

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 seating plan and number of seats several weeks ahead. Secure tables, chairs, and supplies at least two weeks before. Set up 1–2 days before 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:** For outdoor summer events, provide fans, water, bug spray, and sunscreen. In winter, confirm with the venue owner that heating works; don't assume. Visit the site to check lights, climate control, and restrooms.
- ☐ **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-compliant? 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:** Confirm all facility costs, including tables, chairs, cleanup, insurance, and maintenance. Consider hiring local culinary students as servers. 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 caterer, event space manager, and health officials to ensure all food safety guidelines are met.
- ☐ 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 serving dishes with common allergens (milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, fish, shellfish, wheat, 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 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 Extension Publication 2959 *Growing Your Brand: Developing a Marketing Plan Workbook*.
- ☐ Find additional marketing information at <http://extension.msstate.edu/agriculture/local-flavor/marketing-and-business-planning>.

Budget

Cost	Amount
Facility rental	
Tents	
Plates, cups, cutlery	
Caterer	
Insurance	
Marketing	
Entertainment	
Staff	
Decorations	

Resource	Amount	Outcomes/Profit
Ticket sales		
Sponsorship		
Grants		
Donations		
Donations		
Volunteers		
Volunteers		
Volunteers		
Other		

Resources

University of Vermont Agritourism Collaborative. Vermont agritourism guides. *How to host dinners on your farm*.

Virginia Cooperative Extension. *Community, local, and regional food systems*.

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