Local-food activist makes the farm-bike-sailboat connection

Contributed by Elly Blue, BikePortland
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Jan Lundberg moved to Portland a year ago because it seemed like the best place to pursue his intersecting passions for food security, peak oil, bicycles, and sailing.

These passions will be coming to fruition later this month when the oil analyst's brainchild, the Sail Transport Network, will launch into its first major, ongoing local venture. Lundberg is finalizing plans to deliver malted grain from Vancouver, Washington to a brewery further down the Columbia River by a combination of cargo bike and sailboat.

The next phase in the project will be to use the same bike-boat combination to deliver the finished product — bottles and kegs of beer — to Portland markets. (Lundberg asked that we not name the brewery until the plan is finalized.)

Lundberg intends this partnership to be the seed of a radical change in the way we transport — and think about — food.

"Just taking care of a brewery and being able to distribute some beer is not really food security," he told us over the phone. "But what you can do is add on to this existing system with more farms, more bike carts, more sailboats, and more CSA subscribers — and that's the way it grows."

"People want to eat local, right? Well how's that food getting to them? It's being trucked from Corvallis and Richland … it's just kind of all over the map. There are farms on Sauvie Island, and there are community gardens and backyard gardens and Food Not Lawns. All this has to be integrated. We've demonstrated this before, but we want to make it a regular feature."

Lundberg has made this connection before, in his past home of Humboldt County, California, with the organization Pedal Powered Produce, and with several smaller projects in the Puget Sound.
Loading peas from cargo bike to sailboat
on Sauvie Island last summer.

When he first moved to Portland a year ago he quickly connected with food and localization activists at the City Repair Project and helped to organize food delivery for their annual conference last June, the Village Building Convergence. He joined a team of volunteers who delivered 60% of the food for meals during the event by bicycle, and Lundberg arranged sailboat and bike delivery of a load of produce from Kruger's Farm on Sauvie Island. He hopes that next year's event will feature even more local food delivered via the waterways.

The goal, he says, is to get as much food as possible directly from farms to consumers, without intermediaries that include shipments by truck. He's hoping to move away from motorized transportation — last week, he removed the motor from his sailboat, making it entirely wind-powered.

Lundberg says he's currently focusing on building up the Sail Transport Network by connecting with everyone he can. He's seeking donated cargo bikes and trailers that can be kept at the various docks where he ports; he also is looking for potential partners — farmers, consumers, sailors, gardeners, bike delivery people, restaurants, breweries, and anyone with ideas and energy. "All we need is more people to plug in to participate."

"There's not a lot of money for this kind of work — you just have to do it yourself," he said. "It's not a boondoggle or a structure, it's like — Hey, join in the fun."

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