

Hosting Dinners on Your California Farm

A Practical Guide



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Hosting Dinners on Your California Farm

An on-farm dinner or other meal offered to the public can be an exciting way to showcase farm products and venues and teach the public about your farm, and can be a way to raise additional revenue. Although you may also be considering other on-farm culinary activities such as private catered events, potluck gatherings, full-time restaurants, bakeries, or snack bars, this guide will only discuss occasional ticketed meal events marketed to the public for a fee.

On-farm meal events can range from casual pizza or barbeque lunches to formal white-tablecloth five-course dinners with wine pairings for each course. On-farm meals, especially more formal dinners, are complicated events to pull off, and their profitability relative to the amount of work that goes into them is always a delicate balance.

To help prepare this guide, we interviewed six California farm meal event organizers about their goals and operations. The guide will share some of their experiences and advice along with other guidance for offering on-farm meals graciously shared by University of Vermont Extension¹, the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture², Rutgers University Extension³, and University of California Cooperative Extension Sonoma County⁴.

Can you do this?

Basics of permits and regulations for on-farm food service

Zoning: Are farm dinner events allowed in your zoning?

Farm dinners, with tickets sold to the public, are generally considered to be “public events,” and are permitted or allowed as determined by county or municipal zoning ordinances. Some counties or cities allow farmers to offer agritourism activities including meals “by right” within agricultural zoning. Some counties or municipalities place limits on the number of such farm events or limit



Intimate dinner for twenty in the barn loft at the Hurley Goat Farm Dairy

We expect that most farm dinners will be held on working farms and are associated with seasonal crops, tastings, and other related harvest activities.

We don't have a cap on farm dinners unless they are conducted more like regularly scheduled events throughout the year – then the use would be considered a special event that is regulated as an event center.

Currently, we allow ag properties that are 40 acres or greater to hold up to 8 small (up to 150 people) events per year, not more than once per month, by right.

- Yolo County Planning Dept.

the number of guests. Others do not allow such events in certain zonings or on lots less than a minimum size, or require administrative or conditional use permits for farm dinners. To learn more, contact your city or county planning department or your local farm trail or agritourism association, if one exists in your neighborhood.



AND ...

Food Safety requirements and licenses

Even if the farm dinner “event” is allowed by right, permitted as a special event, or covered by an existing use permit, you will still need to follow guidelines established by your county Environmental Health Department (EHD) to ensure food safety, and may need to obtain licenses or permits for food preparation and handling. When planning a farm dinner or lunch, it is a good idea to first contact your county Environmental Health Department to learn about local requirements. In general, all California on-farm meals will need to follow these guidelines:

These meals usually cannot be prepared in the home.

Here are your options:

- **Caterer** – unless your farm has a licensed commercial kitchen (covered below), or unless you are ready to prepare the food in a licensed kitchen or obtain a permit to operate a temporary food facility, you will want to have a licensed caterer (or chef) prepare the meal. They are trained in food safety and will come with all the equipment required to prepare and serve a safe product.
- **Licensed commercial kitchen on the farm** – this is a facility that has been approved by the building department and permitted as a food facility by the county EHD.
- **Self-prepared** – this will be more complicated; the food cannot be prepared in the home (unless the dinner operator is licensed to operate a “microenterprise home kitchen” – see below for details):
 - Food must be prepared in a licensed commercial kitchen or in a temporary food facility as permitted by county Environmental Health Departments (EHD).
 - Contact your county Environmental Health Department to learn the process and fees for obtaining a permit for a Temporary Food Facility and/or operating a Community Event on your farm. You will want to have a conversation with a staff person about your event.
 - The permitting process and fees vary county by county, although the basic food safety requirements for food handling are the same across the state.

Important note: Veterans and Non-Profit organizations are exempt from most fees associated with Community Event and Temporary Food Facility permits. If you are a veteran or working with a non-profit organization, tell the EHD.

