



# A Virginia Producer-Buyer Networking Event Toolkit: Facilitating Value Chain Connections

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# Introduction

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Virginia is fortunate to have a diverse collection of agricultural, natural, and community assets. In the commonwealth, the agriculture and forestry industry contribute 9.5% of the total gross domestic product.<sup>1</sup> According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Agricultural Statistics Service, the average farm size in Virginia is 181 acres.<sup>2</sup> These midsize farms provide a plethora of jobs and control a majority of the farmland in Virginia. Improving the viability of these farms would help maintain Virginia’s agricultural diversity and employment outlook.

With Virginia’s proximity to the nation’s capital and its access to ports, we are well-positioned to provide food for East Coast populations and also serve as an attractive tourist destination. Keeping land in agricultural production will preserve rural view sheds that are an essential product offering of the tourism industry. Agritourism allows agricultural operations to add to their existing enterprise and diversify revenue streams, increasing their resiliency.

These family-owned farms and associated jobs are at risk due to a crisis of agriculture of the middle,<sup>3</sup> where many of the small and midsize farms in our region lack the scale to compete in price with larger farms and lack the resources to viably market their products directly to consumers. According to the 2012 USDA census, less than 16 cents of every dollar spent on food actually goes to the farmer.<sup>4</sup> Marketing directly to consumers and intermediated markets allows producers to capture more of that food dollar and increase production to achieve the scale necessary to survive. Farmers can market directly to consumers, restaurants, retailers, markets, distributors, food hubs, schools, and institutions.

Marketing directly to consumers in local markets has many benefits for the consumer. Local economic and community development authorities and destination marketing organizations can play a key role in value chain coordination of our local food system as an act of economic gardening. Economic gardening is a development strategy that aims to grow the economy from within by building an entrepreneurial climate that capitalizes on existing community assets and resources.<sup>5</sup> By supporting and building the capacity of direct marketing farms and source-conscious businesses, rural localities can create valuable tourism products and the support of local businesses that also contribute to the

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<sup>1</sup> Rephann, Terance J. 2017. *The Economic Impact of Virginia’s Agriculture and Forestry Industries*. Charlottesville: Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, University of Virginia. [www.vdacs.virginia.gov/pdf/weldoncooper2017.pdf](http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/pdf/weldoncooper2017.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2019. *2017 Census of Agriculture*. [www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus](http://www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus).

<sup>3</sup> Lyson, T. A., G. W. Stevenson, and R. Welsh, eds. 2008. *Food and the Mid-Level Farm: Renewing an Agriculture of the Middle*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

<sup>4</sup> USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2014. *2012 Census of Agriculture*. [www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus](http://www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus).

<sup>5</sup> Barrios, S., and D. Barrios. 2004. “Reconsidering Economic Development: The Prospects for Economic Gardening.” *Public Administration Quarterly* 28 (1/2): 70-101. [www.jstor.org/stable/41288214](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41288214).

health, happiness, and well-being of their communities. The improved quality-of-life amenities that result help to attract and retain a talented workforce, which is critical for any business, large or small.

This homegrown economy can be aided by the idea of value chain coordination where supporters of the local food system can facilitate relationships through matchmaking, relationship building, convening, and educating. One example of a value chain coordination activity is the organization of networking events between producers, buyers, and consumers to increase exposure and market access for small and midsize food businesses. These authentic experiences can lead to long-lasting buying relationships across the value chain that builds wealth and capacity.

This toolkit, which examines other case studies in Virginia, serves as a guide for local governments, community organizers, and support agencies to organize their own producer-buyer networking events in order to play a role in local and regional value chain coordination.

## Background and Context

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The Shenandoah Valley Farm2Fork Affair grew out of a diverse regional history of planning and executing buyer-to-producer networking and sales events. A brief history of these activities includes the following events by date and location:

**Love at First Bite (Rockbridge County, Lexington, and Buena Vista)** was held in January 2015 at the Virginia Horse Center in Lexington. In addition to networking, this event included presentations on food safety and regulations, organic farming, insurance and liability, and a farm dinner. The entire event was five hours, from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m. Seventy-three people attended, consisting of

- 28 producers representing 23 farms and businesses.
- 23 buyers representing 18 businesses.
- 22 others (not identified as either producers or buyers).

**Farm2Fork Affair (Staunton, Augusta County, and Waynesboro)** was held in March 2016 at Hermitage Hill Farm and Stables in Waynesboro. The event featured a trade-show-style networking and exhibit space, catered local hors d'oeuvres, free producer samples, and a chef speaker and demonstration. A pre-event training session that drew 10 participants was held before the main event. The Farm2Fork Affair drew 187 participants, composed of

- 40 producers representing 22 farms and businesses.
- 115 buyers representing 59 businesses and organizations.
- 32 others (not identified as either producers or buyers).

**Farm2Fork Affair (Northern Shenandoah Valley)** was held in March 2017 at the Mimslyn Inn in Luray. The event featured a trade-show-style networking and exhibit space and a speaker. Complimentary light fare, free producer samples, and a cash bar were available. A pre-event workshop held the month before the main event drew 25 producers to prepare them with training and marketing assistance. The event itself drew 231 participants, composed of

- 49 producers representing 34 farms and businesses.
- 151 buyers representing 74 businesses and organizations.
- 31 others representing 25 different organizations.

**Shenandoah Valley Farm2Fork Affair (Frederick, Warren, Clarke, Shenandoah, Page, Rockingham, Augusta, Rockbridge, Highland, and Bath counties)** was held in March 2019 at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds in Harrisonburg after partners from the previous events saw an opportunity to expand and increase exposure for participants by working together as a region. The event featured a trade-show-style exhibit hall with ample space for networking. Food trucks provided lunch for purchase. Two pre-event workshops were held prior to the trade show that each drew approximately 20 producers for training and marketing assistance. The event itself drew approximately 203 participants, composed of

- 87 producers representing 58 farms and businesses.
- 94 buyers.
- 22 others representing sponsors, organizers, and volunteers.

Each of these events included exit surveys. In addition, the initial Farm2Fork Affair in the Staunton/Augusta/Waynesboro region conducted a follow-up survey three months after the event, which was used to develop a Shenandoah Valley regional networking event.

Attendees of the 2019 Farm2Fork Affair were surveyed the day of the event to assess overall day-of satisfaction and outlook. Survey respondents, which included both producers and buyers, averaged about 10 new contacts each. Seventy-three percent of producers expected to make a sale as a result of the event, and 89% of buyers expected to make a purchase as a result of the event. Six months later, another survey was administered to assess impact and evaluate for future planning purposes. There were 25 respondents, including 13 producers and seven buyers. Over 58% of producers reported having made sales as a result of participating in the Farm2Fork Affair, and 25% said that they might have made sales as a result of the event. Eighteen percent of producer respondents reported making sales greater than \$500.

The success of these events proved that events such as the Farm2Fork Affair provide a platform for tourism, economic development, and agricultural organizations to facilitate connections across the food value chain to support business and supply chain development and build more vibrant regional communities. Observations from these previous networking events and related evaluation activities are the basis of the recommendations made in this publication.



# Chapter 1. Assemble a Planning Committee

Producer-buyer networking events are elaborate productions that could not be pulled off by one person or organization. Assembling a committee of dedicated partners should be the first priority of anyone considering delivering a local food networking program.

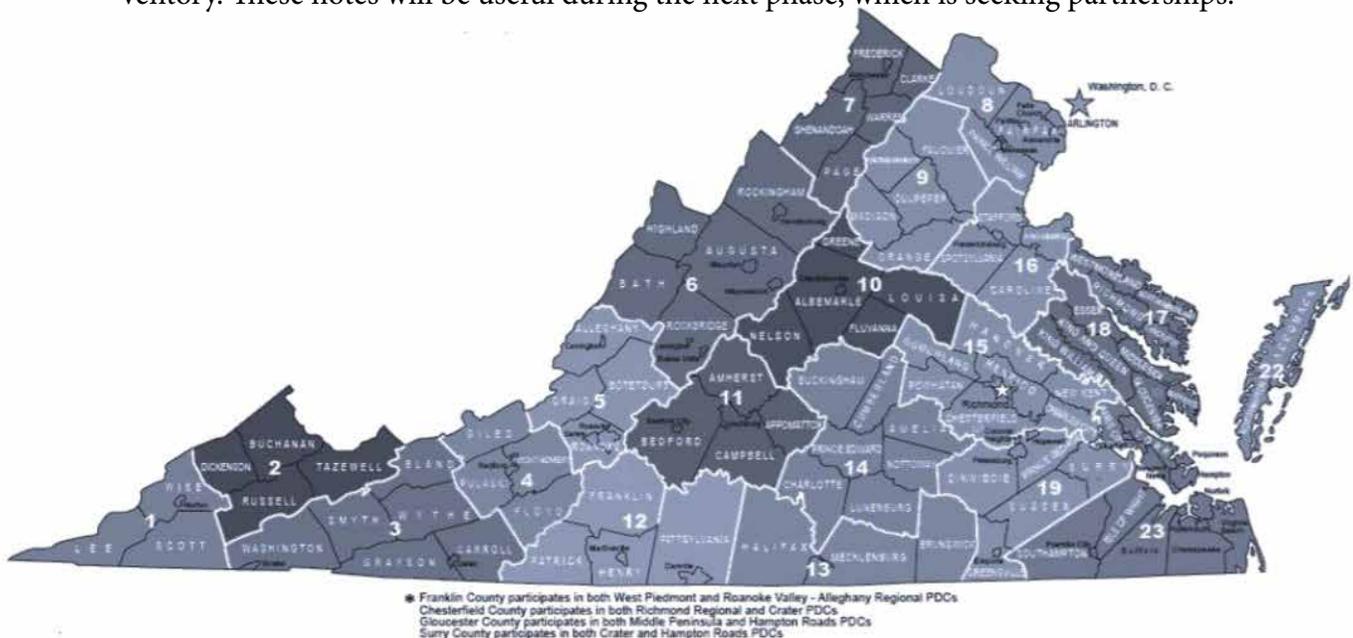
Each community has its own distinct organizations and individuals who play a role in community organizing. Define the region to focus on and take an inventory of the region’s assets.

## Defining the Region

It is important to define the region to effectively market the event to buyers from both inside and outside the area. Oftentimes buyers from metropolitan areas or outside of the state are not familiar with the local geography. Focusing on larger regions gives them a better idea of where the event and the producers will be located. In addition, planning these events at a regional level pools resources and casts a wider net of participating producers, which is more enticing for buyers traveling farther to make the trip worth their time. If you are unable to collaborate with neighboring localities, see Chapter 6 for recommendations about alternative networking events.

To define the region, you will want to consider the footprints of existing working groups in your area. Referencing a map of Virginia’s planning district is a good place to start because many agencies already use these definitions to organize their programs.

Take note of existing partnerships, organizations, or working groups by conducting an asset inventory. These notes will be useful during the next phase, which is seeking partnerships.



# Partnerships

Preparation and planned resources are essential for effective execution. Financial and in-kind support from partner organizations are also necessary. Partners can have varying levels of commitment, but ideally they should be cooperative and invested in the vitality of local food and agriculture systems. If they aren't able to commit money, they may be able to promote the event to their networks and audiences.



Partnership could be defined as:

- Serving on the planning committee.
- Sponsoring, securing, or providing in-kind donations.
- Volunteering staff time.
- Offering knowledge or expertise.
- Promoting the event to their networks.

Potential partners could include:



**Local economic development and tourism offices** – Tourism and economic development offices stand to gain from a vibrant local food system. Farm, food, and beverage industries contribute valuable tourism products and enhance quality of life. Restaurants and businesses sourcing locally also provide tourism offices with a more authentic and marketable product to promote. Local economic development agencies have a wealth of knowledge, resources, and networks that will help to execute a producer-buyer networking event. An event such as this provides economic stability for local businesses

by allowing them to diversify their supply chains.

