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Buying local just got easier as food sales grow online

Premium content from Baltimore Business Journal by Sarah Meehan, Reporter

Date: Friday, October 26, 2012, 6:00am EDT



Sarah Meehan

Reporter- *Baltimore Business Journal*

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Marylanders' desire to buy local food — even cookies — without leaving home is opening up lots of opportunities for online food companies.

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Farms are expanding their reach in the state to meet a growing demand for convenient locally grown or made food

“There is a distrust of large business and a yearning of consumers to connect to local or small companies and feel like they’re making a difference,” said [Kit Yarrow](#), a consumer psychologist at Golden Gate University in San Francisco.

Yarrow noted CookieRide as an example. [Casey Dyson](#), a Columbia native, launched CookieRide in June. She travels Howard County by scooter selling homemade cookies at family gathering places during the warm months, delivers orders year round and donates the extras to the Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center.

Yarrow expects more people to try Dyson’s model.

Buying food and drinks online is still a young concept — Internet sales of packaged goods only accounted for 1.2 percent of total sales from supermarkets, mass merchandisers and convenience stores nationwide in 2011, according to a September report by Hartman Group, a Bellevue, Wash., research firm. But IBISWorld, a Santa Monica, Calif., research firm, predicts online grocery sales will grow 9.5 percent annually and become a \$9.4 billion industry by 2017.

So far, food delivery in Maryland has been dominated by the big guys — Safeway.com and Peapod, a Giant affiliate. They pose the biggest competition to growing food services.

Among the newcomers is Friends and Farms, which touts a commitment to providing local, sustainable food. Friends and Farms, another Columbia company founded in June, prepares weekly baskets that contain about three meals’ worth of food. The company sources fresh meat, produce and dairy from about 70 farmers and fishermen in the mid-Atlantic, and the food arrives to customers within 24 to 48 hours of being harvested.

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Sarah covers hospitality/tourism, minority business, marketing and new media

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Dan,

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