

Agency for Change Podcast: Wayne McIntyre, Co-Founder and CEO, Relocalize

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Wayne McIntyre: 0:01

Ideas are common, execution is rare.

Announcer: 0:07

Welcome to Agency for Change, a podcast from KidGlov that brings you the stories of changemakers who are actively working to improve our communities. In every episode, we'll meet with people who are making a lasting impact in the places we call home.

Lyn Wineman: 0:30

Hey everyone, this is Lyn Wineman, president of KidGlov. Welcome back to the Agency for Change podcast. So it is October and we are in the time of pumpkin spice and apple pie and everything good, so what a perfect time to talk about the food supply chain, right? So today we are welcoming Wayne McIntyre, the Co-Founder and CEO of a startup called Relocalize. Their mission is to decentralize and decarbonize food production, significantly cutting down its environmental footprint while, at the same time, ensuring a fresher, more accessible product to consumers. So I think this is going to be really interesting and we are going to learn a bit more about hyperlocal manufacturing. All right, Wayne, welcome to the podcast.

Wayne McIntyre: 1:30

Thanks, Lyn, really excited to be here to talk about transforming food supply chains.

Lyn Wineman: 1:35

Oh yeah, transforming the food supply chain. I mean, really you are doing some interesting stuff and could you just start by giving us a really high level overview of Relocalize?

Wayne McIntyre: 1:48

Absolutely so, Lyn, we're trying to think about supply chains differently.

Lyn Wineman: 1:54

Okay, Wayne, I'm going to stop you right there, because probably not a lot of our listeners think about supply chains at all right, and so you're kind of just bringing this into our consciousness, but you think about supply chains all the time.

Wayne McIntyre: 2:06

Probably a little bit too much. Absolutely, yeah. When we talk about a food supply chain, right, that's all the things that happen from manufacturing, distribution, trucking, retailer, it's that whole chain that goes right from where the food is produced to the consumer at the end of the day, and that chain is really complicated, yeah, and it's very expensive and it's also very carbon intensive.

As you can imagine, think of all those trucks we see on the road and a very large percentage of them are food trucks or delivery trucks or long-haul transportation of products from California to, say, the east coast. Our vision at Relocalize is to hyper localize production. That means have little factories all over North America. That mean you don't need to do all that trucking, that complexity, and you get rid of the carbon if you're not driving all over the place on trucks.

Lyn Wineman: 3:06

Yeah, I appreciate that because you know, in the intro Wayne we said that you are focusing on decentralizing and decarbonizing food supply chains on a broad scale, so can you tell us more about how that works?

Wayne McIntyre: 3:21

That's a bit of a mouthful, isn't it? A lot of big words, but really, at the end of the day, what that means is, if you have a small factory and it sits right at a distribution center, what normally would happen is that food is made in one place, ingredients come from another place. It then goes on a truck, it sits in a distribution center or cold storage warehouse and then goes to another distribution center for the grocer and finally then goes to the stores. If you can make food right at a distribution center, all those chains go away. Everything happens in just one place, and what that means is you can be much more local, serve a community instead of serving a whole country or a whole region from a factory, and that means that you can have products that are unique and specific to that particular geography. But, most importantly, it means you're not having to truck food all over North America, which means away go all those carbon emissions that are associated with trucking.

Lyn Wineman: 4:24

Wow, that makes a lot of sense to me, Wayne, but can you tell me more? How does it work? How small are these manufacturing plants? I'm just really curious about how this all works.

Wayne McIntyre: 4:38

So the first product we're doing it for is packaged ice. Okay, so we're focused actually initially on products made of water, and the reason is really simple they're very heavy and they're the most expensive products to ship. That's why Elon Musk and Tesla are focused on partnering with Pepsi for the launch of their electric semi-tractor trailer truck.

We're doing the same thing. We're focused on products made of water as well. We're focused on ice first because it's the most expensive and the heaviest of the products that you need to ship. But ultimately we have a factory that is under 1,500 square feet. It has robots in it instead of people. Our people have a centralized command and control center, so there are no people on site and inside that factory just everything a large factory would do. You know, it's 1/20th the size and it produces 1/20th as much as, say, a traditional or conventional ICE factory. But it does it all on site with no people at all right at that distribution center. So you get rid of the truck completely. Whether it's Elon Musk's semi, electric semi or a traditional tractor trailer truck, they're gone.