**Virginia Cooperative Extension** – Since its creation, VCE has existed to serve the local agriculture industry and local communities. It also conducts periodic situational analyses that identify the main priorities of the localities they serve. Many of the existing programs would complement producer-buyer networking events. Extension offices and regional agents have connections with local producers, potential sponsors, local government offices, and state agencies. They also have access to educational resources through Virginia Tech and Virginia State University for training prior to the event.



**Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services** – The marketing department at VDACS has multiple programs and staff members who can aid a project like this. Each region has an assigned marketing and development specialist who has existing connections with large producers and buyers through the Virginia Grown and Virginia's Finest programs that they can use to raise awareness of and participation in the event.

**Regional branding programs** – Many regions already have organizations or programs in place to collectively market the region’s local farms and food businesses. Examples of these are Buy Fresh Buy Local chapters, agritourism trails, or local branding programs. If your region has any of these programs, they can bring information and perspective to the planning process.



**Chambers of commerce** – Depending on the scope of their mission, chambers of commerce can be an excellent network for both producers and buyers. They can also help recruit volunteers.

**Planning district commissions** – Planning district commissions are ideal partners to carry out programs on behalf of a region and can be great coordinators or fiscal agents.



**Industry partners** – Other partners can include representatives from the agriculture industry or local nonprofits. These organizations help bring additional knowledge and resources to the planning committee. These partners can include Farm Bureau, Farm Credit, agricultural lending businesses, farm service businesses, farm supply centers, large agricultural businesses, and established farm- and food-based businesses.

**Others** – Additional partners could include small business development centers, school and university dining services, Virginia Department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity, and community nonprofits, as well as chefs and restaurant associations.

## Planning Committee Structure

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The planning committee could be composed of the following:

- At least one representative from economic development.
- At least one representative from tourism.
- At least one representative from VCE or VDACS.
- At least one representative from each locality in the region.
- At least one producer representative.
- At least one buyer representative.
- At least one representative of the fiscal agency.

One committee member can fill multiple roles. The planning committee should not exceed nine members to ensure all opinions can be heard and managed. An odd number of members makes voting simpler. All other participants can be considered volunteers whose roles can be found in Chapter 3.

# Roles

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The structure of the planning committee and the roles within can vary based on the circumstances of each group. The committee should include the following officers and others as needed.

## Chair

The chair should be well-informed of the history, mission, and activities of the planning committee. They should be committed to working collaboratively to accomplish all of the committee's goals. Specific responsibilities include:

- Set meeting dates and location.
- Communicate with the entire planning committee and subcommittees.
- Prepare meeting agendas.
- Conduct meetings.
- Call meetings to order, take votes, and adjourn meetings.
- Serve as a spokesperson when required.

## Secretary

The secretary should be a highly organized person capable of keeping track of all planning committee records. Specific responsibilities include:

- Take notes during meetings.
- Type and distribute meeting minutes.
- File important records such as licenses, permits, and contracts.

## Treasurer

The treasurer will serve as the liaison between the committee and the fiscal agent. In some cases, the treasurer could be a representative from the fiscal agency. This position will work closely with the chair and subcommittee chairs to manage the financial records of the group. The treasurer is responsible for communicating with the fiscal agent to complete the following tasks:

- Prepare a financial update prior to each meeting.
- Report on the finances during each meeting.
- Keep record of all invoices and receipts for reimbursement.
- Complete copies of the group's tax-exempt forms.
- Sign, mail, and deposit checks.
- Advise committees during the decision-making process.
- Oversee grant reimbursements (if applicable).

## General Members

All members should be knowledgeable about the mission of the producer-buyer networking event and willing to be an ambassador. They should also be committed to filling in for any of the volunteer tasks listed in Chapter 3.

## Meeting Frequency

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At a minimum, the entire planning committee should meet once a month prior to the event on a regularly scheduled basis to keep track of progress and the timeline. In the months and weeks leading up to the event, the frequency of meetings might need to increase. Subcommittee meetings will have varying intervals of frequency throughout the planning process. These meetings can be in person or virtual.

## Recommended Subcommittees

In order to efficiently execute all of the tasks associated with planning a producer-buyer networking event, it is recommended that the planning committee be divided into subcommittees with very specific responsibilities.

Subcommittees could include the following:

- Fundraising and development.
- Operations.
- Marketing.
- Producer training and recruitment.
- Communications.

The subsequent chapters will detail the responsibilities of each subcommittee.

## Hiring an Event Coordinator

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In some cases, it might be appropriate and within budget to hire an event coordinator to help plan the trade show. This person will need to be advised and assisted by the planning committee, which will delegate clear, defined tasks based on the person's background and knowledge (e.g., sponsorships may be best secured through other planning committee members). The event coordinator would most likely be able to assist with the tasks outlined in Chapter 3.

## Administration

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A producer-buyer networking event has numerous moving parts that can become difficult to manage. Using a shared (or cloud) platform for email, phone, and file storage allows for simple sharing and access across organizations and committee members for keeping track of brand accounts, passwords, finances, and communications year to year. This ensures that the event can be picked up each year even though the members of the planning committee can change.

## Defining the Mission

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The organizers of the producer-buyer networking event should create a mission statement that aligns with their values and the needs of the region. The mission statement will explain the purpose and objectives of the group. Not only will this statement serve as a guide for the planning committee when making decisions, but it will also communicate the brand values of the event. Include a brief but powerful mission statement wherever fitting, including the website, press releases, social media, sponsor letters, printed invitations, and programs. Goals and objectives can include:

- Establishing a reputation for quality and diversity of agricultural products in the region.
- Increasing market opportunities and sales of local foods.
- Enhancing producer-buyer connections.
- Building a more viable and resilient food system.
- Supporting and raising awareness of local food and farms.
- Offering an opportunity to experience and taste the region's unique offerings.

Once the mission statement has been defined, secure assets for your event, such as a creative event name and attractive logo. This will help the event be recognized by producers and buyers to build a reputation if it is to be a recurring program. Shenandoah Valley Farm2Fork Affair is a trademarked brand that helps to build on the event's success year after year.

## Chapter 2. Fundraising and Development

The fundraising and development committee is responsible for seeking out relationships and financial partnerships such as in-kind trades. In addition to securing funds, this committee will also be responsible for assessing the event impact to improve and secure future funding.

### Sponsorships

Both public and private entities can find value in supporting this event. During the asset inventory, the planning committee should start a record of which organizations have been approached about partnerships and their level of interest.

It is suggested that registration fees be kept low, as higher fees can create barriers to entry and reduce the event's engagement. If this is the case, revenue from registration fees will not be enough to cover the costs of putting on a producer-buyer networking event, and sponsorships from both public and private partners will be necessary.

The chair of the fundraising subcommittee should be the main point of contact for all sponsorships. Members of the planning committee with connections to potential sponsors should make necessary introductions so that the fundraising chair can complete the transaction.

The fundraising chair is responsible for collecting the following from each sponsor:

- Official sponsor logo.
- Appropriate contact information for invoicing and thank-you notes.
- Tracking and following up on in-kind contributions.
- Potentially, a list of producers and buyers that sponsors would like to invite.

### Locality Sponsors

Localities — particularly tourism and economic development offices should be approached prior to seeking private sponsorships. Assess the importance of the agriculture industry to these localities' strategic plans to determine their interest prior to requesting funding. Gauging the number of farm- and food-based businesses in a locality can help to determine how many businesses a locality could support with their sponsorship.



The Shenandoah Valley Farm2Fork Affair’s planning committee strategically approached locality sponsorships as a way of subsidizing the producers’ costs to participate. Producers located within localities that had “bought in” received a subsidized rate compared to producers from localities that had not chosen to sponsor.

## Private Sponsorships

Private businesses and organizations are also good sources for sponsorships, and many will find value in having an exhibitor booth at the event. Revisit the Partnerships section of Chapter 1 for a basic overview of potential public sponsors.

Potential private sponsors could include:

- Farm service businesses – Farm Credit, Farm Bureau, banks and insurance companies, farm supply stores, and cooperatives.
- Established food-based businesses – Larger food-based businesses could find value in name recognition from supporting the event as well as premier booth placement during the event.
- Distributors and food hubs – Distributors and food hubs are important intermediaries in the food supply chain. Many of these businesses might be located outside of the region and have interest in attending the event as a buyer, but they could also find value in networking with other buyers as an exhibit sponsor.
- Virginia Grown – Events such as these align well with the mission of the Virginia Grown initiative through VDACS.
- Virginia MarketMaker – Thanks to VCE, VDACS, and Farm Credit, MarketMaker is a free tool for Virginia businesses to establish business-to-business connections and conduct market research. Producer-buyer networking events are a great outreach opportunities for MarketMaker
- Media – Partnering with media outlets will help bring additional exposure to your event and its participants. Examples of media partners include radio stations, magazines, newspapers, blogs, and social media influencers.



## In-Kind Contributions

In addition to cash sponsorships, partners may also be willing to provide the following examples of in-kind contributions:

- Sharing about the event through media channels.
- Extending invitations to producers and buyers.
- Providing volunteer staff time on the day of the event.

- Designing, printing, advertising, and other services.
- Providing venue space.
- Supplying food and other supplies.

These opportunities for in-kind contributions should be communicated and negotiated during the initial ask and may count towards sponsorship.

## Acknowledgements and Recognition

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All sponsorships should be secured prior to marketing the event to buyers so that recognition is included on all promotions. The fundraising committee should work closely with the operations committee to determine the sponsorship packages. Be sure to consider the configuration of your event venue, marketing timeline, overall budget, etc., when developing your sponsorship package. A sample sponsorship package from the Shenandoah Valley Farm2Fork Affair is included in the Appendix A.

### Thank-You Notes

Do not fail to properly thank all of your sponsors and supporters. No matter how you choose to recognize their contributions on the day of the event, it is a best practice to send a thoughtful thank-you note following the event and recap some of the event’s successes, including testimonials if available. Showing your appreciation helps to build the relationship and increase your chances of getting their support in the future. As you collect sponsors, make sure to keep track of their contact information and addresses to properly follow up.

## Development

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The fundraising and development committee should evaluate opportunities to further the mission of the producer-buyer networking event as it relates to the region or community. During fundraising campaigns, the committee should be open to alternative support and should also collect feedback about community needs and resource gaps. This qualitative data can plant the seed for grant project ideas.

## Evaluation and Assessment

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Event attendees should be surveyed at different times after the event to assess the overall impact and logistical effectiveness of the producer-buyer networking event. This data is useful in securing future promotions, sponsorships, and grant-funding efforts. The following surveys are recommended after the event:

- Day of the event – Attendees should be surveyed before leaving the venue. Consider a raffle to win a prize — like a basket of regional products. The questions should evaluate marketing

tactics, logistics, and satisfaction and should also ascertain whether they would be interested in participating in a follow-up interview.

- Post-event – Participants should also be electronically surveyed three to six months after the event to measure valuable connections or sales.

The fundraising and development committee should also work with the operations committee to design registration questions that can serve as a benchmark for some of these performance measures. Examples of survey questions can be found in Appendix B.

# Chapter 3. Operations

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The operations committee will oversee and carry out the general logistics and management of the event. If an event coordinator is hired, it is recommended that they chair this committee and manage its members to carry out tasks. Many of the recommendations made in this chapter depend on the region's budget, needs, and number of producers. A sample timeline of tasks can be found in Appendix C.

## Event Format

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For the purposes of this toolkit, the producer-buyer networking event refers to a trade-show-style event where producers are given booth space to exhibit their business and product offerings. Buyers of all types are invited to explore the different producers' booths and have conversations to establish business relationships.

Given the profile of Virginia's specialty growers, it is wise to consider the different markets that make up agricultural sales in your region to determine if an industry-only event is what is most needed or if you want to consider a direct-to-consumer event. If your region does not have the volume or capacity of producers selling wholesale, consider making the event open to the public and creating special accommodations for wholesale producers and buyers. See Chapter 6 for alternative event formats and considerations for consumer-facing events.



