

Here's What It Looks Like When Tinder Meets the Local Food Movement

Agrilicious wants to help you set up a hot date with your local farmers.

By Sarah McColl

Where do the worlds of online dating and small farms overlap? Not with Tinder dates at the farmers market—at least not in this instance. Tech veterans Duane Dahl and Cindy Henry first partnered to help daters find what they were looking for on Perfect Match. Now they want to connect farmers and consumers over, say, a ripe Brandywine tomato—equally swoon-worthy. Their website, Agrilicious, wants to connect users with their local ag economy, and they want to make it click-of-the-mouse easy.



The goal for a site devoted to all things local food, Dahl explained, is to make mainstream a widespread yet fragmented conversation happening at kitchen tables, in corner breakfast joints, and at white tablecloth paeans to fine dining: Where did our food come from?

“Online there just didn’t seem to be a hub for that discussion to take place,” Dahl said. “This isn’t just people from Portland, Oregon, who want to eat granola and feel good about themselves,” he said. “This is everyone.”

Dahl knew he wanted to leverage his Internet experience to help the farming community after taking a road trip turned pilgrimage through Iowa.

“I’m Joe Nobody, some Internet guy who is in the middle of nowhere having a conversation with a farmer,” Dahl said, but seeing the endless labor farmers invest to produce crops was revelatory. “The appreciation that you get—it’s hard to put into words. It was unbelievable. I came home from that really feeling like we needed to help.”

Since its launch in late April, Agrilicious reports seeing growth in its target user demographic: people between 18 and 49 with annual household incomes of \$75,000. But it is also seeing significant traffic in regions across the country among households with annual incomes of \$30,000. Its role is, in part, to democratize the local food movement.

GeekWire calls Agrilicious a matchmaker for local foods (wink, wink), a company with a business model that is part Angie’s List and part Etsy. Listings alone will not attract a mainstream audience, Dahl pointed out. So in much the same way that Etsy has created stories around featured designers and artisans, Agrilicious hosts a video series, *In Search of Food*, and has further plans to build an editorial component through a series of blogs. The end goal is always to connect the person behind the screen to a farmer or local food source.

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In that way, Dahl sees Agrilicious as an Internet megaphone for farmers, food hubs, and CSAs, through which his team's behind-the-curtain experience with keywords, page rank, and SEO can help a farmer sell a dozen ears of corn or a bushel of apples.

“What we really want to do is create more opportunity for the local farmer by giving them a much larger stage,” Dahl said. Since the site launched, he has heard from farmers who are starting to see traction with Agrilicious after years of running their own websites without generating a sale. “The thing that excites all of us is getting emails and phone calls from farmers who say, ‘Thanks for helping us. Thanks for getting me that call from that local guy who never called me before,’ ” Dahl said. In this way, Agrilicious hopes to solve what can be one of the biggest hurdles for small farmers: getting their names and message to consumers. After working long hours in the fields, what small-scale food producers have time for publicity?

This mission is part of what qualifies Agrilicious as a social-purpose corporation, a form of for-profit incorporation available in Washington state that supports socially responsible businesses and gives them the flexibility to pursue missions beyond profit. “More and more entrepreneurs want to run their business differently,” Seattle attorney Drew Markham told Bloomberg Businessweek. “They understand they want to do more for their community, they need to do more for the environment, they need to do more for their employees.”

Can mainstream awareness about local food economies change the larger corporate food systems, and can those with bookmark-heavy Internet browsers make one more daily stop? Dahl hopes so. But he also just wants people to close their laptops and go stand in a field for an afternoon.

“A lot of us don't realize within 20, 30, 40 miles of where we live, there's a farm,” he says. “Just take your kids out there. It's such a great and positive experience to engage with these folks who are working tirelessly to support us.”

Then swoon, together, over some Brandywines.

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