Australia Post Decision Opens Road To A New Food Delivery Model

- Open Food Network to launch Open Road non-profit delivery service and food brokerage in Victoria servicing small to medium sized enterprises
- Australia Post announcement to discontinue carriage of perishable food causes national outcry and subsequent reversal decision
- Small to medium sized local producers struggle with logistics and regulations to be reviewed by Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombusdsman

Non-profit organisation Open Food Network Australia is piloting Open Road, a collaborative producer direct delivery service for perishable goods. It's a timely move. When Australia Post announced it "will discontinue the carriage of certain foods destined for consumption", it placed many producers and community run food hubs or co-ops at risk - businesses already vulnerable under the new covid-normal.

Among those affected by Australia Post's now reversed announcement were some of the ten thousand users of Open Food Network Australia's independent online sales services. They guarantee that their low cost, unincorporated model will never be sold nor exposed to radical corporate style changes.

In the last year Australian producers and consumers pivoted to direct and online sales. According to a recent report by KPMG, "the retail industry unlocked and fulfilled five years of online retail growth in just six months." But the Covid-19 pandemic exposed a major vulnerability in our food supply chain - logistics management.

Research by Open Food Network Australia found logistics represent thirty percent of food producers' costs. Sometimes more, as their own hours spent driving are rarely factored. Reliance on Australia Post developed due to courier services or personal delivery being cost prohibitive. Plus state regulations are difficult to navigate. Bruce Billson, Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman will now co-chair an industry working forum on this.

The Open Road to Empowerment

As producers and shops now consider alternative grocery logistics, Open Food Network Australia's trial of Open Road will begin as a delivery service in Victoria, enabling local producers to act independent of corporations. Like their shopping platform this is a low-cost social enterprise with the aim to nurture, educate and empower them.

There are two arms to the plan. The first is moving food in both directions between regional Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne. The second is a brokerage for producers to reach more customers.

Serenity Hill, Open Food Network Co-Founder, "The lynchpin of Open Road are the drivers. Instead of a random driver at both ends of the service there will be a familiar and trusted face. We see the drivers as honeybees, circulating out to collect and connect while servicing food hubs and distribution centres."

Amelia Bright, Open Road Coordinator has deep knowledge of logistics and coordination of deliveries via Prom Coast Food Collective, "I see retailers like local grocers, delis, cafe-provedores, health food stores and bakeries as key players, connecting with others in the state."

The delivery service will begin with a Hume Highway loop working with food hubs including Strathbogie Local, Wangaratta Farmers' Market, and Beechworth Food Co-Op. A South-East loop will work with food hubs including Baw Baw Food Hub and Prom Coast Food Collective. In metro Melbourne the first to join in are Melbourne Farmers' Market Alphington Food Hub and Ceres Fair Food.

If the trial is well subscribed, Open Road will spread to multiple locations. It is envisaged that regionally some producers also participate as temporary warehousing, acting as central pick-up points where there is no local food co-op. Rather than each farmer going it alone, they will be part of a collaborative solution so they're not losing their farming time and can still make a life on the land.

Expressions of Interest are now open to producers, co-ops and retailers and enquiries can be made at openroad@openfoodnetwork.org.au

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About the Open Food Network

Founded in 2012, we're a not-for-profit organisation focused on building a new food system that is fair, local, and transparent.

We believe a sustainable and resilient food system needs to reconnect producers and consumers. We aim to empower people and communities and give them the tools and knowledge to develop the food systems they need for their community.

Our flagship project is an open source software platform that makes it easy for farmers, producers, farmers markets, and other values-aligned enterprises to sell their products online. We also run place-based projects

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that seek to strengthen local food systems by supporting community food enterprises and by creating connections and sharing knowledge amongst producers, eaters and other food sector stakeholders.

We are part of a global network of people and organisations working together to develop open and shared resources, knowledge, and tools to support local food enterprises all over the world.

The Open Food Network community has decades of experience in running innovative food enterprises with social and ecological aims. We know that good food can transform our planet and our society. We also know that making values-driven food enterprise work takes commitment, perseverance, partnerships and support.

Contact:

Serenity Hill
Co-founder, Sector development, Researcher
serenity@openfoodnetwork.org.au

Amelia Bright
Open Road Coordinator
openroad@openfoodnetwork.org.au