



FARM TO TABLE VIABILITY: BEST PRACTICES & TIPS FOR RESTAURATEURS, CHEFS, AND FARMERS*

Restaurant sourcing of local products is not a new concept in West Virginia, but with many small farmers still in growth mode, providing the right amount of product at the right time can be a challenge. Additionally, restaurants must think carefully about how they market their local sourcing to the customer in order to build loyalty and support for their cause.

A successful marketing strategy can capture the higher prices needed to support the viability of a farm to table operation, while also paying fair prices to the farmer.

* This toolkit was developed by VC2, with the support of our partners, Potomac Highlands Food and Farm Initiative and the Greenbrier Valley Local Foods Initiative, who, under the coordination of Future Harvest CASA, each hosted a Farm to Menu Mixer in their communities.

WHAT ARE SOME COMMONLY EXPRESSED CHALLENGES TO BE AWARE OF?

- 🥕 Coordinating Deliveries
- 🥕 Transporting Products
- 🥕 Utilizing Local Products at Their Peak Freshness
- 🥕 Finding the Right Price Point
- 🥕 Building a Supportive and Knowledgeable Staff
- 🥕 Managing Orders from Multiple Farms
- 🥕 Effective Communication



Figure 1: Farm to Menu Mixer, Thomas, WV

"Flexibility is a key component of farm to table sales. Remember that you are dealing in human relationships! You have to learn to work together, be understanding, have patience and build trust along the way."

- Laura Dimbylow, The Canal House Café, Harpers Ferry, WV

I. PLANNING AHEAD:

FOR RESTAURATEURS	FOR FARMERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🥕 Preplan your menu to the extent that you can: keeping in mind the seasonality of certain items. 🥕 Connect with growers ahead of time to convey your needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🥕 Production planning is crucial for overall success; utilizing season extension techniques, when possible, to maximize output. 🥕 Meet with chefs prior to the beginning of each growing season to assist with your product selection and making your production plan.



Figure 2: Farm to Menu Mixer, Thomas, WV



"We should all be encouraging folks in the customer/consumer position to ask:

"What's local on the menu?"

- Anthony Flaccavento, SCALE, Inc.

II. PRICING CONSIDERATIONS:

FOR RESTAURATEURS	FOR FARMERS	FOR CHEFS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🥕 Share price lists from bigger distributors with your growers, if they ask for that information. 🥕 Make every effort to educate your clientele about the farms that you work with, and the true cost/value of locally grown food. 🥕 Develop a strong marketing campaign that highlights your use of locally sourced products to reach new customers and to allow you to capture the higher prices needed to support a viable Farm to Table operation, while also paying fair prices to your farmers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🥕 Never undervalue your products. 🥕 Ask for what you need in terms of price. 🥕 Understand your cost of production for each item that you offer. 🥕 Set your price at or above your cost of production, also known as your "break-even price". 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🥕 Create specials and incorporate local, seasonal items. This is a good entry point to sourcing locally! 🥕 Consider buying good quality, discounted "seconds" to save money - these items can then be processed or value-added. 🥕 Quality matters! Pay a higher premium for products that are clean, packaged well, from reliable and consistent sources. 🥕 Some menu items will turn a good profit, while other items might be priced at a break-even price or might even be a loss leader. You have to find the right balance on your menu.



"Growers have to educate chefs, and vice versa."

Terry Hudson, Hudson Farms



Figure 3: Farm to Menu Mixer, Lewisburg, WV

III. PREPARING RESTAURANT STAFF:

FOR RESTAURATEURS	FOR FARMERS	FOR CHEFS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🥕 Take your staff on farm field trips to encourage learning and to connect your kitchen and front-of-house staff to the source of the menu's ingredients. 🥕 Screen potential staff during the hiring process to be sure they possess the right enthusiasm needed for the farm to table environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🥕 Encourage chefs, restaurant owners, and staff to visit the farm throughout the growing season. 🥕 Chefs may see a potential product where you, the grower, might not. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🥕 Run through the menu and/or specials with the staff each day, prior to the start of business (especially if the menu changes often).

"Locally sourced and seasonally inspired - if fresh food is best, then it should follow that local food is even better! Mindfully grown, processed and prepared, locally acquired foods can support fair prices to both farmer and restaurant, and bring the cream of the crop to your customer's plate."

- Joy Marr, VC2 Business Coach, Catering Business Owner, Food & Beverage entrepreneur

IV. COMMUNICATION BEST PRACTICES FOR EVERYONE:

- 🥕 Communicate ahead of time as much as possible, to give both farmers and chefs/buyers ample time to plan. When commitments have been made, follow through with these commitments. During times of crop loss, inform chefs/buyers as soon as possible.
- 🥕 Be direct and honest – this helps to build trust in your professional working relationship.
- 🥕 Flexibility is very important.
- 🥕 Understand that you're dealing in human relationships - patience and understanding is **KEY!**
- 🥕 Find out how a farmer or chef/buyer prefers to communicate (phone vs. email vs. dropping by) and communicate with him or her in that manner.
- 🥕 Be clear about which days and times are best for business transactions on both sides.



V. IN-HOUSE PROMOTION OF LOCAL FOODS TO CAPTURE YOUR CUSTOMER:

- 🥕 It's often effective to note the use of local foods within the menu, including the farm where ingredients were sourced.
- 🥕 Consider having a white board or chalk board at the front of the restaurant by the door/entrance. Note the use of local foods and the farms where sourced.
- 🥕 Signage (especially at entryway) seems to be eye-catching to customers and effective in getting the message across.
- 🥕 Chefs should consider running local food specials and featuring them prominently.
- 🥕 Menu inserts, table tents, and flyers in the windows are also alternatives for promotion of local foods.
- 🥕 Waitstaff and restaurant staff should be trained on what items on the menu are locally sourced, where they come from, and the philosophy behind it.
- 🥕 Be sure to cross-promote your efforts with any local or regional branding campaigns like Greenbrier Valley Grown, the 30 Mile Meal and Bon Appetit Appalachia, for example.

Shared Values - Shared Commitment

Customers care about the origin of the foods that they purchase. The trend is growing and here to stay. Use the tips above to build on your customers' interest and shared values, as well as to strengthen your relationships with your fellow market partners in the value chain.