

democratherald.com

Volunteer gets the word out on local foods

By Alex Paul, Albany Democrat-Herald | Posted: Monday, December 27, 2010 7:30 am

TANGENT — Linn County residents who want to know more about where they can find locally grown foods now have a resource at the Ten Rivers Food Web website, www.tenriversfoodweb.org.

Chicago area native Spencer Masterson, who is spending 11 months in the area as an AmeriCorps RARE volunteer, is writing a blog dedicated to connecting farmers with consumers.

According to its website, the “Ten Rivers Food Web supports, educates and organizes farmers, processors, buyers, retailers and individuals to increase and diversify local food acreage, promote local food processing and expand access to affordable and nutritious foods.”

“What I’m hearing is that folks in Sweet Home don’t know what’s going on in Brownsville, or people in Halsey don’t know what’s going on in Lebanon in terms of local food resources,” Masterson said.

Masterson said he is completing a Community Food Assessment with guidance from the Oregon Food Bank as part of his work here.

“There are a lot of people in the area who want a common source to go to when it comes to local food availability,” Masterson said. “They want to learn what’s going on in their area. I hope to update the blog weekly, but I’m not sure if I will get that done.”

Masterson recently volunteered to help when the YMCA in Albany added a community garden. He posted a photo and story about the event.

“I want to write some profiles about local farmers,” Masterson said.

Masterson, 24, has a degree in agriculture and consumer economics from the University of Illinois-Urbana; he spent a semester in Thailand.

“We did a lot of service learning work with farmers,” Masterson said. “I learned a lot about environmental issues and development and realized that I knew more about Thailand than I did about some areas of my own country. I realized I wanted to learn more about the issues facing disadvantaged folks in my country and that’s why I turned toward AmeriCorps.”

Masterson also spent a couple months working with the Worldwide Organization of Organic Farmers in Chile and Brazil.

“The program places volunteers with farmers who need some help in return for room and board,” Masterson said.

“I worked in the fruit and vegetable processing company. I went to area farms to talk to encourage them to use good farm practices such only using correct amounts of fertilizer, or to ensure they treat employees correctly.”

Masterson came to Oregon in September.

“From a consumer’s standpoint, I hope we can improve access to healthy foods grown locally, especially for low-income families,” Masterson said.

Masterson’s effort will be focused on Linn County. Another volunteer is working on a similar project in Lincoln County.

Masterson, who is working out of the USDA office in Tangent, hopes to host a community food workshop in January or February and welcomes input from the public.

He can be contacted at 541-602-7279 or spencer@tenriversfoodweb.org.