- You may be asked to provide a list of the food to be served, explaining how each item will be prepared and held at the appropriate temperature.

- You will generally need to prepare and serve food from an enclosed covered tent similar to those used for food service at fairs and festivals, although cooking facilities such as a barbeque grill can be next to the tent.
- At the site of the event, you will need hand washing and utensil washing set up and restroom facility for the food handlers.
- You will need to start this process early, as there is usually a number of weeks required prior to your event for obtaining Temporary Food Facility authorization.

An example, from Sacramento County, of a Temporary Food Facility Operator's Packet:

http://www.emd.saccounty.net/EH/FoodProtect-RetailFood/Documents/TFF_OperatorsPacket.pdf

- Anyone preparing food in a permitted commercial kitchen must obtain a [Food Handlers Card](#). Food Handlers card is not always required if food is prepared in a temporary food facility, but check with your county EHD.
- **New in 2019:** Food may be prepared in a “*microenterprise home kitchen*” for not more than 30 people per day and not more than 50 people per week with very few physical kitchen or serving area requirements, **if your county or municipality has decided to authorize such an enterprise**, as allowed under California Assembly Bill 626, signed into law by Governor Brown on September 18, 2018.
 - The governing body of a city or county has full discretion to authorize, by ordinance or resolution, the permitting of microenterprise home kitchen operations in accordance with this new allowance, but is not required to do so. If microenterprise home kitchen operations are authorized, the authorization must apply to home kitchens in all zoning designations. For more information: https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB626

Serving alcohol

Pairing your food with wines, beers or ciders from a local purveyor is a great way to showcase both types of products. This will require a permit from the state department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC): <http://www.abc.ca.gov/permits/permits.html>. You have two options:

- **Non-profit events:** the non-profit obtains a special event policy for the event.
 - Form 221: <https://www.abc.ca.gov/FORMS/ABC221-2010.pdf>
 - Instructions for Form 221: <http://www.abc.ca.gov/FORMS/ABC221I.pdf>
 - Cost: \$25 per day, per dispensing point; maximum 12 events per year per non-profit.
- **Private events:** the farm/host must hire a caterer with correct licensing from ABC. Caterer's Permit Information (<https://www.abc.ca.gov/FORMS/ABC525.pdf>) for on-sale alcohol sales, or the host can obtain a one-day permit from ABC.
 - Form 218: <https://www.abc.ca.gov/FORMS/ABC218.pdf>
 - Instructions for Form 2018: <https://www.abc.ca.gov/FORMS/ABC218I.pdf>
 - Common ABC License Types and their Basic Privileges: <http://www.abc.ca.gov/forms/abc616.pdf>
 - Sellers Permit is required; Obtain from the California Dept. of Tax and Fee Administration.
- In both cases, the certificate holder must obtain prior approval from the local law enforcement agency.

Permits needed for Apple Hill Growers Association Fundraising dinner

- *A one-day event permit from the County Environmental Health Dept. cost about \$300, even though a caterer was hired to prepare the dinner and there is a full kitchen on the farm,*
- *For alcohol serving at the farm, the farm had to relinquish their regular license to serve alcohol for the duration of the event, and had to get a one-day permit from the ABC to be able to pour for all the Apple Hill wineries. This permit cost about \$150.*

– Christine Delfino, Delfino Farms

Once you have learned the permits and licenses needed to invite the public to your farm, ranch or winery for your showcase meal, you are ready to start planning your event.

Planning a farm dinner

What are your goals for the dinner?