As an example, a producer-buyer networking event could take the following format.

- 9:00 a.m.** Vendor arrival and check-in
- 10:30 a.m.** Vendor deadline to set up
- 11:00 a.m.** Buyers arrive, trade show begins (including networking, tastings, sales)
- Noon** Welcome and acknowledgements
- 1:30 p.m.** Possible speaker, cooking demonstration, or program
- 3:00 p.m.** Closing remarks
- 4:00 p.m.** Break down and cleanup

# Timing

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## Time of Year

Based on data from a survey of local producers, we recommend planning your trade show for late winter or early spring before planting season begins. Although the products available for sampling are more limited at this time of the year, producers can start to build relationships and plant their harvest based on contacts made at the event. Producers can also follow up with samples when they are being harvested.

This is also the time of year that consumers can sign up for Community Supported Agriculture shares, so it is an opportune time for a consumer-facing event, if that is fitting. More than 20% of producers and buyers who attended the 2019 Shenandoah Valley Farm2Fork Affair responded that March is the best time of year for them to attend a networking event.

Note: VDACS Virginia's Finest hosts the Virginia Food & Beverage Expo every other year in March of the even years. Plan accordingly so your event does not compete. Holding the producer-buyer networking event every two years allows time and resources for planning.

To increase participation, consider incorporating a question about time of year into your evaluations to pinpoint the best time for your audience. Also, see Chapter 6 to consider alternate or complementary events that require fewer resources and could be held during the height of harvest season.



## Day of the Week

According to the Farm2Fork evaluations, the best day of the week varied widely between producers and buyers. Ultimately, producers need to be flexible regarding the buyers' schedules if they want to advance their sales. The types of buyers that will attend this event could include restaurant chefs, produce brokers, retail stores, grocery stores, farm markets, and school nutrition directors.

Holding the event on a weekend is discouraged when trying to attract restaurant chefs. Mondays are best for restaurant buyer attendance at a producer-buyer networking event because many restaurants are closed on Mondays. Although this means the planning committee and volunteers might have to set up the venue on a Sunday, it helps to accommodate the schedules of many buyers.

If the planning committee decides to open the event to the public to promote direct-to-consumer buying relationships, the schedule should consider when the majority of the public is available.

# Location and Venue

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One of the first tasks of the planning committee, in conjunction with setting a date, will be selecting a venue to host the trade show. The chair of the operations committee will lead the search process and should consider the following.

## Geographic Location

When choosing the location of a producer-buyer networking event, consider producer and buyer convenience. If available, a location central to the region is best to minimize producers' transportation costs and their time away from their operation. If working with localities, the venue should be located within one of the localities that sponsored the event. Also consider a location sponsor as another way to save on budget.

The operations committee should also consult with the marketing committee to understand primary target markets to attract buyers. Minimizing travel time for buyers increases the likelihood of their attendance. If it would not inhibit producers' participation, the planning committee might consider hosting the event closer to a metropolitan area if trying to connect with regional buyers.



## Venue Requirements

The planning committee should evaluate venues in their initial asset inventory, dependent on availability, budget, expected attendees, and participating sponsors (e.g., localities). The space will need to accommodate 20-100 tables/booths as well as ample space for networking. Negotiating an in-kind sponsorship could be possible.

Review the Supplies section in this chapter to consider additional perks a venue might be able to provide. Venues such as conference or event centers will require less expense on décor and supplies. Basic site requirements for a region-wide producer-buyer networking event include, but are not limited to, the following considerations.

- Plenty of room for easy movement among vendor tables, allowing approximately 10 feet by 10 feet for each exhibitor space.
- Easy loading and unloading logistics for both local food producers and vendors.
- Ample parking and access for attendees.
- The ability to safely offer food samples, including access to any needed electricity or support services (e.g., three-bay sink) for food dishes.
- All-weather indoor meeting areas.

- Relatively easy to find and easy access from the interstate, particularly for distant travelers.
- A separate room or space to use as a hospitality suite for vendors and sponsors.
- Equipped with audiovisual system for announcements and presentations.
- Tables and chairs included or available for rent.
- Possibly guest Wi-Fi access.
- Ability to serve/sample alcohol on-site.

## Permitting and Licenses

When serving food and beverages to the public, consider state and local regulations. Inquire with the appropriate offices in your region at the beginning of the planning process to prevent being blindsided by regulatory barriers. All permits, licenses, and agreements should be kept on record by the secretary of the planning committee.

### Alcoholic Beverage Control License

If you will have alcohol producers offering product samples, the event must follow all ABC laws. ABC regulations will affect venue options, permit types, types of alcoholic-beverage producers that can participate, and also registrations fees.

In many cases, ABC law requires nonprofits to apply for event permits to serve alcohol. Talk with your local ABC agent to confirm requirements depending on how your event is structured and the venue you choose. The application requires a designated person who will be responsible for managing risk during the event. Affiliated volunteers might be required to pour on behalf of the producer.

In some cases, individual producers will also need to apply for their own licenses to be able to provide samples; otherwise the planning committee will have to purchase the product in advance for it to be served or sampled. If a venue has an existing ABC license, you might not be able to apply for a separate license on the same premises.

Option: Charge a nominal registration fee for buyers so the event can be considered private. This could limit some of the ABC regulations you are subject to.

The event could also exclude alcohol producers from offering samples at the event, but this could lower producer and buyer attendance.



## Health Department Permit

Each locality has different ordinances for health code requirements. Some allow for a special event permit to cover all exhibitors, but other departments require each exhibitor serving samples to apply for their own permit. Designated hand- and equipment-washing stations may be required.

Once the venue is confirmed, contact the applicable health department so producers know what is expected. Ask if the department would waive application fees to help producers.



## Liability Insurance

The regulations mentioned above help to minimize the risk of harm and injury as a result of your event, as can a liability insurance policy. Some venues require a record of insurance to be on file before signing a contract. Consult with the planning committee to see if any represented organizations would be able to include the venue or the planning committee as a temporary rider on their insurance policy. If not, the fiscal agent could apply for a policy on behalf of the planning committee.

## Registration

Registration process planning is helpful. An online registration service organizes data, payments, and communications. Two options include:

- Eventbrite, which affordably provides useful features in a familiar format.
- Google Forms, which is a free option.

It is recommended that participants be divided into different audiences during the registration process (i.e., have them register as either buyers, producers, sponsors, or “other,” such as a direct consumer if CSA shares are part of the event). Each ticket type will have different fees and customized questions that will inform other decisions as noted below. Sample questions can be found in Appendix B.

## Producers

Producers can be defined as small businesses within your region that are growing or making food, beverages, and other agricultural products. These participants will be exhibiting during the trade show.

## Buyers

Buyers can be defined as restaurants, caterers, chefs, retailers, farm markets, grocery stores, distributors, brokers, food hubs, school nutrition directors, universities, hospitals, and institutions that are interested in sourcing from local producers. Depending on budget and space, you may want to require that each attendee register separately. This is helpful for head count, name tags, and future marketing efforts.

## Sponsors/Exhibitors

Sponsors can be defined as any of the partners that made cash or in-kind donations during the planning phases. The sponsorship package details how many free registrations were included with each sponsorship level. It is up to the fundraising committee to verify sponsor registrations for name tags and catering head counts.



## Volunteers

Volunteers can be defined as members of the steering committee, colleagues, additional guests of sponsor organizations, community partners, and individuals who did NOT pay registration fees and therefore are offering their time.

## Others

Others can be defined as anyone who does not fit into the roles defined above. Random people will often ask to attend as spectators for free, but it is recommended that you ask them to register in one of the predefined roles. This keeps it fair for the paying participants and also does not circumvent

incentives for recruiting volunteers and sponsors. You can always make exceptions, but it's best to have everyone register in some capacity to keep things organized.

If the planning committee chooses to invite consumers to attend along with buyers, this additional participant category needs to be included in the registration process.

## Fees

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The costs of hosting a producer-buyer networking event need to be subsidized through sponsorships and grants. Relying on registration fees would create barriers that could reduce participation. Even if you are able to cover all of the costs through public and private fundraising efforts, it is still recommended that you charge some sort of fee to participate. There are multiple reasons for this, such as:

- Offsets some of the total costs of execution.
- Translates to perceived value of the product or service.
- Increases the chance of attendance when a small upfront investment is made.
- Makes you exempt from certain regulations because the event can be considered private.

## Deadlines

### Early-Bird Pricing

Early-bird pricing and incentives are optional promotional tools to encourage registration. These deadlines should be set **at least two months** ahead of the event to allow time for producers to sign up and attend pre-event training. Incentives could include:

- Discounted registration.
- Raffle entry.
- Free package upgrades.

### Producer Deadlines

If space is limited, inform producers that participation will be based on a first come-first served basis. Producer deadlines for registration will depend on the estimated time for printing programs, name tags, and layouts.

- These items should be finalized and sent to print **at least two weeks** prior to the event.
- Consult with your printer to confirm the turnaround time for projects.
- Producers that sign up after the deadline should be made aware that they are not guaranteed to be included in programs and venue maps.
- Registration totals should be reported at every meeting to decide if more aggressive recruitment needs to occur.

### Buyer Deadlines

Buyers should also be encouraged to register early so the operations committee can secure appropriate numbers of name tags and tote bags and adequately prepare producers.

- These items should be finalized and sent to print **at least two weeks** prior to the event.
- Consult with your printer to confirm the turnaround time for projects.
- Buyers that sign up after the deadline should be made aware that they are not guaranteed to receive all registration materials.
- Registration totals should be reported at every meeting to decide if the marketing committee needs to increase campaigns.
- Buyers should be permitted to register on-site as long as space allows.



## Producer Fees

According to a survey of participants in the 2019 Shenandoah Valley Farm2Fork Affair, the majority of producers were willing to pay between \$10 and \$50 to participate. The planning committee will need to decide if and what to charge producers to maximize both attendance and cost recovery.

Depending on the budget, producer registration fees could cover the following:

- 10-foot by 10-foot booth space.
- One 8-foot table
- Two folding chairs.
- Floor-length tablecloth.
- Up to two guests.
- Electricity access (on a first-come, first-served basis).
- Wi-Fi access.

Note: Additional space, tables, chafing dishes, and guests can be offered during registration

## Buyer/Consumer Fees

According to a survey of participants in the 2019 Shenandoah Valley Farm2Fork Affair, buyers were not willing to pay more than \$20 dollars to participate in a producer-buyer networking event. A nominal fee of \$5 is recommended in order to reduce noncommittal registrations. The Virginia Food & Beverage Expo does not charge buyers to participate. Events that allow for public participation may be able to generate larger sponsor contributions to minimize ticket prices/registration fees.

Depending on the budget, buyer/consumer registration fees can include:

- One attendee.
- Name tag.
- Complimentary tote bag and program.

Ideas for buyer fee structure perks include:

- VIP lounge.
- Farm to table lunch or dinner.
- Overnight package with participating lodging or other creative structures.
- Buyers could be entered to win one of these perks to encourage early registration.

## Alternative Fees

If revenue generation is not a priority, the planning committee can use creative fee structures to increase engagement.

## Deposits

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Even though it is free or inexpensive for producers to participate, there are sunk costs associated with each business that registers. These costs include name tags, rental fees, and catering expenses. An empty table looks unprofessional and diminishes the overall aesthetic of the trade show. To deter this from happening, the planning committee can decide to collect a deposit when producers register that will be returned if they show up on the day of the event and stay through its duration.

## Donations

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If the planning committee chooses to partner with a nonprofit organization like a food bank, in lieu of registration fees, participants can either make a monetary donation or donate nonperishable food items.

## Programs and Name Tags

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Programs and name tags orient participants and facilitate networking. Both producers and buyers will receive a directory prior to the event for research and preparation.

