

Tech startups create virtual farmers markets (Update)

December 22 2013, by Terence Chea



In this Dec. 19, 2013, Ian Kizu-Blair, with Farmgirl Flowers, drops off a shipment to the Good Eggs warehouse in San Francisco. New online services are letting consumers buy fruits, vegetables, meats and artisan foods directly from local farmers and producers. Buyers can have their orders delivered or retrieve them at local pickup spots. These virtual farmers markets are changing the way people buy groceries and creating new markets for small farmers, ranchers, bakers and other food makers. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

Sara Pasquinelli doesn't shop at the grocery store much anymore. The busy mother of two young boys buys nearly all her food from a new online service that delivers to her front door—but it doesn't bring just any food.

The emerging tech startup specializes in dropping off items that Pasquinelli probably would only be able to find at her local farmers market.

Minutes after her weekly GoodEggs.com order arrived at her San Francisco home, Pasquinelli unpacked bags and boxes of finger limes, organic whole milk, kiwi fruit, beef short ribs, Dungeness crab and pasture-raised eggs.

"I don't even remember the last time I went to the store for anything other than bananas and string cheese," said Pasquinelli, an attorney who started using the service about a year ago.

The San Francisco-based Good Eggs is among a new crop of startups using technology to bolster the market for locally produced foods that backers say are better for consumer health, farmworkers, livestock and the environment. These online marketplaces are beginning to change the way people buy groceries and create new markets for small farmers and food makers.

"It's a new way of connecting producers with consumers," said Claire Kremen, a conservation biology professor at the University of California, Berkeley. "The more alternatives people have access to for buying food outside the industrial agricultural regime, the better it can be."

The Good Eggs website features attractive photos of offerings such as Hachiya persimmons, chanterelle mushrooms, grass-fed beef steaks,

pureed baby food and gluten-free poppy seed baguettes. It also has pictures and descriptions of the farmers and food makers. Prices are similar to what shoppers pay at a farmers market, and customers can pick up their orders at designated locations or have them delivered for \$3.99—usually two days after they're placed.



In this Dec. 18, 2013 photo, Good Eggs community dispatcher Vanessa Casey, right, hands an order to a Financial District customer in San Francisco. New online services are letting consumers buy fruits, vegetables, meats and artisan foods directly from local farmers and producers. Buyers can have their orders delivered or retrieve them at local pickup spots. These virtual farmers markets are changing the way people buy groceries and creating new markets for small farmers, ranchers, bakers and other food makers. San Francisco-based Good Eggs has built a fast-growing business connecting foodies and farmers in Northern California. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

"There's this wave of entrepreneurship and creativity happening in the food world, and Good Eggs is all about bringing that high-quality production right to your door," said CEO Rob Spiro, who co-founded the startup after he sold his last company, a social search service called Aardvark, to Google Inc. for \$50 million in 2010.

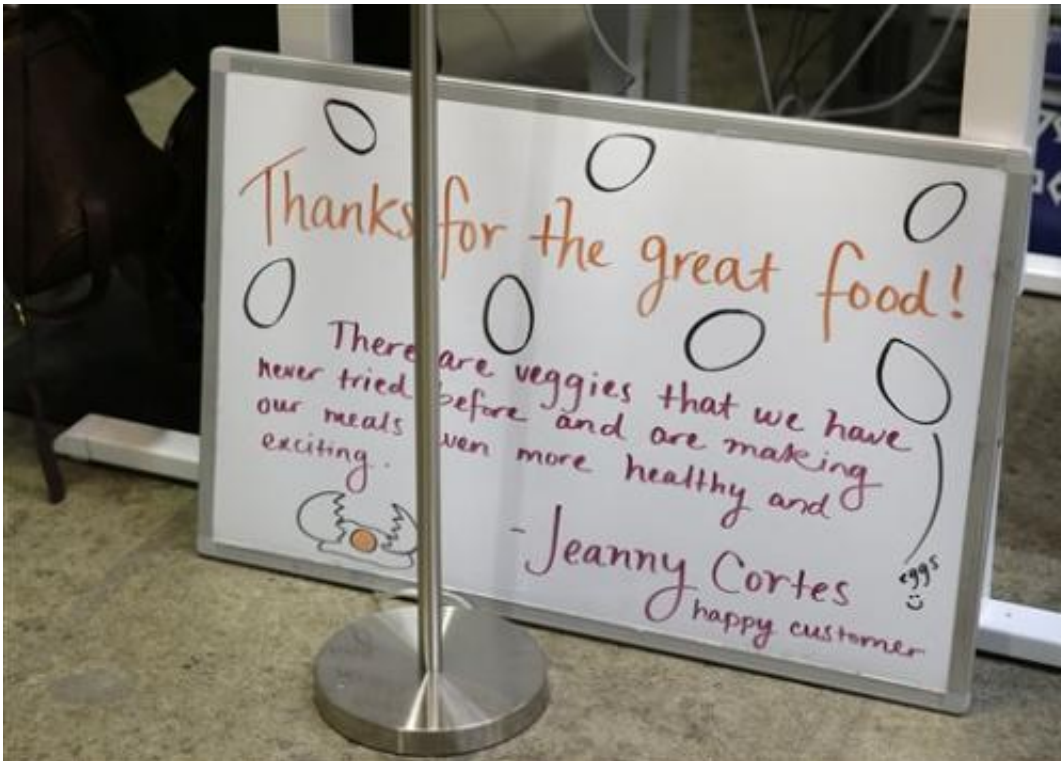
Good Eggs offers more varieties of fruits and vegetables than most supermarkets, but the selection is limited to what can be grown and made locally, so you can't buy bananas in San Francisco in December.