Lyn Wineman: 5:50

Wow, this is fascinating. So you start with ice and then, once you're successful with ice, then you can start thinking about all kinds of things, right?

Wayne McIntyre: 6:02

We're really focused on that beverage category right now because it's so heavy and carbon intensive. But, believe it or not, ice is a multi-billion dollar market.

Lyn Wineman: 6:12

Really, you just don't think about it at all, right yeah?

Wayne McIntyre: 6:17

But we see ourselves starting in ice for a whole bunch of reasons. I'm happy to tell you about those if you have any questions. But we're starting with ice for a bunch of reasons. Most importantly, it's the most carbon intensive. Then we see bottled water and beverage is our future. This is a multi-trillion dollar market but most importantly to us, it is a huge category when it comes to carbon emissions. So I don't know most people don't realize that our food system is responsible for about 3.4 gigatons of carbon equivalent emissions each and every year. That piece of the food system that involves distribution trucks, manufacturing and retailing just that part, and that's a big number. What does that number mean?

Lyn Wineman: 6:58

Right, it's almost too big to kind of even fathom Wayne.

Wayne McIntyre: 7:02

It's just a number, so we can put it into something relative. It is significantly larger than the entire commercial aviation sector. It's actually three times as much. So just that part of the food chain, our food system that we're trying to impact, is a huge carbon emitter, and beverages are the worst because they're so heavy. So it's the best place for us to focus from an impact perspective as well as from an economic perspective, so we can have a win-win for our country.

Lyn Wineman: 7:33

You're blowing my mind a little bit, because I think, when a lot of us think of carbon footprint, we do think of airlines, right? We don't think of ice and bottled water and soda and all those energy drinks, all the things that line the wall of the quick shop. You're looking to someday hyper-localize. That's pretty cool, Wayne. So Wayne, can you go a little bit deeper then on the impact of hyper-local manufacturing on transforming food systems?

Wayne McIntyre: 8:07

Yes. So if you think about a food system, right, it's thousands of chains, all those products you see on a shelf, right, they're all coming from different places, mostly regional or centralized, sometimes even international scale factors, right, and they're really complicated, as we found out during COVID, these types of systems are complicated, they're complex, they have a whole lot of players and when they get disrupted, products go missing, shelves are empty and there's a whole lot of risk in that supply chain. So all that complexity, all those players, all those trucks, it's really a web of complexity. So that's the first. The second part is there is a whole lot of consumption that goes on in that process, whether it be wrapping and unwrapping pallets, whether it be trucking, whether it be food waste and in some categories of food, food waste can get up to almost 50% and so there's so much waste and complexity and cost in that system that if you can actually get rid of that complexity right, so it's not actually a micro factory right at the distribution center. If you can get rid of the trucks, there go a lot of costs, there go a lot of complexity as well.

What you end up with is not a food chain but a supply system, and it's all in one place. But what's more, it's a network. So just imagine ice for a second. We're going to be deploying about 3,000 micro factories across North America just for ice, and so if one of those factories goes down or there's a big storm that you know, let's say in Florida and a portion of Florida can't get, you know, products from that area because they can't be produced, well, the rest of the network picks up the slack.

And for ice, this is a great example, because ice is an essential service during a hurricane. This is how people keep their food fresh, so their food doesn't go bad. It's really an absolute need in an emergency situation. When you have a distributed network of production, it doesn't matter when a few parts of that network go down. The rest could pick up the slack. What you end up with is a greener and better and more secure supply chain. It's just a more resilient, less complicated, less expensive in some cases not all cases less expensive and definitely more sustainable.

Lyn Wineman: 10:22

I love that. So, Wayne, how does someone like you get involved in this line of work? Were you on the playground as an eight-year-old saying I'm going to relocalize the food supply chain?

Wayne McIntyre: 10:36

I'm a nature lover. I'm happiest when I'm hundreds of kilometers away from any other human being in nature, and this is really right. From a very, very young age, both of strong interest in biology, ecology, sustainability. I remember studying believe it or not global warming back in the 80s that's really old science, believe it or not and for many years this was just something I did on the side of my desk. I've been in the tech industry for more than 20 years. My personal passion for sustainability was something I got involved in not-for-profits, other areas.