Your goals for your dinner will help you establish the target attendees, the ambience, the date, the menu and the price for your event. A single event may encompass several goals at the same time. Some goals and reasons for offering farm dinners include:

- Increasing farm revenue, diversification of the income stream
- Improving cash flow in a slow season
- Raising money for a specific farm project or infrastructure
- Raising money for a cause or non-profit organization you are aligned with
- Building stronger connections and loyalty with regular farmers' market or CSA customers
- Introducing new or different clientele to the farm
- Highlighting the farm's relationship with chefs who use farm products, promoting both chef and farm
- Showing off farm products and farm experiences in a different season (i.e. a summer dinner on a farm known as a fall festival destination can showcase summer fruit-picking opportunities)
- Marketing value-added products (Winery dinners often aim to break-even on the dinner and make money by selling wine.)
- Marketing the farm as a venue for future private events, such as weddings

***Windrose Farm Goal:**
"Offer guests the most unique farm experience by bringing in our amazingly special personal community of chefs to present our farm's food to our guests."*



***Lonely Mountain Farm Goal:** To keep in touch with regular customers.
"The dinners are not so much about making money, but to get people to come to the farm and see where their food comes from"*

Who will be your dinner guests?

Do you have an established customer-base, relatively close-by and excited to visit your farm? Are you trying to be accessible to families, or will you promote to those who are more affluent and more likely to book future weddings or other events?

Most of the farm dinner organizers interviewed for this guide have strong existing direct-marketing relationships with potential farm dinner guests and regularly sell out every meal, or come very close to selling out. After farms have established a reputation for offering exceptional on-farm dinner experiences, many guests return every year or on a regular basis to enjoy another dinner at the farm. One farm reports that as many as one quarter of the guests at any dinner are repeat customers. If you do not have established relationships with potential guests, such as your CSA membership, farmers' market customers or guests at a hotel/resort down the road, selling tickets to a farm dinner might be harder, and would probably require more extensive marketing.

Staffing: Who will organize the event, prepare the farm, set up, cook, serve, host, entertain, and clean up?

An on-farm dinner is a lot of work, involving careful organization and experienced staff. Some farmers partner with chefs or caterers and/or event organizers; some prefer to cook and staff the event in-house. When considering the work involved in putting on a farm dinner, don't forget to include the pre-dinner farm clean-up, meal set-up, marketing, menu-planning, food acquisition, preparation and serving, guest hospitality, on-site sales of additional products, and clean-up and managing of all these logistics.



Fathers' Day Lunch buffet line at Tanaka Farms

Here are the staffing patterns for some California farm dinner events:

Tanaka Farms, Orange County, staffing for a 2-session barbecue luncheon, no alcohol, with 200 guests at each session – Cost: \$39 - \$49/person – all staff are in-house employees

- Five people cooking
- Eight people serving, stocking the buffet, running the corn bar, the potato bar and the dessert bar
- No outside chefs involved
- The farm owner is there at all events; his son is the main host who leads the tours and talks with guests about the farm and crops

FARMstead ED, San Luis Obispo County, formal 50-person five-course dinner at Windrose Farm, involving five chefs. Cost: \$125. Staff are all either farm employees or employees of nearby restaurants. All are paid. Staff:

- Four servers
- Two back-of-house platers/dishwashers
- Lynette (event organizer) as maître d.
- Two people staff the cocktail station
- Two people staff the wine station
- Farmers don't work; they are hosts and interact with the guests
- Each chef is invited to come out and talk about the food they create as it is served



Full Belly Farm, Yolo County, dinner for 80 guests – Cost: \$80, BYOB

- Farm owners (who are licensed caterers) and one other chef cook the meals, using primarily products from the farm.
- Seven additional employees assist with serving and other tasks. The employees are mostly regular employees, with some students working part-time for the dinners.

Delfino Farms, El Dorado County, Apple Hill non-profit fundraising dinner for 170 guests – Cost: \$125, wine included

- The caterer (Table Nectar Catering) was paid to create the menu from local products.
- A few people were paid to pour wine.
- Eight family members and others volunteered as servers.
- Local FFA and 4H youth also volunteered, helped with bussing the tables.
- The farm owner was the event planner, but she did not take a fee for this non-profit work.



