



# Farmer-Chef Connection Event

*Linking food buyers and producers.*



Too often, food producers are so busy growing and harvesting food, they don't have the time to actually meet the restaurant, school, and other institutional chefs and buyers who might like to purchase their food. Similarly, busy chefs rarely have the opportunity to meet and make a connection with local food producers.



The goal of a Farmer-Chef Connection Event is to solve this dilemma. This gathering is designed to foster collaboration between and create market opportunities for local farmers, ranchers, processors, and food buyers (such as chefs). The event connects producers and food buyers who wish to support and fuel the local food economy with their commitment to growing and purchasing local, seasonal, and sustainable goods. It facilitates a face-to-face dialogue where producers and food buyers can meet each other, learn what they each need from the other, and begin to form lasting business relationships.

## WHO IS INVOLVED IN THE EVENT?



**Partners:** Community partners that might help fund and organize the event could include anyone with an interest in healthy local food, for example: garden groups, health service or physician groups, churches, farmers market coordinators, local farmers and ranchers, school food services, parent groups, elected officials, health departments, etc.

**Chefs:** Chefs and other buyers are invited from local restaurants and from institutions such as schools, hospitals, nursing homes, correctional facilities, etc.

**Producers:** All local food producers should be invited, including farmers and ranchers who grow vegetables, fruit, grains, poultry and eggs, pork, beef, lamb, dairy, and any other products. You might also want to include any food processors in your area, such as meat processors, jam and jelly makers, bakeries, etc.

## GOALS

Link and build lasting relationships between food buyers (restaurants, schools, and other institutions) and food producers.

Begin the process of creating a *Guide to Local Food* for your area.

Encourage restaurants and institutions to buy and highlight locally produced foods.

## WHERE?

It can take place at almost any venue. For example, a local restaurant may donate the space and refreshments for a morning event or a school can donate space on a Saturday.

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## HOW?

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- First, everyone in attendance is welcomed and participants briefly introduce themselves. Chefs give their name and the name of their facility. Producers and processors give their name and a short list of their products.
- An introduction is given on why to buy local. See “Why Buy Local?” on page 4 for specifics.
- At this point, you may want to discuss the need to create a *Local and Seasonal Products Guide* for your own region. See the online resources on this topic.
- Discuss the goals of the event, then break (30 minutes) for refreshments, networking, and a bathroom break.
- Explain the “Speed Dating” exercise (below). It is VERY important to clearly explain the exercise to the entire audience beforehand in order to minimize confusion and chaos.

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## SPEED DATING ACTIVITY

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This activity is designed to help start a face-to-face dialogue between producers and buyers/chefs and create an opportunity for exchanging business cards, handshakes, and making business deals.

All participants engage in at least three rounds of conversation, each lasting 10-15 minutes (more or less depending on number of participants). Producers sit at tables with the name of their farm and what they sell on a large, clearly visible table tent. At the ring of a bell, buyers roam around and find a farmer/rancher to visit. When the bell rings again, buyers/chefs all get up and find another producer.

The food producer should talk *first* and then the buyer/chef should follow with what they would like to buy:

Information **producers** should share:

- Name and farm name.
- Where and how they farm.
- What they produce & when is it available.
- Why they would be a good supplier.

Information **chefs/food buyers** should share:

- Name and location of restaurant/institution.
- Type of business (size, customer base, etc.).
- Current direct farmer purchases.
- What they would like to buy.
- Why producers should sell to them.

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## TIMELINE

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**Timeline:** As with any event, the bulk of the work is completed long in advance. The goal of the sample timeline on the following pages is to walk you through all of the arrangements that need to be made—starting 10-12 weeks prior to the event, all the way through to the week after the event.

The topics that need to be covered include:

- Establishing the planning committee.
- Setting date(s) for event.
- Identifying the location for the event.
- Identifying food and drink.
- Identifying and recruiting food producers.
- Identifying and recruiting chefs.
- Budgeting and financial planning.
- Press release and media strategy (if any).
- Volunteer recruitment.
- Evaluation (if needed).

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## START PLANNING—SAMPLE TIMELINE

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### **10 weeks before event**

Establish planning committee (recruit new members if necessary).  
Clarify roles, responsibilities, and tasks.  
Decide on event date(s).  
Identify producers and buyers to be invited.  
Budgeting and financing:  
\* Identify existing resources.  
\* Estimate probable costs.  
\* Create an itemized budget.  
\* Plan how to raise the necessary money.

### **9 weeks before event**

Identify potential venues and reserve location.  
Identify potential donors for food and drink.  
Invite chefs/buyers and producers.  
Identify and invite announcer for the event.

### **8 weeks before event**

Hold a planning meeting to assess progress and set next tasks.  
Follow up on invitations to participants.  
Plan detailed agenda.  
Secure food and drink donations.

### **7 weeks before event**

Volunteer Coordinator: recruit volunteers for event set-up, clean-up, and food pickup.

### **6 weeks before event**

Finalize press release.  
Follow up on invitations to buyers and producers with phone calls.

### **5 weeks before event**

Send press release out to local papers, TV, and radio stations.

### **4 weeks before event**

Hold a planning meeting to assess progress and set next tasks.  
Check in with location to figure out how tables, seating, and food will be set up, etc.

### **2-3 weeks before event**

Begin pulling together “Day Of” equipment and task list.  
Make name tags for all attendees.  
Contact producers for name of farm, name of contact, contact information, what they grow, etc.

### **1 week before event**

Make producer table tents.  
Reminder email or phone call to participants.  
Compile “Day Of” event box (pens, paper, bell, nametags, table tents, forms, clipboard, camera, etc.).

### **1 day before event**

Call facility and check that tables and chairs will be set up, go over details of when door will be open, etc.

## DAY OF EVENT

Make sure you have all supplies and equipment.  
Volunteer coordinator: kitchen station set-up/break-down, take photos.

## 1-2 WEEKS AFTER EVENT

Send thank-you cards to all sponsors, donors, volunteers, and announcers.

Ensure all invoices are paid promptly.

Finalize and reconcile event budget.

Schedule and hold a debriefing meeting with event planning committee.

Compile suggestions for next year's event.

Congratulations  
on holding a  
successful local  
food event!

## WHY BUY LOCAL?

- Allows you to get fresh, quality food at the peak of ripeness and seasonality.
- Helps farmers earn a higher percentage of every food dollar, bringing more economic stability to farming communities.
- Supports the local economy: studies have shown that every dollar spent with a local food business generates considerable additional local economic activity.
- Reduces food miles, energy use, pollution, and greenhouse gases.
- Protects farmland and open space by keeping family agriculture a vibrant and competitive land use.
- Builds long-term positive relationships between food producers and food buyers, and reconnects consumers with how and where their food is grown.
- See our tool, "How & Why to Buy Local" for more information.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Find online resources for this tool, as well as additional tool booklets on other community food topics, under "Food System Tools" at [www.healthycommunityfoodsystems.org](http://www.healthycommunityfoodsystems.org) or [www.HCFS.org](http://www.HCFS.org)



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