit them from growing certain crops which can be grown at a much lower cost elsewhere. That basically means that workers in other countries are paid ridiculously low wages."

Farmers here – and internationally – have no control over the price they get for their crops, either. That's determined by market forces well beyond their reach. For example, while the price of bread has risen steadily over the decades, farmers have seen very little increase in the price they get for the wheat it's made from. Who is making all that profit?

### The Plan

The plan for A2R melds new crops with some familiar to Robinson and Lindsey. Some will be grown conventionally (with chemicals) while others will begin the transitioning process to organically-grown. The latter will be hard red and soft white wheats, drying beans (depending on spring weather) and sunflowers for seed. Thirty to sixty acres will be planted in flax for seed, making A2R the largest flax grower in the Valley. Flax was once a common crop here, used mainly to make linen before synthetic fibers became the norm. Clover, grown for seed (with the added bonus of restoring nitrogen to the soil) will be tucked in wherever it will fit. Spring-planted oats, which they've grown for years as a rotation crop, will be grown conventionally and be their second-largest crop behind soft white wheat. "We still plan to have some rye grass for one simple reason," Lindsey said. "It will grow where other crops will not – in wet, marginal ground unsuitable for wheat and other potentially more valuable crops."

The challenges for farmers transitioning to organically-grown are weeds (grass seed crops are graded according to weed seed content and priced accordingly so it's difficult for such farmers to tolerate them), seeds (sourcing good varieties for this climate) and finding markets with good prices. Finally, cleaning the fields at the end of harvest without chemicals will be tough. "Anyone who has grown grass seed will tell you it's extremely difficult to eradicate from a field without the use of herbicides," Lindsey said. What was once a lucrative crop becomes a noxious weed.

The good news is that Lindsey and Robinson won't need to reinvest in lots of new equipment. Most of the crops in A2R's new plan can be grown and processed with existing equipment, often with the same process used for grass seed.

### Fair Trade at Home

Hummingbird Wholesale, the Willamette Valley Bean & Grain Project and many consumers want to see fair trade extended to our local farmers too. But collaborating directly with farms like A2R is just the first step. Much work remains to establish an efficient storage and distribution system throughout the entire Ten Rivers food shed – and in every community nationwide. The knowledge and experience of businesses like Hummingbird and A2R can help get us there by risking collaboration in such trying times.

Consumers can help the process by seeking out new opportunities to buy from local farms, either through established routes such as farmers' markets and stores that innovative wholesalers such as Hummingbird supply, or new routes, such as collaborative CSAs, directly from the farm, or on-line purchases in newly-emerging "virtual" markets.

Challenging times create unlikely partnerships and spawn innovation. We consumers are as instrumental to the success of farms like A2R as the weather, the soil and businesses such as Hummingbird Wholesale. Our health and the health of our community depend on it.

## Hummingbird Wholesale

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## Bird Food

### Lisa's Pumpkin or Yam Bread

(Adapted from Bluebird Farm recipe)

- \* 1 1/2 Cups Emmer Flour
- \* 1/2 tsp. Sea Salt
- \* 1 Cup Palm Sugar or Sucanat
- \* 1 tsp. Baking Soda
- \* 1 Cup Pumpkin or Yam Puree  
(cook and mix pumpkin & puree  
in blender)
- \* 1/2 Cup Melted Butter
- \* 2 Eggs Beaten
- \* 1/4 Cup Water
- \* 1 tsp cinnamon
- \* 1/4 tsp. Allspice
- \* 1/4 tsp. Cloves
- \* 1/4 tsp Nutmeg
- \* 1/2 Cup Chopped Nuts (Optional)

Preheat oven to 350. Melt butter. Mix flour, salt, sugar & baking soda. In separate bowl combine pumpkin or yam puree, butter, eggs, water, & spices. Pour wet ingredients into flour mixture; mix just until combined – don't over stir. Fold in nuts. Pour into a well buttered 9x5x3 inch loaf pan, bake 50-60 min until done in the middle. Remove from pan, cool on a rack. Keep wrapped in refrigerator. Serve with cream cheese & chopped walnuts.

## OUR MISSION

WE ENDEAVOR TO SERVE PEOPLE AND THE PLANET BY PROVIDING THE HIGHEST QUALITY, MOST NUTRITIOUS FOODS, GROWN AS LOCALLY AND SUSTAINABLY AS POSSIBLE, TO NOURISH BODY, MIND AND SOUL.

- ◆ WE STRIVE FOR MAXIMUM BENEFIT FOR CUSTOMERS AND FARMERS, MINIMUM PACKAGING AND WASTE, AND GREAT FOOD FOR LIVING.
- ◆ WE VALUE LONG TERM RELATIONSHIPS WITH CUSTOMERS AND VENDORS, MEETING NEEDS WITH RELIABILITY, CARE AND PRIDE.
- ◆ WE PRACTICE PRINCIPLES OF ECOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE OPERATION OF OUR BUSINESS.
- ◆ LIKE THE HUMMINGBIRD, WE SEEK TO SIP THE NECTAR OF THE EARTH WITHOUT HARMING THE FLOWER. WE ARE HAPPY TO SERVE YOU!

### Injera – Ethiopian Flatbread

"Adopt the pace of nature: her secret is patience."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

1 cup freshly-ground Teff flour  
1.5 cups water  
1 tsp salt

Mix flour and water together in a large bowl. Cover with a towel for 24 to 36 hours in a warm room. As the mixture settles, carefully pour off the excess water from the top.

Add 1/2 tsp. salt and stir. Pour 1/2 cup batter onto a medium hot skillet and cook for approximately 5-7 minutes. Holes will appear on the surface of the bread, and the surface will begin to dry and crack slightly. Although the injera will resemble a pancake, do not attempt to flip it. Be patient and allow the surface of the bread to dry completely, then carefully remove from the pan and let cool. Makes 4 injeras.

Suggested Toppings: Lentils, Mung Dal, Split Peas, Stew-like meat dishes.