Table lights at FARMstead ED dinner

“Lighting is important,” says Lynette of FARMstead ED. “Lighting needs to be overhead and also on the tables. Candles need to be in hurricane holders so they don’t blow over or blow out.”

It’s a crazy concept at face value: adding another time-commitment-intensive business layered on top of an undoubtedly super busy summer farm season. But that’s the reality of on-farm food service: customers want to come at a time when they can enjoy the farm’s scenic beauty while savoring fare made

with the farm’s produce at the peak of ripeness. Hence, the majority of all this takes place at the apex of summer or during fall harvest. Simply put: if you think you’re working hard already, it’s only going to increase.

However, if you’re of that seasonal workload mindset where it’s a constant schedule overload all summer and fall that is then balanced with some time off and a lesser workload in the

winter months, on-farm events in the summer could work for you.

Farm presentation and appeal

Remember that while your farm operation may be a perfectly functioning agricultural enterprise, those coming as guests to an on-farm event may have a different image of what a “farm” should look like. Can you meet those expectations currently? Does your farm give off a generally neat and tidy impression? You might want to get rid of any old equipment that isn’t intended to be decorative, and make sure all storage areas and shelves appear uncluttered and clean; or minimize what your guests can see by closing barn and shed doors as needed. Fresh flowers, tablecloths or nicely-finished wood tables and good lighting can also help create an elegant feel.

Peak summer timing

“It’s a fun thing to do, but it is overwhelming and stressful. We live on the farm; it can get messy. The dinners force us to tidy up the property to meet the high expectations of our guests. But when everyone arrives and has a good time, it’s really special. We do the dinners during our busy season, and we’re really busy. Getting the property up to the high expectations of our guests is a major challenge”

- Molly Baker, Lonely Mountain Farm

Facilities and equipment

Tables, chairs, festival tents, linens, plates, glasses and cutlery for a fifty or one hundred person dinner can be expensive to rent. Most of the farmers consulted for this guide owned, borrowed or otherwise obtained most of this needed equipment; they found it more economical to purchase what was needed and to spread the cost over several dinner events in their budgeting.

For the 170 person non-profit benefit dinner organized by Delfino Farms for the Apple Hill Growers Association, a sponsor, El Dorado Party Rentals, donated the use of tables and other needed supplies. If you do need to rent equipment and supplies, perhaps to test the market for potential future events, you may not make much profit on the event.

Restrooms

Restrooms must be very clean and well-stocked. Some farms that offer regular events for the public have invested in installing full

“We were able to get all of a caterer relative’s old plates, linens, and silverware. I can’t imagine how to make it if you had to rent everything.”
– Molly Baker, Lonely Mountain Farm

restrooms with flush toilets and hand washing facilities with a septic system. More casual lunches and dinners can, if needed, be served with porta-potties. You may want to consider renting additional units rather than send your guests to the regular toilets used daily by everyone working on the farm. For example, for the Apple Hill Growers Association fundraising dinner, Delfino Farm rented luxury porta-potties, with flush toilets and a wash-sink inside each unit.



Farm Dinner and Event Facility at Full Belly Farm in the Capay Valley, Yolo County

Parking

Dinner guests will usually arrive in couples or groups, so you don't need a parking place for each guest, but you will need dedicated parking for your dinner guests. One coastal region farmer bought property from a neighbor for a parking lot. Glenn Tanaka, of Tanaka Farms in Irvine estimates that he needs 100 parking spaces to serve 200 people at a time. The parking area should be clearly marked, with a designated entrance and exit. Remember to mow any tall grass for fire safety, and keep parking areas as flat as possible. Lighting is helpful if your dinner will end after dark.

More Considerations

- Will your event be rain or shine?
- Will your dinner be a buffet, family style or plated?
- Will you offer farm related activities for kids, families or adults?