- Printing deadlines should coincide with closing registration.
- A complete program should be updated and shared digitally after the event to include last-minute participants.
- Include a map of the event's layout.
- If possible, indicate the products offered by each vendor to help guests and organizers navigate the event. Name tags should be color coded to distinguish between producers, buyers, volunteers, etc., to help make introductions simpler. This information will be captured in the registration process. Consumer or public name tags would be optional depending on numbers.



## Supplies

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A significant portion of the budget will be allocated to supplies, both fixed and variable (and optional). A sample budget is included in Appendix C. See Venue Requirements earlier in this chapter for other considerations.

### Variable Supplies

Decide before registration opens if these supplies will be included in the standard registration fee. It is recommended that décor and furniture be offered and provided to all participants to create a cohesive look among vendor booths as opposed to them providing their own. Some producers are



experienced with trade shows, while others will be unequipped to prepare an entire display.

**Tables, chairs, and linens** – These items are sometimes offered by the venue for an additional charge. Check availability and pricing when booking. Providing linens is highly encouraged for a uniform look and it is expected with most trade shows. Include tables needed for sponsors, registration, refreshments, and guest seating in your total.

**Chafing dishes and electricity** – Chafing dishes are recommended for vendors that are offering product samples for proper food safety temperatures. Alternatives like Crock-Pots require electricity and extension cords. Chafing dishes can be rented, but often the fuel source (e.g., Sterno) will need to be purchased separately or provided by the vendors. To get a count, survey vendors during registration about whether they will be serving samples and will therefore need a chafing dish. You can also ask if they will need access to electricity at this time. Outdoor events may require generators and longer extension cords.



**Printing** – Items to be printed included programs, name tags, and signage. Printing proofs should be sent two weeks prior to the event to allow for last minute changes.

- Registration deadlines can be extended past printing deadlines, but complete and accurate digital copies of the directory should be made available online.
- Plenty of blank name tags should be printed and extra name tag holders should be made available for walk-in participants.
- Signage can include parking, welcome, orientation, and directional, as well as stage backdrops. If recognition on signage is included on sponsorship packages, be sure that all eligible sponsors are recognized before printing.

**Pipe and drape** – This can help to break up large event spaces and exhibit halls and provide a uniform look. It also provides a backdrop for vendors to hang signage and feel more comfortable in their booth space. Pipe and drape is often included with large venues.

**Refreshments** – Refreshments should be provided for producers. Other attendees should not expect to be fed beyond the samples provided by vendors. If the event is open to the public, consider inviting outside food vendors; without public traffic, this event might not be worth the vendors' time. Consider the following when arranging refreshments:

- Incorporate local items whenever possible.
- Coffee must be made available during setup and throughout the day.
- Drinking water should be made easily accessible for all attendees.

## Fixed Supplies

**Sound system** – If the venue is not equipped with a sound system one will need to be rented to make announcements, welcome participants, thank sponsors, and any other aspects of the program. Consider amplified speakers if it is an outdoor event.

**Stage** – Stages can be rented and will make a difference when speaking to large audiences.

**Projector and screen** – Ideas: PowerPoint signage, backdrops, presentations, or sponsor recognition.

**Photography and videography** – Capturing the event on film is especially helpful for marketing and promotion of future events, including social media. If budget is limited, a volunteer could capture the day.

**Handwashing station** – Have a sink station for handwashing and utensil washing available to the vendors, separate from the restrooms. Depending on what the venue is equipped with, a washing station with three bays may need to be provided. This can be rented or makeshift, with purchased tubs and washing supplies. Inquire with the venue about access to a sink that meets the health department’s specifications.

**Décor** – Decor will depend on the ambiance of the venue and desired effect. Vendor displays should be the focal point for the event. Décor should not distract or upstage vendor displays. Ideas include:

- Picnic tables.
- Hay bales.
- Lighting.
- Agricultural displays.
- Baskets.
- Seasonal produce.
- Flowers.

Often these items can be borrowed, donated, or rented; if they are purchased, they should be purchased locally to support the mission of the event. If the ambiance and appearance of the event is important, especially for photos, consider décor costs when choosing a venue.

Note: Outdoor events or elements will require significantly more supplies, including tents, outdoor heaters, generators, electricity, lighting, etc.



## Setup and Tear Down

### Layout

Organizing the layout by locality or region guides buyers who are looking for hyperlocal products and forces buyers to wander by other vendors. Arranging vendors by locality also facilitates producer networking. Many producers are also buyers, and this geographic organization helps producers to mingle with one another to maximize the impact of the event.



Organizing by product category (e.g., proteins, produce, fruit, beverages, value-added) is another option to help buyers find exactly the products they are seeking, but this could create unintended crowding around popular products or samples.

The layout of the event should be predetermined prior to vendors' arrival and spaces should be labeled. Depending on the size of the event, it might be helpful to have a map included in the program or welcome packet. Consider coding the map or program directory in a way that makes it easy for buyers to find the products they are looking for. This is helpful to participants and organizers.

### Hospitality Suite

The hospitality suite should serve as a backstage area for producers and organizers to take a break, network, and get refreshments throughout the event. It can also serve as a staging and storage area for supplies. The hospitality suite needs to include caffeine, water, and food to fuel vendors because they are required to stay the whole time.

## Volunteer Management

An event of this size would not be possible without a team of volunteers. Volunteer tasks should be clearly defined and assigned prior to the event. Volunteers can include:

- Members of the planning committee and outside volunteers.
- Individuals interested in attending without a clearly defined role.
- Partner organizations or agencies.

Pre-event volunteer tasks include:

- Distributing printed marketing materials.
- Making cold calls for producer and buyer recruitment.
- Stuffing registration packets and tote bags.
- Setting up the event and decorating.

## Day of the Event Volunteer Tasks

For a sample list of volunteer and planning committee tasks during the event, see Appendix C.

- Event setup and decoration.
- Vendor check-in and orientation.
- Vendor unloading and setup.
- Sponsor check-in and welcome.
- Parking attendants and guides.
- Door greeters.
- Buyer check-in.
- On-site registration.
- Survey distribution and collection.
- Vendor relief.
- Cleanup.
- Vendor assistance.
- Tear down.
- Photography.

# Chapter 4. Marketing

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The marketing committee is responsible for promotion of the event and overall communications about the brand. The committee will need to carefully consider the various audiences they will target: producers, buyers, sponsors, and possibly consumers.

## Website and Communications

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Build a simple website and/or Facebook page/event so attendees and sponsors can easily find more information and details about the event. Clearly separate information targeted for producers and buyers on your website, social media, emails, and invitations.

Remember to include your mission statement and logo on marketing materials. Clearly list registration deadlines and early-bird incentives on all communication. See the Deadlines section in Chapter 3 for these considerations.

## Buyer Marketing

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### Define Your Product for Buyers

An important step in a marketing campaign is clearly defining your product. For a producer-buyer networking event, be clear about the purpose and format of the event in your marketing and communications. Using language like “trade show,” “expo,” “trade only,” “industry only,” and “business-to-business” helps to define the intended audiences. Use pictures and testimonials when possible.

### Define Your Target Buyer Audience

Every producer will have a different target market. Target audiences for buyer marketing can include:

- Restaurant chefs and managers.
- Grocery and retail.
- Farm markets.
- Distributors and food hubs.
- Schools, universities, and hospitals.

Farm2Fork Affair organizers observed an ideal ratio of two to three buyers for every one producer business. Having too few buyers makes producers disappointed about their return on investment; having too many buyers can make producers feel overwhelmed or unhappy about missed potential connections. Buyers are also frustrated when there aren't enough producers or if they have to wait in line to network.



When keeping track of this ratio during the registration period, note that both producers and buyers will bring multiple participants per business. Keeping track of this ratio and analyzing registration surveys will help with the matchmaking aspect of a producer-buyer networking event. For example, inviting a dozen institutional buyers to a networking event where only two producers have the capacity or interest to sell to schools would damage the trust of buyers. It is likely those buyers would be hesitant to attend another event after having this experience. For a trade-show-style event, try to recruit at least four to five buyers who match with each producer's offerings to increase the potential for connections.

It is also important to consider where the buyers are coming from. Educate producers about feasible delivery options to these markets, or otherwise consider also inviting intermediaries that can provide distribution services. Virginia MarketMaker offers a market research tool to help define potential markets and identify target businesses during this process.

## Identify Buyer Networks

Finding relevant networks will increase the impact of your marketing campaigns. Share press releases, promotional emails, and social media campaigns with appropriate buyer networks such as:

- Past attendees or followers of the Virginia Food & Beverage Expo.
- VCE, VDACS's marketing and promotions department, and Virginia Department of Education's Farm to School Network.
- Food policy councils, branding programs, and networking organizations like Real Local RVA.
- Buy Fresh Buy Local chapters.
- Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington, Virginia Restaurant, Lodging & Travel Association, and other chef and restaurant associations.

Producers, sponsors, and planning committee members also have their own valuable networks that should be tapped into. Consider asking these stakeholders to endorse and promote the event to their networks and followers.

Each year, the invitation list will grow and need to be culled, but the data is one of your committee's most valuable assets. Be sure to capture as much contact information as possible during registration to add to your database and communicate with participants about future events and opportunities.

## Buyer Media Strategy

Buyers' time is limited and — depending on the size of the business — there can be multiple levels or points of contact involved before you reach a decision-maker. Because of this, it is important to be persistent and repetitive with buyer marketing campaigns and one-on-one outreach. According to the Shenandoah Valley Farm2Fork Affair evaluations, the most successful media strategies were email, printed invitations, and Facebook. Ultimately, tapping into the networks listed above will build trust in your brand when the information comes from a source buyers have an existing relationship with.

# Producer Marketing

## Define Your Product for Producers

Defining the purpose and format of the event will be important when recruiting producers. Committing to spend a full day away from the farm is a big investment for many small businesses. Producers will want to know the time and effort is worthwhile to participate. Be clear about what is expected of them and what they are poised to get in return. Marketing and networking are not included in every producer's skillset, so often the value needs to be explicitly communicated. Consider preparing a list of FAQ to share with producers and include on the website.



## Define Your Target Producer Audience

Defining your region, as advised in Chapter 1, will help narrow your pool of producers geographically. Virginia has a diverse agriculture industry that includes farmers of all sizes and types. If inviting various size and capacity producers to your networking event, be conscious that there will be potential buyers that match their needs.

## Identify Producer Networks

- Past attendees of other networking events like the Virginia Food & Beverage Expo.
- VCE, VDACS's marketing and promotions department.
- Farmers markets, food policy councils, branding programs.
- Buy Fresh Buy Local chapters.
- Industry associations such as Virginia Association of Biological Farming, Virginia Farmers Market Association, agritourism, and artisan trails.



## Producer Media Strategy

According to the Shenandoah Valley Farm2Fork Affair survey respondents, the top channels for producer marketing were email, word of mouth, and printed invitations, followed by Facebook. Word of mouth and direct contact is an important communication strategy for recruiting producers. This type of marketing is free and can occur throughout the year.

# Marketing Strategies

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Marketing strategies for an industry-only event need to be intentionally designed to reach specific target audiences and wholesale buyers. Marketing options include the following.

## Email

Email was the most successful strategy used by the Shenandoah Valley Farm2Fork Affair planning committee. Email campaigns that are visually appealing are nice, but beware of third-party mail services, whose emails are sometimes screened or sent to spam folders — especially during the first few years when brand recognition is low. To increase the success of email campaigns, ask the planning committee and partners to forward email campaigns or send personalized email invitations attaching a flyer for the event to their networks so it comes from a recognized and trusted source.

## Print Invitations

Printed save the dates cards and invitations can make a worthwhile impact if the marketing committee has an accurate list of mailing addresses. The committee will need to decide if design, printing, and postage costs are the best use of the marketing budget. Also consider the time investment necessary to curate the address list.

## Word of Mouth

Word of mouth is still one of the most powerful forms of marketing. A sincere and well-intentioned phone call can be an effective way to build a relationship and promote the event to targeted attendees. This is time consuming, so the marketing committee should prioritize which businesses to contact first. This task could potentially be completed by volunteers, but cold calls are not as effective as ones that come from an existing connection.

