

# Creating a Farm-to-Table Event

## *A Checklist for Extension Agents*



### Event Concept

- ❑ **Authenticity** – Events are more successful if they provide an experience that is tied to the local community or farm that is hosting the event.
- ❑ **Theme** – Determine the focus of the event. For example, are you having a fall harvest festival, a holiday event, or an event to celebrate a particular crop? Music can add both atmosphere and entertainment to the event. Using some natural décor or even equipment to depict the season may add a positive experience.
- ❑ **Cause** – Does your event support a charitable cause? Is your event designed to increase awareness about agriculture, increase agricultural knowledge in your community, or thank the agricultural industry for bringing food to our tables?

### Event Management

- ❑ **Event date** – Determine the date of the event, your weather plan, and your event-planning timeline.
- ❑ **Committees** – Create a series of committees to address different parts of the event, such as marketing, food, and decoration committees.
- ❑ **Staff** – Help committees estimate the needs and costs of waiters, greeters, and cleaning staff. Make sure there is sufficient staff to maintain proper trash removal and restroom upkeep during the event.
- ❑ **Seating** – Determine the seating plan and number of seats at each table several weeks ahead of time. Secure the number of tables and chairs needed and any other supplies at least 2 weeks before the event. Set up tables and chairs 1 to 2 days before the event, depending on the size and schedule of the event.
- ❑ **Atmosphere** – Determine the theme of the event, and create an environment that flows with the selected theme.

## Location

- ❑ **Weather** – Decide if your event will take place regardless of weather or if you will have an alternative rain date. Determine if the event will be indoors, open-air, or outdoors with a tent or pavilion. If the event is outdoors, consider reserving an alternative indoor location and build the cost into the budget.
- ❑ **Seating capacity** – Consider how many people you want to attend and estimate the amount of space needed for each person. Come-and-go events with a continuously flowing crowd will not require everyone to be seated at once. If tables are needed or required, plan for space requirements, layout, and additional costs. Reducing the amount of seating can help reduce costs.
- ❑ **Heating and cooling** – If hosting an event outdoors in the summer, be sure to provide fans, water, bug spray, and sunscreen. In the winter months, meet with the venue owner to determine if the space is heated. Don't assume that the building is heated and cooled! Visit the space to make sure lights, heating and cooling, and restrooms are in good working order.
- ❑ **Restrooms and handwashing** – For outdoor events, you will need to provide portable restrooms and handwashing facilities stocked with soap, water, disposable towels, and trash cans.

- ❑ **Safety** – Meet with your local emergency manager and insurance agent to determine safety and insurance needs. If you expect a crowd, consider parking and traffic flow. Will you need assistance and traffic direction? Is the facility ADA-approved? Determine the typical age of your audience and if you will need parking for those with special needs. Golf carts or shuttle buses and drivers are something to consider if parking is not convenient to the event location.
- ❑ **Cost** – Fully understand all costs associated with the facility. Often there are additional fees for tables, chairs, clean-up, insurance, and maintenance. Also, consider working with local schools' culinary arts programs to hire servers for the event. Determine if ticket sales will cover all of these costs.

## Food Safety and Menu

- ❑ Who will provide food for the event? Options include local chefs, caterers, or restaurants.
- ❑ When choosing the menu items, consider offering local foods and dishes that include them.
- ❑ Take into consideration the event theme and time of year. What types of farm products will be available during this season?
- ❑ Consider working with a professional who manages food events.

- ❑ Determine food safety needs such as keeping food hot and/or cold, handwashing, and food preparation. Catering staff will need access to ovens, warmers, and refrigerators. Have plenty of food thermometers and pads for handling hot dishes.
- ❑ Meet with the caterer, event space manager, and local health department official to meet all food safety guidelines.
- ❑ Determine the traffic flow for serving lines, utensil pick-up, drinks, and so forth in the layout design to minimize congestion points and make serving and replenishing the serving lines most efficient.
- ❑ Label contents of serving dishes, especially for those who may have food sensitivities, to include any or all of the most common allergens (milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, fish, crustacean shellfish, wheat, and soy). Work with your food provider and health department representative to make sure you are following all food safety guidelines. Contact Dr. Courtney Crist, Assistant Extension Professor in the Department of Food Science, Nutrition, and Health Promotion, for additional information: [cac400@msstate.edu](mailto:cac400@msstate.edu) or (662) 325-0852.
- ❑ The day before the event, walk through the space to check for cleanliness.
- ❑ Make sure the handwashing stations are stocked with soap, water, disposable towels, and trash cans.

## Farm Products

- ❑ Inventory local farms, farmers markets, and food hubs to determine potential food products to serve.
- ❑ Meet with chefs or restaurants to design a menu with the available products.
- ❑ Create flyers and social media posts highlighting the farms and farm products that will be used. Obtain any permissions (photos, data, etc.) needed before publishing or distributing any materials.

## Marketing

- ❑ Determine your audience for the event.
- ❑ Determine the price of tickets and the event registration process.
- ❑ Create a marketing plan to reach your target audience. See *Growing Your Brand: Developing a Marketing Plan Workbook* at <http://extension.msstate.edu/publications/growing-your-brand-developing-marketing-plan-workbook>.
- ❑ Find additional marketing information at <http://extension.msstate.edu/agriculture/local-flavor/marketing-and-business-planning>.

## Budget

Costs		Resources		Outcomes/Profit?
Facility rental		Ticket sales		
Tents		Sponsorship		
Plates, cups, cutlery		Grants		
Caterer		Donations		
Insurance		Donations		
Marketing		Volunteers		
Entertainment		Volunteers		
Staff		Volunteers		
Decorations		Other		

## Resources

University of Vermont Agritourism Collaborative. Vermont Agritourism Guides. *How to Host Dinners on Your Farm*. Available at <https://www.uvm.edu/vtagritourism/files/agritourism-guide/howto-host-farm-dinners.pdf>.

Virginia Cooperative Extension. Community, Local, and Regional Food Systems. *Organizing a Farm to Table Meal*. Available at <https://blogs.ext.vt.edu/clr-food-systems/organizing-a-farm-to-table-meal/>.

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