Managing Liability

Liability exposure will always be present when there are employees or guests on the farm. There are many types of liability exposure. It is best to talk with your insurance carrier to make sure you are covered for all these types of exposure:

Premises Liability: Property owner fails to protect people from potentially hazardous conditions. Customer is injured on property or "premises." Examples: slip and fall, equipment usage, contact with animals

Product Liability: Customer is injured by a product that was prepared and/or served to them. Examples: foreign object in food, becoming ill after consuming food

Property Damage: Customer's property is damaged by business/employee. Examples: employee hits a



Farm Dinner guests enjoy the loft balcony at Harley Farms

customer's car in the parking lot

Personal Liability: Customer suffers inadvertent personal harm from a service provided by a business. Examples: employee spills hot beverage on a customer and it causes a burn

Employees: Vicarious liability: landowner responsible for his/her own actions and for those of people acting on the landowner's behalf (employees and independent contractors).

Alcohol Liability: Property owner liability insurance typically has a "social host exclusion" that covers on-property visitors who consume alcohol. However, where food is being sold for money, insurance companies will most likely require an endorsement that covers both food and alcohol consumption.

An endorsement for BYOB is easier and less expensive to attain than including alcohol in the dinner plate price and selling it. Contact your insurance company for more details and information on endorsements that they may require.

There is no single strategy for effectively reducing your exposure to risk. Approach liability management holistically, as a program or series of activities. Add "layers" of protection that demonstrate a proactive, responsible, and comprehensive approach to farm safety.

Keep your farm safe for visitors and employees!

- *Conduct routine safety inspections.*
- *Create a farm safety plan detailing hazard mitigation strategies/plans of operation.*
- *Hold employee trainings.*
- *Have appropriate communication with farm visitors.*
- *Develop a response plan for emergencies.*
- *Use hazard/incident report forms for anyone that gets injured on the property.*

For more on managing your liability, visit the UC Cooperative Extension Foothill Farming Risk Management website: https://ucanr.edu/sites/placervevadasmallfarms/Farm_Business_Planning/FBP_Risk_Management/Risk_Management/

Building a Budget

Once you know the costs of insurance and any additional permits, start assembling a budget that accounts for the cost of food, labor (including yours), rentals, marketing/advertising expenses, and supplies. You could also factor in the wear and tear the event will have on your buildings, driveways and other infrastructure. If you decide to offer multiple on-farm dinners there will be adjustments to your budget, including investment in supplies such as a tent, cutlery, plates and glassware, and linens.

There will always be discrepancies between your projected and actual budgets. The important thing is to remember to log everything – from the hours you spend responding to registration inquiries and prepping table centerpieces to the wages paid to your staff. Sound record keeping will help you know if you're losing or earning money and how you can adjust spending to make an event profitable.

For your planning purposes, a sample budget template is included as Appendix A, at the end of this guide. An excel version of this budget template, with formulas already entered, is available for download here: <https://tinyurl.com/ybhnd6j2> or from the UC SAREP website. To use this budget form, adjust the line items to fit your needs and enter numbers that fit your operation into all the yellow-colored squares. As you adjust the numbers in the yellow squares, you will see the bottom line shift.

From farmers about their budgeting process:

The budget is created on a cost basis. One of the hardest elements to factor in is insurance. It is also tricky to remember to include charging for the rental of the farm facilities as a cost (the cost we would charge to rent the space to someone else for their private event) We try to budget the direct costs (food, labor, etc.) as about 50 percent of the price charged. We are trying to make it affordable for the average family.

– Glenn Tanaka, Tanaka Farms

We started with the food cost; we grow a lot of the food we serve. We looked at the labor cost. Then we put the costs to one side and looked at what the space is worth. We did what we felt the experience was worth. We priced the dinners at \$150 because we wanted to appeal to people who will use the space appropriately. We are very protective of our space. We have very clear boundaries. We don't want to have kid's birthday parties in the loft, but we want to be reasonable enough. We're comfortable with the \$150 price. We only do about ten weddings a year on the farm, but do lots of private events.