## Social Media

Social media is an inexpensive and far-reaching form of marketing. Well-designed boosted ads on Facebook and Instagram can help reach relevant audiences and have the ability to be shared to increase visibility and engagement. Be sure to tag and mention the networks identified above to increase your reach. Also consider identifying potential influencers who could endorse your event. If high-profile producers or restaurants register, reach out to see if they would be willing to post and share the event with their followers.

# Equity and Inclusion

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Building an equitable food system requires inclusive participation at all levels of the value chain. A diverse group of producers will attract diverse buyers and markets. Consider the demographics of your area and set goals for producer and buyer registration. Planning committee members should adequately represent the population of the region. When marketing to a variety of cultures

and backgrounds, meet the audiences where they are to build relationships and trust. For example, for Mennonite growers or audiences with limited broadband connectivity, personal visits and phone calls are a thoughtful and inclusive recruitment effort. Virginia Cooperative Extension’s Small Farm Outreach Program at Virginia State University— established to serve socially disadvantaged and resource-limited communities — is a great partner for building equitable and just access to markets.



# Chapter 5. Producer Training

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The producer training committee is responsible for preparing producers to make connections. The most common complaint from buyers who responded to the Shenandoah Valley Farm2Fork Affair survey was the lack of producer preparedness. Having someone who works directly with producers and/or business development support on the planning committee will be critical to achieving the objectives laid out in this chapter.

Producers who participate in an event will have varying levels of experience and market development knowledge. Even farmers who have been marketing and selling directly to consumers for years through farmers markets and stands could be unprepared to answer questions from wholesale buyers. Virginia Cooperative Extension provides educational resources to build capacity for producers to break into these new markets. The producer training committee is strongly encouraged to include or partner with VCE to access these training materials and programs. Producers should also consider the size of their operation and how much product they can produce when engaging with commercial consumers and evaluating their target markets.

## Virginia Cooperative Extension Programs

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Virginia Cooperative Extension has a suite of programs and resources designed to equip businesses with the necessary skills and add value to and market their products. VCE programs provide a pipeline of potential producers who are groomed and eligible for a producer-buyer networking event. A summary of these programs can be found below, but be sure to reach out to your local VCE office for additional information and resources.

### Virginia Market Ready

The goal of the Market Ready program is to provide profitable alternatives to Virginia food and agricultural producers who are ready to explore direct marketing opportunities beyond the farm gate to meet consumer demand for local products provided by trusted sources. VCE provides direct marketing curriculum and training, online resources, social networking, and farmer-to-buyer connections. The Market Ready program is a series of workshops and modules that educate producers about basic principles of economics and risk management strategies for various markets. Upon completion of this course, participants should be able to:

- Explore current food policy legislation.
- Build relationships and communicate with managers and chefs.
- Design effective packaging and labeling.
- Develop marketing strategies.
- Craft alternative pricing structures.
- Address regulatory concerns.

Partnering with VCE to offer a Market Ready workshop would be a simple way to build producers' capacity.

## Virginia MarketMaker

Virginia MarketMaker is the largest, most comprehensive database of Virginia’s agriculture industry. The portal functions as a search tool for producers, restaurants, markets, schools, processors, and distributors to make connections across the agricultural supply chain. Supported by VCE, VDACS, and Farm Credit, the service is available at no cost to Virginia businesses.

For producers participating in producer-buyer networking events, MarketMaker can be used as a market research tool to target markets, find eligible buyers, and locate competitors prior to the event. After the event, MarketMaker can continue to be a resource to make connections and research markets. It can also be a recruitment tool for the planning committee.

## Food Safety Resources

VCE has a robust food safety program that guides producers through regulatory barriers and ways of mitigating risk to provide the safest product possible. Safe food handling and preparation certifications, like the Good Agricultural Practices certification, are product features that many buyers require and value. VCE has a [Food Innovations Program](#) that provides resources for value-added processors and an [On-Farm Food Safety Program](#) for the safe production of fresh produce. These are excellent resources for producers who are interested in exploring large-volume wholesale markets.

## Pre-Event Training

Offering pre-event workshops is a way to let producers know what to expect from a networking event that aims to improve the overall experience of both the producer and buyer. Marketing knowledge, customer service skills, and promotion are expected and appreciated by serious buyers. Producers can improve their chances of making profitable business connections at the trade show by attending a training workshop in advance.

Rookie and veteran producers alike can benefit from attending a producer training. The training will serve as an orientation to the event and allow all producers to brush up on their networking skills and sales techniques. After attending a training workshop, a producer could decide they aren’t quite ready and only want to participate in the trade show as a spectator so they can take notes for future years. This is encouraged for any producer who is curious but not quite ready to commit.

## Incentives for Training Participation

If buyer attendees are the target customer of the planning committee, each producer is a customer service representative. Positive interactions between producers and buyers improve overall satisfaction and increase the likelihood that the customer will return. Producer training is as essential as



customer service training to building brand trust and loyalty for your producer-buyer networking event. The level of producer preparedness reflects on the event's brand.

The planning committee can encourage producers to attend by offering an incentive like discounted registration fees, raffle entries, premier booth placement, or upgrades to a sponsor package.

## Training Logistics

Pre-event training should be scheduled far enough ahead of the trade show to allow producers time to apply what they learned and to prepare their displays and promotional materials. Depending on the number of producers and the size of your region, multiple training sessions may need to be held at varying locations and times to accommodate everyone. If a producer cannot attend a training, someone on the training committee should follow up with them to make sure they feel prepared. Materials and presentations can be shared in the producer resources section of the website or via email.

At the very least, producer should be required to have:

- Sales sheets.
- Business cards.
- A Web presence (website, social media, or MarketMaker profile).
- An understanding of wholesale prices and needs.

Product samples are highly encouraged.

Extension agents are able to provide resources and guidance with programming needs. If a VCE agent or specialist is not available to assist, consider offering a short slideshow answering FAQs and then invite a panel of experienced producers and buyers to answer questions.

You will find the following sample documents in Appendix D:

- Sample Pre-Event Training Agenda
- Sample Pre-Event Training Slideshow Presentation
- Sample Handouts and Materials
  - Virginia Market Ready Checklist
  - Sample Producer Tips & Tricks
  - Food Sampling Guidelines
  - Sample Producer FAQ Sheet

These documents can serve as models and will need to be modified to meet the circumstances and format of your event. Ultimately, the training workshop is designed to offer best practices for fostering the most productive relationships possible.

# Building Relationships

Relationship building is the most integral piece of a successful producer-buyer networking event. Relationships among the planning committee, sponsors, producers, buyers, and support agencies contribute to a well-connected and cooperative food system.

## Buyer Relationships



Best practices for building buyer relationships include conducting research ahead of time, taking notes during or after buyer interactions, and following up with buyers after the event to continue to build the relationship. The producer training committee should teach these best practices to producers and provide the necessary resources, like contact lists, for producers to do their due diligence.

## Peer-to-Peer Relationships

A less common but equally valuable relationship is the one that is formed between producers. Producers have opportunities to network at training workshops and during downtime on the day of the trade show. These peer-to-peer relationships can foster friendly competition, informal mentoring arrangements, and business-to-business sales.



# Chapter 6. Alternative and Complementary Events

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A trade show is only one style of networking event. There are many options to choose from that can be just as impactful, if not more so. These alternative events can be offered instead of or complementary to a larger trade-show-style event to keep the connections going throughout the year so relationships can be built on and maintained. The planning committee should evaluate its mission and resources to decide which event format or series of events is best for the region's needs.

Although these events do not maximize the quantity of connections compared to a large trade show, they do offer the potential for high quality relationships to form between producers and buyers. In addition, they require less effort and resources on behalf of both the farmer and the planning committee, which increases participation and return on investment. Nontraditional networking events like those listed below provide opportunities to slowly build the event brand and capture marketing content for future expansions.

## Farm Tours

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Farm tours are a popular style of networking event between producers and buyers that allow buyers to familiarize themselves with the farm, its growing practices, and the larger region. This option is great because it requires less effort on the farmer's part and also allows the buyer to learn firsthand where the products are being grown. This experience leads to sincere relationships, trust, and brand loyalty between individual producers and buyers. Farm tours also require fewer resources, like time spent planning and executing, venue rental fees, and supply costs.

Unfortunately, the logistics of this type of event limits the number of farm connections that can be made in a single day. However, these connections might be more authentic and long lasting. The planning committee could get creative by having neighboring farms meet at the tour location for added networking. This event could also be added as a pre- or post-event in conjunction with other networking events. Farmer availability and seasonality would need to be considered.

## Farm to Table Networking Meals

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Farm to table dinners are an enjoyable and artistic way to enjoy the bounty of a region. Both producers and buyers would be invited to attend and network over dinner. This gives buyers an opportunity to imagine how the products could or would be consumed while getting to know the person who raised it — ideally in a picturesque setting. Combined with farm tours, networking dinners give the buyer a peek at the entire journey of local foods from the farm to the fork. Depending on the size of the group, meals could be prepared by local chefs or caterers using as many locally sourced ingredients as possible.

For a fun twist, ask the guests themselves to get involved in the culinary process. This casual style event would be memorable for all involved, increasing the likelihood that the relationships would last and become profitable. Unique opportunities such as these are sought after and could attract seriously source-conscious buyers with a following that could influence other buyers' tastes and preferences. This event could also be added as a pre- or post-event in conjunction with other networking events. Farmer availability and seasonality would need to be considered. Despite requiring fewer resources than a trade-show-style event, farm to table dinners have limited capacity due to venue and catering constraints.

## **Informal Happy Hours**

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Happy hours are a low-key way to facilitate networking and connections across the food value chain. Generally offered in the evenings, happy hours create an opportunity for farmers who maintain a full-time job during the week to join in on the networking. Business connections made at events like these are necessary to advance beginning and small direct-marketing farms to a point where they could feasibly farm full time. This event format requires a low investment for the planning committee and so could be replicated multiple times and on a hyperlocal scale. An informal structure might be more comfortable for some producers and buyers; however, lack of a program and inability to guarantee participation might leave other producers and buyers uninterested or unwilling to travel long distances to participate. It is hard to track the impact of these types of events, but it could be a good opportunity to build the brand and guest list for a larger trade-show-style event.

## **Speed Dating**

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Speed dating is a more structured form of a happy hour, although these events can really take place at any hour of the day. Speed dating requires even numbers of producers and buyers to be recruited. The planning committee could then make matches between producers and buyers so each one has a docket of "dates" for the duration of the event. Prompts can be given to jumpstart conversations, which can be helpful for some introverted folks. This format requires slightly more coordination on behalf of the planning committee, but concentrated vetting of producers and buyers could lead to more long-lasting connections.

## **Consumer Meet & Greets**

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To lower risk, especially in response to the coronavirus pandemic, which disrupted food service supply chains, many producers are diversifying their market channels. At the same time, the uncertain supply of food in grocery and retail outlets has caused increased consumer interest in local foods. Online ordering and Community Supported Agriculture models have sprung up across the region to accommodate for social distancing guidelines.

The planning committee should consider the producers' target audiences to determine if the trade show event should be modified to accommodate consumer interest. For example, industry-only networking hours could occur during the day, but the event could be open to the public in the afternoon or evening so consumers can "meet their farmer." This might overwhelm producers and could be split into two separate events, but it would make the most of producers' time if they already have a display set up.

Polling consumers to find out about their needs is recommended. If the trade-show-style event is open to the public, careful messaging should be crafted to communicate the dual purpose of the event.

# Appendices

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## Appendix A. Sample Sponsor Package

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### Sponsorship Opportunities



**JOINING LOCAL  
PRODUCERS WITH  
CONSUMERS**

The Farm2Fork Affair is a biannual one-day event that connects Shenandoah Valley food producers with commercial buyers from around the Commonwealth and the DC metro area. Designed to provide Shenandoah Valley producers an opportunity to directly promote their products, network, and increase sales, and for buyers to discover and experience the wide variety of fresh food options available throughout the Shenandoah Valley, Farm2Fork is a collaborative effort of economic development agencies, tourism departments, business development organizations, and local food initiatives. The event has been held sub-regionally for several years and is now being expanded to a centrally-located event that can be easily accessed via Interstates 81 and 64 and which features 50-100 food producers and draws more than 500 potential buyers.

