

Summary: Chef-to-Chef Training 3/22/10

Hosted by the Heartland Food Network and the Minnesota Project
at The Craftsman Restaurant, Minneapolis

Speakers:

Chefs

- Tracy Singleton, **Birchwood Café**
- Marshall Paulsen, **Birchwood Café**
- Scott Pampuch, **Corner Table**
- Mike Phillips, **The Craftsman**
- Lori Valenziano, **Lucia's Restaurant**
- Joe Hatch-Surisook, **Sen-Yai Sen-Lek Thai**

Farmers and Distributors

- Greg Reynolds, **Riverbend Farm**
- Lisa Klein, **Hidden Stream Farm** (a farm near Elgin, MN, that specializes in pork, but carries products from at least 12 other nearby family farms)
- Lori Zuidema, **Co-op Partners Warehouse** (a wholesale distributor in St Paul that carries products from over 50 local farms)

Campus Management Company

- Peter Abrahamson, **Bon Appetit Management Company**
(Bon Appetit is a Management company that is dedicated to sourcing from local growers. Peter reported that at least 20% of all their purchases come from local sources, often much more, but that he serves 3000 meals a day, so has a huge impact. Peter reported he spend \$2.43 per student/per meal by reducing waste and not using expensive processed foods and buying in bulk)

Attendees:

- 128 Café
- Angel in the Kitchen, LLC
- Anodyne Coffeehouse
- Bon Appetit Management Company – Midwest Fellow
- Bulldog NE
- Butter Bakery Café
- Chez Jude Restaurant and Wine Café
- Colleen Foster & Associates
- Cooks of Crocus Hill
- Dinner Belle Catering
- Edible Twin Cities
- Elegant Entrees Catering
- FireLake Grill House and Cocktail
- Food Alliance Midwest
- Garden Farme (farmer)
- Good Earth
- Good Life Catering
- Great Waters Brewing Company
- Heavy Table
- KFAI Radio
- Mary Jane Miller Consulting
- Mufuletta
- Nick and Eddie
- Our Lady of Peace School
- ThePerennialPlate.com
- Pizza Luce
- Rainbow Chinese Restaurant
- Riverbend Farm
- Richfield Public Schools
- Saga Hill Cooking and Events
- Simple, Good and Tasty.com
- The Oceanaire Seafood Room
- Turnip Rock Farm (farmer)
- Victor's 1959 Café
- Vics

Notes from the Day

Why do it?

- Chef Mike Phillips from the **Craftsman** said that 10 years ago maybe 10% of his customers knew that he used local food. Now at least 75% come in looking for it, and business is booming.
 - Chef Scott Pampuch from **Corner Table** commented that a few of the farms that he works with are reinvesting heavily in their farms because of the business he gives them at his 40-seat restaurant. This support is critical to the survival of small farms.
 - Bottom line: local food brings customers in the door; the taste, quality and freshness is unsurpassed, (Lori Valenziano from **Lucia's Restaurant** commented that the product often lasts 2-3 times as long in the cooler than non-local items); it keeps farmers on the land, it's better for our environment, better for our health, and if we engage kids, we can impact their lifelong eating habits.
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Tips for working with farmers

- **The Birchwood** suggested working with just 1-2 farmers to start with to develop the relationship. It can be easier to pick one farmer to supply each item that you want locally, like one for onions, one for carrots, to start with.
- **Lucia's** suggested: Go out to the farm and help out for a day. Bring your staff and they will understand what it takes to pick a pound of beans. No more wasted beans in the garbage!
- When working with a new farmer: ask, what can you offer, when do you deliver, where are you located, and how will the product arrive.
- Cost: The products will mostly cost more up front- there is no way around that. But you waste less, and the flavor brings the customers back. Some products in season can be cost competitive. Labor is expensive for small farms – they can't compete for low prices with large farms.
- Work with farmers in the winter to plan your menu and what you want to buy well in advance. They may grow items just for you and will appreciate being able to plan.

Tips from a Farmer

- Greg Reynolds of **Riverbend Farm** gave his perspective: Be flexible- farmers cannot predict the weather and conditions. Farmers need to communicate if there will be a change to the order, but you need to be able to fill in if needed. Pay them on time, and know that product cannot be completely sand and dirt-free or it will disintegrate. Talk to them about menu planning – they will grow something for you.
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How to find local food

- Use the directories: **Minnesota Grown Directory** (online, you can search by zip code), **Land Stewardship Project's Stewardship Directory**, **Food Alliance Midwest's** list
 - Look at other restaurant's menus and ask them where they get items
 - Ask farmers to recommend other farmers – they will do it!
 - Buy a CSA share or 2 for a small restaurant. A great way to get your toes wet.
 - You can get local through distributors: Lori Zuidema, **Co-op Partners Warehouse** shared what they can offer: they are a wholesale distributor that offers product from many local growers. Great for chefs that don't have the time to spend working with many farmers. Also can order from **Hidden Stream Farm**, which delivers goods from 12 nearby family farms in SE MN, and other a few local distributors in MN.
 - Grow your own food in a garden at the restaurant
 - Go to the farmers market and ask farmers if they also sell to restaurants
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Creating a menu and dishes based on local foods

- It's OK to start small- try a few products on your menus that you consistently use
 - Run a new or unusual item in a special for a few days
 - New foods: **Birchwood** suggested using something like kohlrabi in a side with one of your best sellers, people will get to know it and like it
 - Give customers credit- they love to experiment and try new things
 - Celebrate the seasons! We live in a seasonal location and menus should reflect this
 - Can these foods work in an Asian restaurant? Certainly. Joe Hatch-Surisook from **Sen- Yai Sen-Lek** restaurant shared that he serves brussels sprouts wok-fried with stir fry sauce, and customers love it.
 - What about in winter? Not a problem. Local is now available almost year-round: in the winter onions, potatoes, other root veggies, flour, cornmeal, milk, cheese, honey, beans, and meats are available. Greenhouses are really increasing the growing season. You can freeze fruits and veggies to last year round! **Sen-Yai Sen-Lek** does not vary their menu seasonally, but in the summer almost all of their veggies and herbs are local, and year-round their meats are.
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Working with local foods in your restaurant:

- Communicate with your staff regularly about what you have ordered
- First-in, first-out. Keep track of your inventory- don't waste this wonderful food!
- Be organized: keep a spreadsheet so your staff knows what has been ordered and when it will be delivered - **Birchwood Café** offered a sample of this sheet they hang in the kitchen to list when deliveries are coming in

Marketing you use of local: very important. Your customers need to know what you are doing!

- List producers on your menu
 - Put a plaque on the wall with farm names
 - Front of house staff - you have to have waitstaff on board. Let them sell it for you. Make sure they taste the food every night, and know everything about the food you are serving.
 - Bring the farmers to you- host events at your restaurant – sampling local food with farmers is a great way to get your customers excited about it
 - Take part in events: Renewing the Countryside's speed dating events, Minnesota Cooks, cooking demos, Minnesota Homegrown Cookbook
 - Social Media- use it!
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