– Dee Harley, Harley Farms Goat Dairy

Marketing

There are two layers to marketing farm dinners: marketing the event, and then marketing your farm and all that you have to offer during the event. Bringing people to your farm is a powerful way to build customer relations and cultivate customer loyalty. Before the dinner, your efforts will naturally focus on selling tickets to the event. It's important not to lose sight of the marketing opportunity you are creating at the dinner.



FARMstead ED does the marketing using our media contact list that stretches from San Diego to San Francisco. A press release is created for each event and sent to this list to encourage foodie writers and others to help promote. An email newsletter to our mailing list, as well as Windrose Farm's is sent, we promote on Facebook, and get a bit of ink from local newspapers and our local tourism agencies really boost awareness through their channels. In addition, we sometimes use paid ads, but not much.

– Lynette Sonne, FARMstead ED

Before the event

Identify your clientele and what visitors will be willing to pay. Research what similar farm-dining experiences cost. Decide on a cost that is comfortable and fits your budget.

Explore both paid and free marketing options. Reserve ample time for marketing, and be open to unlikely partnerships (the hotel in town, the restaurant to whom you wholesale produce). Consider listing your event on www.calagtour.org or your local community calendar, sponsor a well-respected travel blog, create a Facebook event to share, explore a partnership with your tourism bureau.

Who else within your network can help market the event? Local businesses? Nearby farms? Your farmers' market association? CSA members? Slow Food? A chef with a wide following?

If you don't have a captive audience, such as your CSA membership or local hotel/resort guests, make room in your budget for marketing and advertising expenditures. A standard budget allows for 30 percent of the operating cost to be spent on advertising!

Decide how formal or casual the event will be, and be sure your marketing materials reflect that feel.

All we do is post an announcement on the website, and every once in a while in the newsletter that goes to CSA members and other customers. The dinner dates are also announced on Facebook. Farm dinner photos are shared on Facebook and Instagram after the events, building interest in future dinners. The dinners always sell out pretty quickly after we announce the dates in November. This helps with cash flow in a slow season.

– Jenna Muller, Full Belly Farm

At the Event

Communicate your farm's vision and goals and personal story.

Have materials ready for people to take home: CSA sign-up brochure or a schedule of farmers' markets you attend. Always have a mailing list sign-up sheet available. If people are enjoying their experience, they will be eager to receive information on future opportunities.

If your event is raising money for a specific cause – expanding beehives, remodeling the farm stand, supporting CSA shares for low-income families – share this information and make sure your family and staff tell a consistent message about the investment.

Consider additional sales opportunities of farm products at the dinner event – perhaps a farm stand set up when guests arrive, or a table with baskets of soaps, jams or other products for sale

Give guests something to remember the event – a menu or a small gift from the farm.

Some “at the event” marketing:

Each dinner guest receives a little take-away to memorialize the evening. We take pride in producing a beautiful menu with a story about the farm on the back. We like to share a little something that represents the farm. - *Lynette Sonne, FARMstead ED*

For this event, additional sales were raffle tickets for the raffle that benefited the Four Seasons Farm. Apple Hill Growers Association members donated gift baskets and other gifts for the raffle. Since the goal was to promote summer growers, there was a fruit stand set up with products from the farms, and also signs listing the farms open in the summer, with a slogan “Not just apples”

- *Christine Delfino, Delfino Farms*

It's an important part of our business. It's classy. It has to be good. We use it as a marketing tool; a dinner translates into private events or other experiences on the farm. Dinner guests might bring a corporate group for an event or will tell their friends, who might hold a wedding on the farm.

- *Dee Harley, Harley Farms Goat Dairy*

Full Belly Farm dinner guests are invited to camp overnight on the farm after dinner, for an additional \$20 per car.