I'm personally carbon negative. I'm rewilding a 100-acre property, but these were all personal activities. And then I'd go to work and I'd work for my tech companies and really at this stage of my life, I was looking for an opportunity to have my personal passions impact aligned 100% with my professional goals, and not that the other companies I was involved with weren't making impact, but really they weren't decarbonizing, and that's really my passion. Now I have three children. I'll leave the world a better place when my time comes to an end and I think Relocalize really exists to actually prove that it's possible to have a sustainable business economically while delivering massive impact and decarbonization.

Lyn Wineman: 11:58

Wayne, I love hearing that, you hear more and more people since the pandemic who are saying I want my life and my work to stand for something. I don't want it to just be going in and trading for the paycheck. And your story is inspiring and you're doing it and you know another thing that I've seen here in your background information is that you've won something called the ABB Sustainability Prize and I know that's a huge achievement. Can you tell everybody what that means and kind of how that has influenced your work at Relocalize?

Wayne McIntyre: 12:35

We've been really fortunate to have partners and people in the industry champion us, and I think we've come at this from a purpose perspective. We're driving change and we believe in that change and I think that's contagious right.

And it's been noticed that ABB is the world's largest supplier of industrial robotics. They're a key partner for us and really we're making them part of that sustainability equation too. We replace trucks with robots and I think that's something that gets them excited as well, and when we have that kind of recognition, it's a positive feedback loop. It really helps us quite a lot as well, because when you have major players with that kind of credibility involved in your business, it makes it much easier when you're raising capital or trying to convince an investor that, hey, why should you put your money here instead of there? Why should you help us decarbonize when you could be I don't know, developing the next social media application. You know, these kinds of support energizes our team but also lends us some additional credibility that helps us drive forward with our mission. So we're really thankful and appreciative of all these, as well as the trade magazines, and we won Progressive Grocer. We were one of the editor picks for product of the year for sustainability.

Lyn Wineman: 13:59

Congratulations.

Wayne McIntyre: 14:01

Thanks and we're just so excited and grateful that people are seeing the mission and helping us promote that vision for a hyperlocal decarbonized food system.

Lyn Wineman: 14:13

I love it, Wayne. So you mentioned partnerships. I'm curious. I'm assuming partnerships must play a key role in doing this work and meeting the sustainability objectives.

Wayne McIntyre: 14:26

Partnerships are critical. They're critical for learning because, again, we're a small, young startup right, trying to make a big impact, and you can have great partners that have tons of industry expertise, like Southeastern Grocers. They're our launch partner for our first micro factory. Here's a grocery retailer with the vision to try something new, take a risk. Nobody's ever done this before making food at a distribution center. Okay, you know. I mean, you have a partner like that, one that gives you a chance to really road test your innovation. But what it also does is it gives you a chance to really road test your innovation. But what it also does is it gives you a chance to learn from all those experts from inside the organization.

Southeastern Grocers or our other partners. That's what they bring to us. They don't just bring money, they don't just bring, maybe, a customer, an agreement or a contract. They're bringing their brains. They're bringing their hearts and they're bringing their credibility to the table as well, which, again, is something you need if you want to bring, you know, affect a massive change.

Lyn Wineman: 15:33

All of those things are very important. So, Wayne, so many exciting things happening. What's ahead, what's next for you?

Wayne McIntyre: 15:38

We completed our proof of concept factory and so proved it's possible and it's pretty exciting, you know. In that case, compared to the product we were replacing, we're talking about north of a 90 transportation carbon footprint reduction.

Right at the same, the same time, we're delivering cost savings, and this is really why we focused on this sector in particular. Right, ice is a lunch, except for during hurricanes, and you know. There are other places we put our attention, but when we think about ice and beverage, you need to meet customers where they are, and this is a place where it works, where you can bring both economic results and sustainability results at the same time, and we believe that's how you affect change by showing people that it's possible, and so our proof of concept has done that. The next big step for us is launching a full-scale micro factory, which is we haven't announced it yet, but it'll be coming very soon one that will be able to serve more than 100 stores and really transform an entire community source for at least one category of products packaged ice.

Lyn Wineman: 16:48

So, Wayne, just to bring this down to the level of just your average person, what insights or advice do you have for our listeners who are interested in sustainable food practices? Is there anything we can do?

Wayne McIntyre: 17:12

Absolutely. It all comes down to the consumer. At the end of the day, the choices we make, the places where we put our dollars and cents, are so important. Right, everything comes down to the market, everything comes down to the consumer. So I think my advice would be if you're a consumer who's passionate I mean, there's so much greenwashing and noise out- there.