In this Dec. 19, 2013 photo, Jesse Hayter, front, and Josh Greenfield fill customer's order bins at the Good Eggs warehouse in San Francisco. New online services are letting consumers buy fruits, vegetables, meats and artisan foods directly from local farmers and producers. Buyers can have their orders delivered or retrieve them at local pickup spots. These virtual farmers markets are changing the way people buy groceries and creating new markets for small farmers, ranchers, bakers and other food makers. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

The service started in the San Francisco Bay Area last year and recently launched in New York, Los Angeles and New Orleans. There are plans to expand into more markets next year.

The founders, Silicon Valley engineers, say they want to grow the market for local food that's led to the proliferation of farmers markets and community-supported agriculture programs that deliver boxes of fresh fruits and vegetables.



This Dec. 19, 2013, photo shows a thank you note from a customer at the Good Eggs warehouse in San Francisco. New online services are letting consumers buy fruits, vegetables, meats and artisan foods directly from local farmers and producers. Buyers can have their orders delivered or retrieve them at local pickup spots. These virtual farmers markets are changing the way people buy groceries and creating new markets for small farmers, ranchers, bakers and other food makers. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

"There are a lot of people out there who want to eat locally, who want to support their local community, who want to support the producers who are doing things right, but it's just not very convenient," said Chief Technology Officer Alon Salant, who ran a software consulting firm before starting Good Eggs with Spiro.



In this Dec. 19, 2013 photo, a thermometer checks the temperature of an incoming shipment of gluten-free soul food from Grease Box at the Good Eggs warehouse in San Francisco. New online services are letting consumers buy fruits, vegetables, meats and artisan foods directly from local farmers and producers. Buyers can have their orders delivered or retrieve them at local pickup spots. These virtual farmers markets are changing the way people buy groceries and creating new markets for small farmers, ranchers, bakers and other food makers. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

The company is entering an increasingly competitive market for online

grocery delivery. Major retailers such as Walmart and Safeway deliver groceries and Amazon launched its AmazonFresh service in San Francisco this month. Another San Francisco startup called Instacart allows customers to order groceries from local supermarkets and delivers in as little as an hour.

Good Eggs currently sells food from about 400 local producers that meet the company's standards for environmental sustainability, workplace conditions and transparent sourcing of ingredients. Produce is usually picked one or two days before it's delivered.



In this Dec. 19, 2013, Travis Jackson, of Dirty Girl Produce, in Santa Cruz, Calif., delivers a shipment to the Good Eggs warehouse in San Francisco. New online services are letting consumers buy fruits, vegetables, meats and artisan foods directly from local farmers and producers. Buyers can have their orders delivered or retrieve them at local pickup spots. These virtual farmers markets are changing the way people buy groceries and creating new markets for small farmers, ranchers, bakers and other food makers. San Francisco-based Good

Eggs has built a fast-growing business connecting foodies and farmers in Northern California. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

The startup is helping farmers such as Ryan Casey, who runs a small organic farm that grows more than 50 types of fruits, vegetables and flowers. His Blue House Farm in Pescadero, about 45 miles (72 kilometers) south of San Francisco, mainly sells its produce at farmers markets and through community agriculture programs, but Good Eggs makes up a growing share of its business.



In this Dec. 18, 2013 photo, Good Eggs community dispatcher Vanessa Casey, holds an order to be picked up by a Financial District customer in San Francisco. New online services are letting consumers buy fruits, vegetables, meats and artisan foods directly from local farmers and producers. Buyers can have their orders delivered or retrieve them at local pickup spots. These virtual farmers markets are changing the way people buy groceries and creating new markets for

small farmers, ranchers, bakers and other food makers. San Francisco-based Good Eggs has built a fast-growing business connecting foodies and farmers in Northern California. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

"They're really good at marketing and finding people and connecting people with the food, which leaves me more time to do the growing," said Casey, standing in a field of leafy greens.

Good Eggs has attracted enthusiastic foodies like Shelley Mainzer, who does nearly all her grocery shopping on the website and often emails producers with questions and comments.



In this Dec. 19, 2013 photo, Ian Garrone, of Far West Fungi, delivers an order of mushrooms to the Good Eggs warehouse in San Francisco. New online services are letting consumers buy fruits, vegetables, meats and artisan foods directly from local farmers and producers. Buyers can have their orders delivered or

retrieve them at local pickup spots. These virtual farmers markets are changing the way people buy groceries and creating new markets for small farmers, ranchers, bakers and other food makers. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

After her weekly order arrived at her downtown San Francisco office, she pulled out organic cauliflower and Romanesco broccoli she bought from Blue House Farm.



This Dec. 19, 2013, photo shows customer's order bins before going out for delivery at the Good Eggs warehouse in San Francisco. New online services are letting consumers buy fruits, vegetables, meats and artisan foods directly from local farmers and producers. Buyers can have their orders delivered or retrieve them at local pickup spots. These virtual farmers markets are changing the way people buy groceries and creating new markets for small farmers, ranchers, bakers and other food makers. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

"I can't eat store-bought food anymore because it just doesn't taste the same," said Mainzer, who works as an executive assistant at a small investment bank. "You basically remember what things are supposed to taste like when you eat these fresh vegetables and fruits."

© 2013 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Tech startups create virtual farmers markets (Update) (2013, December 22) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-12-tech-startups-virtual-farmers.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.