Expanding the options:

The evening before the farm dinners, during the warmer summer and fall months, Full Belly Farm offers “Pizza Nights”, selling pizzas baked in an outdoor oven, farm salad and homemade ice cream – all a la carte, boxed to go. Pizza night costs about \$25 per person. Customers are invited to purchase the prepared food from the on-site farm stand and then enjoy a picnic on the farm.

Jenna Muller of Full Belly Farm says, “Since we have blocked out the weekend for the Saturday night farm dinner anyway, we decided to offer the Pizza Nights on the Fridays just before the dinners, to add some revenue. The Pizza Nights are much more casual, with people setting blankets on the grass and no reservations required. Customer numbers for Pizza Night have ranged from 50 to 350 people.”

Photography

Documenting your event is critical. Don't overlook this important element for your website and future marketing. Hire a professional photographer to ensure you don't miss the opportunity to showcase your location looking its best. The photographs should focus on the quality of the food, the chefs, the setting, signage, guests interacting with each other, and the details that make your event unique. The images should be high quality and capture the look and feel of the event so that when a prospective client sees what you have to offer, they will want to sign up for the next dinner! Even if you can only afford to hire a professional for a short amount of time, do not miss this all important step. This is a great way to attract more business!

Advice from the experts:

If you're serious, invest in getting your own plates and silverware.

Make sure it's fun and something you enjoy doing, because it is a lot of work

– Jenna Muller, Full Belly Farm



A summer dish from Full Belly Farm

Don't be afraid to charge an adequate fee to ensure that you make a profit. Farming is tough, most of the time working for free. But people will pay for entertainment and experiences, so do not be afraid to make sure that you make a profit on dining experiences on the farm.

– Glenn Tanaka, Tanaka Farms

Have insurance. Make sure caterers and other vendors have insurance.

Be clear about boundaries, both physical (where guests can go and not go) and personal (time)

– Dee Harley, Harley Farms Goat Dairy

Flow is big for an event. When people arrive, you should always give them a wine glass, a cocktail or an hors d'oeuvre (or several of these). Give them a chance to mingle for an hour or so. Then sit them down for the dinner. Since it is awkward to get up from a dinner and just leave, get people up for a dessert buffet and coffee. This will give people another chance to mingle and perhaps buy wine or other products before they leave.

– Christine Delfino, Delfino Farms

A farm dinner is your opportunity to set the stage to star what that farm grows. The spotlight has to be on the farm and what the guests get from the farm. Telling the farm story is super important. Make sure the farmer has a chance to tell his or her story and the story of the farm.

Put the menu atop the place setting (something special to be saved), with a story on the back that relates to the event to the farm.

– Lynette Sonne, FARMstead ED

Last minute check list example

(not complete or inclusive for all dinner events - Make your own!)

- Email guests day before with time to arrive, what to wear, what to expect.
- Pick up donations from other farms, or purchase other farm products.
- Harvest all dinner food.
- Complete seating chart & name cards (these change up to the day of the dinner as cancellations happen).
- Inventory linens, cutlery, dishes, platters, serving utensils, gravy boats.
- Prep for coffee, tea, mint water, and lemonade.
- Set tables and decorate.
- Cut flowers; make bouquets.
- Organize staff and allocate jobs: bussers, servers, back-end help, dish-washers, photographers, greeters to check people in and chat with early arrivals. Make sure all staff are on board with their job and the mission of the event. Having to-do lists and checklists for your staff can help. Do not give yourself a job other than host.
- Set up event tent with tables and chairs.
- Mow and weed whack.
- Set up lights in tent and elsewhere; illuminate path going to porta-potty or restroom facility.
- Format and print menus (do this last minute, as the menu can change until the last day).
- Post signs for parking, farm products, ingredient lists, etc.
- Make sure there is enough ice.
- Get firewood ready to be lit on time, if having a fire circle.
- Put out guest book and other information (business cards, etc.)
- Check pathways and yard for dog poop, chicken poop, other such messes.
- If there will be music or a movie, make sure sound/projector is set to go.