Lyn Wineman: 17:38

Sometimes it's frustrating because you don't really know right. You don't really know what's real.

Wayne McIntyre: 17:43

Absolutely, but I'd say my advice would be power through it. I mean, power through that challenge and I think I would say, support as many companies that are doing their best. I mean, nobody's perfect, right, we still have to use plastic in our product. We hate plastic. It's something we need to do. Find those organizations that are trying to do better and, I think, support them. Support them if you're a consumer, by buying their products. If you are another entrepreneur out there who's looking for their next big idea Our ideas are free, right? Take an idea of whether it be ours or somebody else's or your own, and maybe step in and actually build a company of your own. Or just do what you can in your own environment, right, try to buy products that have less packaging. Try to compost or other things. Everybody can take action based on you, based on where they are in their personal situation. Sustainability is something we can all do something about.

Lyn Wineman: 18:46

Wayne, I really love that. I think that is great advice for people. I think one thing I've noticed about talking to entrepreneurs who are in a purpose-driven space is they're very willing to share ideas and resources with others who are solving the big problems right, and I think there's a generosity of spirit in this space that you just demonstrated as well. So, Wayne, I'm going to put you on the hot seat next. You might need some ice for this one. I'm just kidding.

So there's one question we've asked. On every episode of the Agency for Change podcast, I am inspired by motivational quotes and I'm wondering if you could give us a few of your own words of wisdom to inspire our listeners.

Wayne McIntyre: 19:41

Yeah, I have one and actually it connects really well to what we were just talking about. This is a quote that actually I engraved on my first iPad that I bought back in 2010. You know, you could get that option where you can put something on the you know engraved on it for free. On the back of that iPad was ideas are common, execution is rare.

Lyn Wineman: 20:05

Ooh, I love it. You know most of us just engraved our names on our iPads, but I like that. Ideas are common. Execution is rare, and you are in that execution stage right now with Relocalize, I know. So, as we wrap up this great conversation today such interesting stuff about the food chain supply what would

you say is the most important thing you would like our listeners to remember, Wayne, about the work that you're doing?

Wayne McIntyre: 20:36

I'm going to come back to that. Ideas are common idea again and I think the most important thing is it's going to take change at a massive scale.

And you know, the hard part is not the talking about it. The hard part is not the thinking about it, the idea is. The hard part is doing something about it. It's that right in your sleeves and taking action. And so I mean, if anybody has this idea of decentralizing manufactured foods, happy to reach out. Anybody wants to connect with me on LinkedIn. I'm happy to share those ideas, right, because I know those ideas are worth very little and hopefully other people can execute on them. We're going to execute on them in products made of water first. Maybe someone else has a way to take some of those ideas and do it somewhere else. And so I think, ultimately I'd say, look, it's a community. I'd leave the idea that, whether it is building a company or buying good products, get out there and take action. Don't talk about it, do something about it. And if we all do that whether it's buying a product or building a company, I'm 100% confident we can deal with the clients.

Lyn Wineman: 21:44

That's amazing, Wayne. Wayne, we're going to make sure we get your LinkedIn connection in the show notes on the KidGlove website. And, for people who want more information on Relocalize, what's the best way for them to find you?

Wayne McIntyre: 21:56

I mean, our website is a great place to start. You can see our micro factory and learn a little bit about what we're doing. And yeah, and I think you know, listening to this podcast and quick Google of Relocalize. You know, quite a lot of what we've put out there in the world will be there, and I'm happy to, of course, answer any questions that people may have.

Lyn Wineman: 22:16

Fantastic. We'll make sure to get that website in the show notes as well. Kudos to you for having a unique name, so people can find you with google too, that's an important thing, Wayne. Wayne, it's just been a pleasure talking with you, learning more about your work. I fully believe the world needs more people like you that are passionate about their cause and do something about it, and more organizations like Relocalize. Thank you for joining me today.

Wayne McIntyre: 22:45

Well, thank you, Lyn, it's been a real pleasure.

Announcer: 22:48

We hope you enjoyed today's Agency for Change podcast. To hear all our interviews with those who are making a positive change in our communities or to nominate a changemaker you'd love to hear from. Visit kidglov.com at K-I-D-G-L-O-V.com to get in touch, as always. If you like what you've heard today, be sure to rate, review, subscribe and share. Thanks for listening and we'll see you next time.