With Virginia ranking ninth nationally for direct farm sales according to a 2015 U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service study, and four of Virginia's top five agricultural producing counties located in the Shenandoah Valley, the Farm2Fork Affair is a great opportunity to associate your brand with the Shenandoah Valley's strong local food movement and to show your support of farming, tourism, rural business development, community involvement, healthy living, and improved food access and nutrition. Previous vendors and attendees have included well-known farmers and chefs, conference center managers, craft beer brewers, medical center food service managers, food distribution companies, school nutrition managers, vineyard operators, and many small agriculture, tourism, and food businesses from around the state.

**For sponsorship inquiries please contact Kirsten Moore at 540-578-0527.**

## Sponsorship Packages -- Summary

Farm2Fork Affair offers several levels of sponsorship that will promote your brand, increase visibility among a highly-motivated business/individual audience, and align your business/organization with a significant and influential segment of the Shenandoah Valley economy.

<b>Cream of the Crop Sponsors:</b>	<b>\$5,000 (FILLED!)</b>
<b>Local Food Champion</b>	<b>\$2,500</b> (Six sponsorships available)
<b>Fresh Food, Healthy Food Sponsor:</b>	<b>\$1,500</b> ( <del>Four</del> <b>ONE</b> sponsorships available)
<b>24-Carrot Sponsor:</b>	<b>\$1,000</b> ( <del>Eight</del> <b>SEVEN</b> sponsorships available)
<b>Ag-Venturesome Sponsor:</b>	<b>\$500</b> (Unlimited sponsorships available)
<b>Friend of the Farm:</b>	<b>\$250</b> (Unlimited sponsorships available)

## Demographics & Economic Impact

### Who attends Farm2Fork Affair?

Previous Farm2Fork Affair events have attracted a diverse range of producers and buyers, as well as attendees from local, regional, and statewide agencies affiliated with local food and agricultural initiatives, tourism, and economic, business, and community development programs. Participants are business owners, managers, distributors, sellers, buyers, creators, as well as community decision- and policy-makers. They are individual and business consumers of a wide range of products and services and have an extended influence and networking power based on the types of work they do and the people they interact with on a regular basis.

### What impact does Farm2Fork have on the community?

Collaborative events like Farm2Fork Affair contribute to better business relationships, community cohesiveness, and an overall sense of economic connectedness and vitality. By providing a forum in which producers and buyers become aware of not only the many products available throughout the region, but to meet each other and understand the needs and challenges unique to their respective industries, a space for innovation opens for developing best uses, new partnerships, and better production and delivery methods. Because agriculture and tourism are major economic drivers in the Shenandoah Valley, providing a platform for more sustainable business practices in the region is crucial and is why so many diverse agencies are coming together to support this event.

**Localities and public partners currently sponsoring the 2019 event are:** Augusta County, Clarke County, Frederick County, Page County, Rockbridge County, Rockingham County, Shenandoah County, Warren County and the Cities of Buena Vista, Harrisonburg, Front Royal, Lexington, Staunton, and Waynesboro.

### Why is this a great partnership opportunity?

The Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia published a study in 2017 indicating that as the largest private industry in Virginia, agriculture has an economic impact of \$70 billion

annually, providing more the 334,000 jobs. As home to four major agricultural producing counties in the Commonwealth, the Shenandoah Valley's contributions to that impact are significant. And because 90% of this business sector is made up of farms owned by families or individuals, not corporations, sponsoring trade show events like this can have an exponential impact on overall economic stability and growth within the region and the state.

Aligning with Farm2Fork Affair will differentiate a sponsor's brand, show community commitment and corporate responsibility, and place a sponsor's products and services in front of a targeted audience that are part of the local food movement because of a set of values that include community involvement, civic duty, investing in local economies, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, and supporting a sustainable environment. The local food demographic has higher education levels, higher income levels, and is associated with more institutions of higher education, which allows them to make consumption decisions based on moral values and relationships in addition to price.

### **Participant Experience & Impact**

Attendance at previous Farm2Fork events rose 156% from year one to year two, and an additional 20% the third year. Exit surveys from each event indicated enthusiastic satisfaction, and intentions to participate again. By combining forces across multiple localities, establishing a centralized location, merging invitation lists to attract even more producers and buyers, and increasing promotion, the reach of a region-wide event is anticipated to be incrementally greater. Goals for the expanded event are 50-100 producers and 500-1,000 buyers.

### **Marketing Reach**

In the first year of this regional event, we will combine the market reach of the partnering organizations to begin building a unique and highly-networked Farm2Fork Affair community. This will include email blasts to multiple organizational lists, mentions on partner websites that link back to the Farm2Fork Affair website, mentions at partner events and on social media, mining partner media relationships for earned media, and promotions to encourage participant outreach into their networks as well.

The geographic reach of this event includes producers from throughout the Shenandoah Valley as well as local food buyers from both the Shenandoah Valley and targeted metropolitan regions including Charlottesville, Richmond, Roanoke, and Washington, D.C.

### **Marketing Assets**

Farm2ForkAffair.com and partner websites

Print materials – invitation postcards, flyers, event programs, event swag

Signs/banners – direction signs, event banner

Email blasts – partner mailing lists, event invitation lists

Social media – partner and event Facebook, Instagram, Twitter

Earned media – Regional, Richmond, Northern Virginia media outreach

## Sponsorship Packages

### **Cream of the Crop Sponsor - \$5,000** (Two sponsorships available)

- Top billing on all promotional materials
- Offer to participate in vendor training events and follow-up networking events as applicable
- Opportunity to speak at the main event
- Opportunity to incorporate some aspect of your business product or services into the main event format (i.e. branded display/vehicle at event, giveaways, demonstration, on-site social media or experiential activity)
- Preferred booth space at event
- Logo on pre- and post-event training and networking materials (handouts, presentations)
- Prominent placement on event website home page linked to your site
- Profile article on website featuring an interview with your business
- Multiple tagged mentions on social media before and after the event, including circulation of interview
- Mentions in all email communications that will be promoted to an extensive regional network that includes tourism, economic development, Chambers of Commerce, and other business development partner email lists
- Exclusive media announcement of sponsorship
- Mention in subsequent media releases and potential media interviews
- Logo included on all event signage
- Handout/swag of sponsor's choice included within event registration bag
- Logo included on presentation materials at the event
- Logo and sponsor introduction included on event program

### **Local Food Champion - \$2,500** (Six sponsorships available)

- Logo on pre- and post-event training and networking materials (handouts, presentations)
- Opportunity to incorporate some aspect of your business product or services into the main event format and a booth at event
- Logo on event website with link to your site
- Tagged mentions on social media before and after the event
- Mentions in email communications
- Mention in media releases
- Logo included on all event signage
- Handout/swag of sponsor's choice included within event registration bag
- Logo included on presentation materials at the event
- Logo and sponsor introduction included on event program

### **Fresh Food, Healthy Food Sponsor - \$1,500** (Four TWO sponsorships available)

- Booth at the event
- Logo on event website with link to your site
- Tagged mentions on social media before and after the event

- Mentions in email communications
- Mention in media releases
- Logo included on all event signage
- Handout/swag of sponsor's choice included within event registration bag
- Logo included on presentation materials at the event
- Logo on event program

**24 Carrot - \$1,000** (Eight SEVEN sponsorships available)

- Logo on event website with link to your site
- Tagged mentions on social media before and after the event
- Mentions in email communications
- Mention in media releases
- Handout/swag of sponsor's choice included within event registration bag
- Logo included on presentation materials at the event
- Logo on event program

**Ag-Venturer - \$500** (Unlimited sponsorships available)

- Handout/swag of sponsor's choice included within event registration bag
- Logo included on presentation materials at the event
- Logo included on event program

**Friend of the Farm- \$250** (Unlimited sponsorships available)

- Business name included on event program and presentation materials



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## Sponsorship Form

Due to limited availability of some sponsorship packages, requests will be honored on a first-come, first-served basis. If a sponsorship package is requested and no longer available, the next available level will be offered. Sponsorship level will be confirmed upon receipt of payment.

**Deadline for providing logo and promotional materials for inclusion in programming is Feb. 1, 2019.**

Business Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Office Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to sponsor at the following level:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Cream of the Crop (\$5,000)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Local Food Champion (\$2,500)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Fresh Food, Healthy Food Sponsor (\$1,500)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 24-Carrot Sponsor (\$1,000)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ag-Venturer Sponsor (\$500)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Friends of the Farm (\$250)

Please make checks payable to: Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission (CSPDC) and mail to CSPDC, c/o Farm2Fork Affair, 112 MacTanly Place, Staunton, VA 24401

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Sponsorship Package



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## Comparisons

	Cream of the Crop	Local Food Champion	Fresh Food, Healthy Food	24-Carrot	Ag-Venturesome	Friend of the Farm
<b>Sponsorship Levels</b>	<b>\$5,000</b>	<b>\$2,500</b>	<b>\$1,500</b>	<b>\$1000</b>	<b>\$500</b>	<b>\$250</b>
Participate in vendor training events and follow-up networking events	*					
Opportunity to incorporate some aspect of your business product or services into the main event format	*					
Preferred booth space at event	*					
Profile article on event website featuring an interview with your business	*					
Exclusive media announcement of sponsorship	*					
Sponsor introduction included on event program	*	*	*			
Opportunity to sponsor promotional or educational health/nutrition programming in a key location at the main event	*	*	*			
Logo on pre- and post-event training and networking materials (handouts, presentations)	*	*	*			
Booth at event	*	*	*			
Logo on event website with link to your site	*	*	*	*		

Tagged mentions on social media before and after the event	*	*	*	*		
Mentions in email communications	*	*	*			
Mention in media releases	*	*				
Logo included on all event signage	*	*	*	*	*	
Handout/swag of sponsor's choice included within event registration bag	*	*	*	*	*	
Logo included on presentation materials at the event	*	*	*	*	*	
Logo included on event program	*	*	*	*	*	
Business name included on event program and presentation materials	*	*	*	*	*	*

# Appendix B

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## B-1. Sample Day of Event Survey Questions



Farm2Fork Friends:  
Tell Us How We're doing!

Please complete this 2 minute survey. Hand it to any volunteer or take it to the check-in table to be included in our drawing.

We'll be giving away a **Virginia Is For Lovers** gift basket!

Questions? Contact French Price at frenchprice@vt.edu 540-232-6013

### Shenandoah Valley Farm2Fork Affair 2019

I am a \_\_\_\_\_(farmer/producer) or \_\_\_\_\_ (Chef/other type of buyer)

I have participated in a previous Farm2Fork Affair: \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

I expect to buy or sell local farm products as a result of this event :

\_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ Unsure at this time

In 3 to 6 months, I can take part in a 10 minute follow-up survey by phone or email to help Farm2Fork collaborators understand the impact of this event: \_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_ NO

If YES, the best way and times to contact me are:

\_\_\_\_\_

(Optional) For chefs: I could still use help finding this product(s) locally:

\_\_\_\_\_

Name and preferred contact info:

## B-2. Sample Post-Survey Questions

*Possible survey questions:*

Did you participate in the 2019 Farm2Fork Affair held Tuesday, March 5, at Rockingham County Fairgrounds?

How did you hear about the event?

Do you consider yourself a producer or a buyer?

What would interest you in attending future Farm2Fork events?

How many connections with buyers did you make the day of the event?

Did you follow up with any of these connections?

Did you make any sales as a result of the Farm2Fork Affair?

Did you feel properly prepared for the event?

Did you attend one of the pre-event workshops prior to the event?

How many connections with producers did you make the day of the event?