After tackling elements such as safety, signage, liability, permitting, and zoning, many farmers are finding that dinners are a fruitful way to engage farm visitors. Dinners can be an opportunity for you to showcase your finest products, your community connections, and the land you steward every day, while tapping into a new market of culinary-minded tourists and neighbors.

Your farm, family, and market are always changing, so make a plan for evaluating your dinners regularly and adjust as needed. This flexibility will bring resilience to your business, and is critical for helping your farm reach its overall goals.



Appendix A: Budget Template for a Farm Dinner Event

This is suggested budget template for a farm dinner. An excel version of this budget template, with formulas entered, is available for download here: <https://tinyurl.com/ybhnd6j2> To use this budget form, adjust the line items to fit your needs and enter numbers that fit your operation into the yellow squares. Watch the bottom line shift.

Budget Template - Farm Dinner

Income		dinner ticket price		
		# of paying guests		
		gross income from ticket sales		0
		expected on-site product sales		
		total income		0
Expenses				
	Food	cost of food produced on farm		
		cost of purchased food		
		cost of purchased drinks		
	Staff	Chef, Caterer payment or salary		
		Marketing, organizing payment or salary		
		Farm clean-up, event set-up		
		Hosting, serving and clean-up staff		
		Wine pouring staff		
		Parking attendents, etc. staff		
	Marketing	any advertising costs		
	Rentals, if needed	tents, tables, chairs, plates, linens, etc.		
		portable toilets, hand washing		
	Purchased Equipment and supplies	Cost of purchased plates, tents, tables, chairs, etc. (to be spread over 5 or 6 events)		
	Supplies	any disposable plates, napkins, etc.		
		printing menus, signs, etc.		
		cleaning supplies, candles, fuel		
	permit fees	event permit, fees		
		liquor permit		
		additional insurance		
	facility	wear and tear on infrastructure		
		missed facility rental income		
	product sales cost	production cost of products sold on site (estimated at 60% of product sales)		0
		total expenses		0
		net income		0

Resources

Vermont Agritourism Guides - <http://www.uvm.edu/vtagritourism/?Page=guides.html>

Rutgers University Extension Training for Agritourism Development - <http://agritourism.rutgers.edu/training/>

UC SAREP Agritourism Resources - <http://asi.ucdavis.edu/programs/sarep/research-initiatives/fs/agritourism-1/agritourism>

Agritourism and Nature Tourism in California – Second Edition - anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/Details.aspx?itemNo=3484

California Small Farm Food Safety Guidelines - ucanr.edu/sites/UrbanAg/files/283565.pdf

University of California Cooperative Extension Sonoma County Ombudsman fact sheets (regulations): <https://ucanr.edu/sites/CESonomaAgOmbuds/Agritourism/#fs>

Food Handler Training Courses - <https://www.ansi.org/Accreditation/credentialing/certificate-issuers/AllDirectoryListing?prgID=262&statusID=4>

Example of Temporary Food Facility Operator’s Packet from Sacramento County - http://www.emd.saccounty.net/EH/FoodProtect-RetailFood/Documents/TFF_EventOrganizersPacket.pdf

AB-626 California Retail Food Code: microenterprise home kitchen operations: https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB626

UC Cooperative Extension Foothill Farming Risk Management Guide: https://ucanr.edu/sites/placernevadasmallfarms/Farm_Business_Planning/FBP_Risk_Management/Risk_Management/



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For more Vermont agritourism resources, see www.uvm.edu/vtagritourism/

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3. “Managing Liability” is from Rutgers University Extension, “Agritourism Liability”

4. “Food Safety Requirements and Licenses” and “Serving Alcohol” sections are based on information compiled by the University of California Cooperative Extension Sonoma County: <https://ucanr.edu/sites/CESonomaAgOmbuds/Agritourism/#fs>

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