



Best Practices and Tips For Finding and Buying Local Food

*Information given at Chef-to-Chef Training
Hosted by the Heartland Food Network
March 22, 2010 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**

Attendees:

- 128 Café
- Anodyne Coffeeshouse
- Bulldog NE
- Butter Bakery Café
- Chez Jude Restaurant and Wine Café – Grand Marais
- Cooks of Crocus Hill
- Colleen Foster & Associates
- Dinner Belle Catering
- Elegant Entrees Catering
- FireLake Grill House and Cocktail
- Food Alliance Midwest
- Garden Farme (farmer)
- Good Earth
- Good Life Catering
- Great Waters Brewing Company
- Mary Jane Miller Consulting
- Mufuletta
- Nick and Eddie
- Our Lady of Peace School
- Pizza Luce
- Rainbow Chinese Restaurant
- Richfield Public Schools
- Saga Hill Cooking and Events
- The Oceanaire Seafood Room
- Turnip Rock Farm (farmer)
- Victor's 1959 Café
- Vics Restaurant

Notes from the Day:

Why Do it?

- Customers are looking for it: Chef Mike Phillips of 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.
 - Consistent support of restaurants is critical to the survival of small farms. We have the power to sustain local economies and help keep farmers on the farm.
 - The taste, quality and freshness will keep your customers coming back.
 - It is not that hard! Just call a few farms, or go to a farmers market, and tell your customers you are doing it.
 - It is not always more expensive. There is much less food waste (it lasts much longer in the fridge) and in season, many items are very cost competitive with CA produce.
 - It creates a ripple effect: if you highlight your use of local food, customers seek it at the grocery stores, schools etc. increasing the benefits to local growers.
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Working with farmers

- Start small - pick one or two farmers to start with the first year. They can supply you with multiple products or just a few.
 - When working with a new farmer, remember to ask a few things: What can you offer? When do you deliver? Where are you located? How will the product arrive?
 - Work with farmers in the winter to decide what they will sell you. They may grow items just for you and will appreciate being able to plan.
 - 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. Good communication is essential. Pay them on time.
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How to find local products

- Use the directories: Minnesota Grown Directory, Land Stewardship Project's Stewardship Directory, Food Alliance Midwest's list (see attached resource list)
 - Try going to the farmers market! They will often give you good deals.
 - Look at other restaurant's menus and ask them where they get items.
 - Ask farmers to recommend other farmers if you are looking for a specific item.
 - Buy a CSA share or 2 for a small restaurant. A great way to get your toes wet.
 - Distributors and farmer coops: You can get local through many distributors, a "one-stop-shop": Coop Partners, Bix, Northwestern and more (see resource list)
 - Grow your own food in a garden at the restaurant
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Creating a menu and dishes based on local foods

- Not sure what to do with something? Run a new or unusual item in a special for a few days.
 - Celebrate the seasons by changing your menu seasonally. Customers appreciate seasonal cooking and love something different and uniquely “Minnesotan”
 - Remember: local is available year-round, and works on “year-round” menus. In the winter there are onions, potatoes, other root veggies, flour, cornmeal, milk, cheese, honey, beans, and meats. You can also freeze and preserve fruits and veggies to last year round!
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Ordering and other logistics

- Communicate with your staff regularly about what you have ordered and from whom if there are new orders coming in from farmers.
 - Some chefs/managers that do the ordering hang a sheet on the kitchen wall indicating what they ordered and from whom so staff know what is coming.
 - Be organized: first in, first out. Don’t let the food rot (it will stay fresh longer than your other food however!)
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Marketing you use of local:

Your customers need to know what you are doing!

- If you buy from local farmers - list them on your menu and/or website, and have their flyers, posters, or other material in your restaurant.
 - Educate the front of house staff - let them sell it for you. Make sure they taste the food every night and know about the food you are serving.
 - Consider advertising in local food publications (like Edible Twin Cities) that reach many people that really care about local food.
 - Host events at your restaurant or take part in events:farmer/chef speed dating events, Minnesota Cooks, cooking demos, Minnesota Homegrown Cookbook.
 - Social Media (Twitter, Facebook, Blogs)- use them.
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