Did you follow up with any of these connections?

Did any connections made as a result of the event lead to a sale?

Please elaborate on relationships or purchases that resulted from the event.

Was the location of the event convenient/easy to access?

Which days of the week are the best days for you to attend an event like this? (Select all that apply.)

Which time of year is best for you to attend a Farm2Fork event? (Select all that apply.)

What is the maximum amount you would be willing to pay to participate?

How likely are you to recommend this event to a peer?

What was your overall satisfaction with the 2019 Farm2Fork Affair?

Please leave any additional comments you'd like to share with the Farm2Fork Affair organizers.

How far (hours of travel) would you be willing to travel to participate in an event like this?

Other suggestions to make this event more valuable in the future.

### **B-3. Sample Producer Registration Questions**

*Customized registration questions for producers could include:*

Name of business

Brief business description

Contact name

Email

Physical address

Mailing address

Phone number

Website or Facebook link

What is the best way to reach you?

What is the best time to reach you?

Is this your first producer-buyer networking event?

How many people will you be bringing with you on the day of the event? Please list their names.

Will you be providing samples on the day of the event? If so, what?

Will you need access to electricity?

What products do you sell?

What differentiates your product (growing methods, certifications)?

What are your current methods of sale?

What are your current delivery methods?

Approximately, what are your annual sales?

What businesses are you currently selling to?

What markets are you hoping to reach?

Who is your dream customer? Please list.

Which mandatory pre-event workshop will you attend?

Do you require any special accommodations?

Other questions, concerns, or comments

## **B-4. Sample Buyer Registration Questions**

*Customized registration questions for buyers could include:*

Name of business

Brief business description

Contact name

Email

Physical address

Mailing address

Phone number

Website or Facebook link

What is the best way to reach you?

What is the best time to reach you?

Is this your first producer-buyer networking event?

How many people will you be bringing with you on the day of the event? Please list their names.

What businesses do you currently source from?

Approximately how much (dollars) in local purchases do you spend annually?

What products are you looking for at the event?

Do you have any quality, quantity, delivery, or insurance requirements? Please describe.

Would you like your contact information to be included in the program?

Do you require any special accommodations?

Other questions, concerns, or comments

## **B-5. Sample Sponsor Registration Questions**

*Customized registration questions for sponsors could include:*

Business name

Sponsorship level

Contact name

Email address

Mailing address

Phone number

What is the best way to reach you?

What is the best time to reach you?

How many guests will you be attending the event? Please list their names.

If you will be exhibiting, do you need access to electricity or Wi-Fi?

Do you require any special accommodations?

Other questions, concerns, or comments

## B-6. Sample Volunteer Registration Questions

*Customized registration questions for volunteers could include:*

Contact name

Business or organization

Email address

Mailing address

Phone number:

What is the best way to reach you?

What is the best time to reach you?

What times are you available for volunteering?

- In the months and days leading up to the event as schedule permits
- Setup the night before
- Setup the morning of
- During
- Tear down

What tasks are you willing and able to perform? List tasks

What is your t-shirt size? \*If budget allows for matching volunteer t-shirts

Do you need any special accommodations?

Other Questions, Concerns, or Comments:

# Appendix C

## C-1. Sample Timeline

Time before producer-buyer networking event	Activity description
<b>Ongoing</b>	Monthly meeting with partner organizations/supporting localities. Receive and address questions from potential attendees. Social media and website updates.
<b>14 months</b>	Define the region and mission. Planning committee meets to begin solicitation of top sponsors. Assign roles and subcommittees.
<b>12 months</b>	Event date selected and venue booked.
<b>10-11 months</b>	Planning meetings.
<b>9 months</b>	Outreach list management and updates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consolidate and update a master outreach list based on past event marketing.</li> <li>• Distribute outreach list to participating localities.</li> <li>• Have supporting localities review invite list for additions, deletions, and amendments.</li> <li>• Research and develop an enhanced buyer outreach list.</li> </ul> Create (or update) event website and social media platforms. Recruit top-name participants and partners. Develop and publish sponsorship packages; sponsor outreach.
<b>8 months</b>	Finalize registration page. Create and mail a “save the date” invitation — USPS and listserve. Work with supporting localities to raise corporate sponsorships.
<b>7 months</b>	Corporate sponsorship fundraising. Finalize pre-training event plans. Ongoing social media updates.
<b>6 months</b>	Determine cash bar and/or food truck vendors. Begin volunteer recruitment and finalized volunteer task lists. Insurance riders. Health inspector and ABC license inquiries in place.

<b>5 months</b>	Volunteer recruitment.
<b>4 months</b>	Mail event invitation. Create a Facebook group where participating vendors can connect.
<b>3 months</b>	Maintain social media and email blast activity to keep event awareness intact during the holiday season.
<b>2 months</b>	Pre-training event. Registration deadline for vendors. Order registration and event supplies (bags, stickers, etc.). Create and distribute “what to bring, what to expect” information for registering vendors.
<b>1 month</b>	Registration deadline for buyers (to be included in directory). Confirm schedules with volunteers. Coordinate all food, inspection, venue contacts. Write and distribute media press release. Finalize and print program directory. Finalize survey for distribution immediately after the event.
<b>0 months</b>	MAIN EVENT, including all logistics and volunteer oversight. Distribute and collect exit survey.

## C-2. Sample Budget

<b>Expenses (50 vendors, 200 Buyers)</b>			
	<b>Services</b>		
		<i>Fiscal Agent</i>	\$ 1,500.00
		<i>Staff Time/Event Coordinator</i>	\$ 12,000.00
		<i>Event Insurance</i>	\$ 500.00
	<b>Producer Training</b>		
		<i>Catered Refreshments</i>	\$ 300.00
		<i>Facility Rental</i>	\$ 100.00
		<i>Instructor Stipend/Speaker Gifts</i>	\$ 100.00
		<i>Printed Materials &amp; Hand Outs</i>	\$ 100.00
	<b>Venue</b>		
		<i>Facility Rental</i>	\$ 1,475.00
		<i>Utilities</i>	\$ 355.00
		<i>General Purpose Tables &amp; Chairs</i>	\$ 200.00
		<i>Vendor Tables, Chairs, etc</i>	\$ 2,000.00
		<i>Chafing Dish Rentals</i>	\$ 1,800.00
		<i>Linen Rental</i>	\$ 1,800.00
		<i>Hospitality Room (Refreshments)</i>	\$ 2,500.00
		<i>Venue Styling</i>	\$ 2,000.00
	<b>Marketing Costs</b>		
		<i>Invitation Printing</i>	\$ 200.00
		<i>Invitation Design</i>	\$ 100.00
		<i>Postage</i>	\$ 150.00
		<i>Signage</i>	\$ 300.00
		<i>Staff T-shirts printed</i>	\$ 280.00
		<i>Producer Notebooks/Gifts</i>	\$ 600.00
		<i>Program/Directory Printing</i>	\$ 700.00
		<i>Bags</i>	\$ 1,600.00
		<i>Paid Social Media Advertising</i>	\$ 500.00
		<i>Name Tags</i>	\$ 150.00
		<i>Photography</i>	\$ 400.00
	<b>Miscellaneous Expenses</b>		\$ 1,000.00
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$ 32,710.00</b>

## C-3. Volunteer Tasks

### F2F Volunteer Tasks

#### Monday, March 4

- **2:00 p.m.** - Meet at the Fairgrounds
- Set up tables, place table cloths, general set up
- Mark assigned tables (use nametags?)
- Run electric
- Set up and test AV equipment
- Put chafing dishes at assigned tables
- Hang signage and Decor
- Stuffing registration bags with sponsor swag
- Stuffing nametags

#### Tuesday, March 5

##### **7:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m**

- Set up tablets/phones with Wi-Fi and registration app
- Set up hospitality room
- Producer check-in and orientation. Give them a bag, nametag, guide them to their space
- Help producers unload and set-up, get acquainted
- Welcome sponsors

##### **10:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.**

- Parking guidance
- Buyer check-in (Eventbrite app)
- Registering buyers that didn't register in advance (Eventbrite app)
- Passing out bags, nametags, and programs
- Highlighting the matchmaking cards, making introductions to producers
- Reminding guests to fill out surveys
- Collecting surveys
- Tidying the exhibit hall and hospitality room
- Covering producer tables if they need a break
- Policing hospitality room in case anyone leaves personal items in there (coats, purses, etc.)

##### **4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.**

- Tear down booths and signage and decor
- Pack up registration
- Help producers tear down and load up vehicles
- French to receive all final surveys

If you're unsure what to do, ask a producer if they need help. Report to registration to see if they need to be relieved. If all the bases are covered, enjoy the networking.

**Questions? Call or Text: Kirsten Moore, 540-578-0527 or French Price, 540-335-8611**

## C-4. Registration Reminders

### F2F Registration Tasks

- Greet & Welcome
- Registration
  - Check-in those that registered in advance on the Eventbrite App
  - Register those that haven't registered on the Eventbrite app
    - This will help us gather emails and keep track of attendance
- Program and swag bag
- Nametag
  - Have them make one if not registered
- Highlight matchmaking cards
  - If there's a volunteer standing around, guide them to the first producer on their matchmaking card
- Survey reminder to win a Virginia is for Lovers gift basket
- Reminder of two food trucks available
  - Mashita
  - Smokin Q
- Point out water station/table section
- Point out bathrooms

# Appendix D

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## D-1. Sample Pre-Event Training Agenda



### Farm2Fork Producer Training Workshop

Wednesday, February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019 – Augusta County Government Center

#### Agenda

5:30 p.m. - Welcome and Introductions

5:45 p.m. - Representing your Brand

6:00 p.m. - Getting Farm2Fork Ready

- Your Brand Promise
- Frequently Asked Buyer Questions
- Display Tips
- Building a Relationship
- Following up

7:15 p.m. – Questions & Answers

7:30 p.m. – Adjourn

Thank you!

If you have questions regarding the material presented during the workshop, contact French Price at [eprice@shenandoahcountyva.us](mailto:eprice@shenandoahcountyva.us) or 540-459-6227

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## D-2. Sample Pre-Event Training Slideshow Presentation



### JOINING LOCAL PRODUCERS WITH CONSUMERS

Producer Training Workshop  
Wednesday, February 6<sup>th</sup>  
Augusta County Government Center

### Agenda

- ▶ Welcome and Introductions
- ▶ Representing your Brand
- ▶ Getting Farm2Fork Ready
  - ▶ Your Brand Promise
  - ▶ Frequently Asked Buyer Questions
  - ▶ Display Tips
  - ▶ Building a Relationship
  - ▶ Following up
- ▶ Q&A

## Introductions

- ▶ Name
- ▶ Location
- ▶ Product
- ▶ Why or how you got into the work you do?

## Your Brand Promise

- ▶ **THINK:** What are the **VALUES** of your company/brand? What **ASSOCIATIONS** do you want people to have with your brand?
- ▶ **ANSWER:** What do you produce? Who uses or consumes your product? What is the experience of your product like for them?



# What questions might a potential buyer have about your product?

- 
- 
- ▶ When is your product available? (seasonality)
  - ▶ What's the lead time (1-3 business days from order)?
  - ▶ Where do you source your ingredients?
  - ▶ What volume do you sell in?
  - ▶ Pricing? Wholesale prices?
  - ▶ Do you deliver? Work with distributors?
  - ▶ What is your standard pack size, and are you willing to modify it for special orders?
  - ▶ How much does it cost? Can I get a discount?
  - ▶ What does x term (grass-fed, natural, free range) mean?
  - ▶ Are you GAP certified?
  - ▶ Is your product traceable?
  - ▶ Do you have product liability insurance?
  - ▶ Shelf life?
  - ▶ What makes your product different from the other guy?
  - ▶ What happens if I receive an order from you and it's not up to snuff?
  - ▶ Is the kitchen where you make your value added products inspected?
  - ▶ References from current clients?
  - ▶ How do you take orders and do invoicing?
  - ▶ Where are you located?
  - ▶ UPC codes?

# What makes a great tradeshow display?



















## Display Tips

- ▶ Stand out
  - ▶ Table Runner adds depth
  - ▶ Business signage
  - ▶ Add different levels (Larger items in the rear, shorter in front)
- ▶ Free Stuff!
  - ▶ Giveaways
  - ▶ Drawings
  - ▶ Certificates on first order
  - ▶ Samples!
  - ▶ Flyers, business cards, product lists

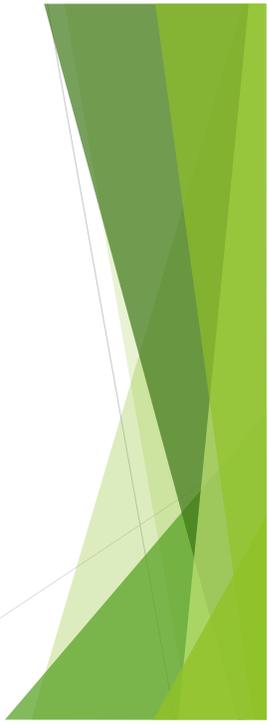
## Other Tips

- ▶ Assistant
  - ▶ Helps to take breaks
  - ▶ If no help, bring signage to let people know you'll be back
- ▶ Be friendly and welcoming
  - ▶ Make eye contact, smile
  - ▶ Prepare a short elevator speech
  - ▶ Connect with @Farm2ForkAffair on social media before, after and during the event!

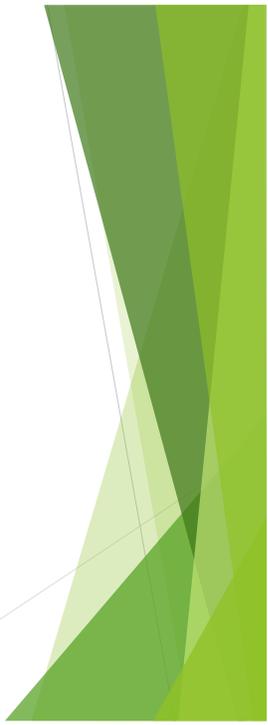


# What questions should you have for your buyer?

- 
- ▶ Location? Type of business? **The buyers role?**
  - ▶ **When and how to get in touch?**
  - ▶ Who are their customers? How do they communicate?
  - ▶ What is the story behind your restaurant/retail business?
  - ▶ How will you discuss my product with your clients? Will my name or logo appear on menus or elsewhere in the establishment?
  - ▶ How will you need it packaged? How much and how often?
  - ▶ Will you need it delivered? If so, when and how?
  - ▶ What is the best way and time to contact you? (There are personal and generational differences in how we communicate. Meet people where they're at.)
  - ▶ Are there other products you would be interested in that you can't access to at this time?
  - ▶ Are you open to trying/trialing new products?
  - ▶ What storage space and equipment do you have to ensure the quality of my product is preserved? (Cold chain requirements) How much product can you accept at once?
  - ▶ What invoicing requirements do you have?
  - ▶ Do you provide payment upon delivery?



## What are best practices for following up?

- 
- 
- ▶ Who to contact?
  - ▶ Means of Communication?
  - ▶ Time of Day? Day of the week?
  - ▶ If supplying a restaurant, consider when they do seasonal menu planning
  - ▶ Do things in advance- crop planning, appointments, notifications

Questions?



## D-3. Virginia Market Ready Checklist



Dr. Kim Morgan, Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, Virginia Tech  
[Adapted from Original Document Authored by Dr. Tim Woods and Jim Mansfield]

### Market Ready™ Checklist for Direct Farm Sales to Restaurants

This list of best practices examines a series of basic business-to-business functions, outlining ideal starting points restaurant buyers would like to see regarding grower preparedness. Specifics will vary from restaurant to restaurant. These practices will help the grower/supplier communicate with potential restaurant buyers regarding their expectations for each business function.

#### Market Ready™ Direct Marketing

- ✓ **I understand what kind of customer typically eats at the restaurant I would like to sell to.**
- ✓ I know when/where/how often it may be possible for the restaurant to mention my products by name in their communication.
- ✓ I have easily-accessible, simple, clear, marketing materials (recipe card with brief farm history, website, social media) that provide information that a restaurant could use to tell the story of my product.
- ✓ I am aware of what kinds of promotion materials are available through sources like my state department of agriculture, grower association, or other 3rd parties.
- ✓ I am willing and available to host the chefs and their staff at my farm.
- ✓ I am open to being involved in events like food festivals, in-restaurant visits, and on-farm dinners that provide opportunities for my restaurant buyers to connect with my food and food products.

#### Market Ready™ Packaging

- ✓ **I understand that labeling can help build my farm's identity and improve product presentation**
- ✓ I understand the legal regulations for labeling my product, including verifiable label claims, weights, and business contact information.
- ✓ I have taken the opportunity to explain to chefs what terms like "grass-fed" and "natural" mean if I use them on my labels and/or packaging.
- ✓ I understand the typical industry standard packaging for the product I want to market from my farm and am prepared to deliver that kind of package to a restaurant.
- ✓ **I am prepared to spend extra time packaging my produce to a chef's specifications and have accounted for my extra time in the product price.**
- ✓ I have asked the chef how s/he wants it packaged.
- ✓ I have access to standard size cardboard produce boxes.
- ✓ I have relationships developed with processors/co-packers that can produce the desired cuts or processed products from my farm.
- ✓ I have selected the appropriate packaging to protect my product and preserve and protect its identity and integrity, and keep it free from contamination.
- ✓ I can use my packaging/labeling to work with my buyers on product traceability.

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- ✓ I understand the legal packaging and labeling requirements for meat, dairy or processed products.
- ✓ I have relationships developed, or am developing relationships, with processors that a chef can work with my meat or dairy products.
- ✓ **I am prepared to show a chef the potential value for their restaurant in purchasing a whole animal or other larger quantities of product direct from my farm.**

#### Market Ready™ Pricing

- ✓ **I realize I may not be able to charge retail or farmer's market prices.**
- ✓ I have researched what prices chefs in my area might be paying for wholesale products.
- ✓ **I understand why the chef might value my product more than wholesale products.**
- ✓ **I can provide a written description of my product attributes, benefits and label claims.**
- ✓ **I can discuss the benefits of my product quality, freshness, or locally-grown attributes with my buyers.**
- ✓ If appropriate I am prepared to discuss each size, grade or cut of my product with my buyers.
- ✓ I have researched current market prices for my products and am aware of the transportation costs I will incur to deliver my product.
- ✓ I have worked out the processing and packaging costs and any other post-harvest costs associated with producing my final product long term.
- ✓ I have estimated the cost of delivering my product to the restaurant.
- ✓ I have priced the product at a level where I can make a profit and be a stable supplier.
- ✓ I can give an estimate of how much volume of product I can provide and for how long I can provide it.
- ✓ I can quote the buyer a delivered price for my product.
- ✓ I am prepared to quote a price per pound that I would accept for my product.

#### Market Ready™ Supply

- ✓ **I am prepared to discuss my potential products and product forms that may interest buyers.**
- ✓ I have approached possible chef clients before planting season to talk about my crop availability and their volume needs.
- ✓ **I have explained what varieties or product types I offer.**
- ✓ I have invited chefs into conversations about new product possibilities before the season.
- ✓ I can supply a consistent volume of product in the quantities acceptable to the buyer for a specified period of time.
- ✓ I have a plan to accomplish a steady production of my product.
- ✓ I am exploring season extension and other production options that allow me to increase volume of products supplied.
- ✓ I have identified my chef customers' direct email, voicemail, or the best way to reach them directly.
- ✓ I understand the importance of advanced notice to the buyer about my product availability and any possible changes in quantity or quality.
- ✓ I have a regular price and availability list available for chef customers.
- ✓ I am aware of other growers that may be looking for ways to get their products to restaurants and have started conversations about cooperative delivery.

- ✓ I have the ability to ensure that my product is delivered as promised if I am not personally delivering it to the restaurant.
- ✓ I am building good relationships with my restaurant customers so that if deliveries are delayed or mixed up, we can have an honest conversation about functional solutions.

### **Market Ready™ Delivery**

- ✓ I am willing to offer delivery services in new areas to gain new clients.
- ✓ I am able to deliver my products to the restaurant's door.
- ✓ I have calculated the cost in time and fuel, etc., that is involved with delivering my product.
- ✓ I can arrange affordable transportation of my product to my buyer's requested delivery location at an acceptable frequency.
- ✓ I have asked the chef what days and times they want me to deliver and I can accommodate.
- ✓ I have an invoicing system that allows me to leave an invoice with each delivery and send an invoice via e-mail
- ✓ **I am building good relationships with my customers so that if deliveries are delayed or incorrect, we can have an honest conversation about their concerns and necessary corrections.**

### **Market Ready™ Invoicing**

- ✓ I can provide a numbered invoice form with farm/contact name, address, email/website, phone/fax clearly visible.
- ✓ I have space on my invoice form to print the product name/description, weight/quantity, and price.
- ✓ **I have discussed invoicing with the restaurant manager and have made sure that my invoice statement or billing system meets their requirements.**
- ✓ I am prepared to accept payment at a later date beyond the actual product delivery time.
- ✓ I have a system in place to keep track of sales to each individual restaurant location.
- ✓ I have a system in place to keep track of how much I am owed by individual restaurant customers.

### **Market Ready™ Insurance**

- ✓ I have asked the restaurant what level of product liability insurance is required.
- ✓ I have added the necessary product liability insurance coverage for my farm.
- ✓ I note my product's proof of insurance on all marketing/label materials.
- ✓ I have communicated with my insurance provider regarding changes in my marketing activity.

### **Market Ready™ Storage**

- ✓ I know how much of my product a chef is able to comfortably handle in his/her kitchen storage space.
- ✓ I am willing to help a chef to come up with offsite storage options that can maintain my product's freshness, quality and food safety.
- ✓ I have developed best storage practices for my products.
- ✓ I have educational materials available for my customers describing storage & handling guidelines for my farm's products.

### Market Ready™ Quality Assurance

- ✓ I have discussed cold chain requirements for my products with the chef and other food handlers.
- ✓ I have educated myself about safe food handling, proper temperatures, and storage of the products that I will be marketing direct from my farm.
- ✓ I am able to explain to my customers how my handling practices help to maximize the quality and shelf-life of my products.
- ✓ **I have the necessary documents for USDA and local health inspection where required.**
- ✓ I have the necessary documents outlining my organic production practices available to share with my chefs.
- ✓ I am planning to participate in GAP certification programs now or in the near future.

### Market Ready™ Satisfaction Guarantee

- ✓ I have explained to the restaurant how my product will be delivered and presented.
- ✓ I have addressed any and all of restaurant's concerns about my product.
- ✓ I am working on a relationship with the chef that allows for honest dialogue about my product quality.
- ✓ I am able to make product adjustments to improve final product quality if necessary.
- ✓ I have other products or additional product to offer in the event that I need to compensate a restaurant client for poor quality.

### Market Ready™ Communication

- ✓ **I have asked chef what the best way is to contact them personally to have conversations about my food product.**
- ✓ I have access to email, websites, social networking sites, and other communication channels to discuss product orders and quality.
- ✓ **I am making the effort to connect personally with my customers to improve the conversation and business relationship.**
- ✓ I have my buyers' contact information such as their direct phone numbers and email.
- ✓ I understand their preferred contact methods and times.
- ✓ I understand my buyers have many demands on their time, so I make appointments in advance.
- ✓ I understand the importance of advance notice about my product availability and any changes in quantity or quality.
- ✓ I am building good relationships with my customers so that, if deliveries are delayed or incorrect, we can have an honest conversation about their concerns.
- ✓ (My staff and) I present a professional and clean appearance when making business calls to potential customers.

These practices are offered as guidelines on expectations summarized over many firms. They are intended as reference points for self-examination of the farmers business practices to evaluate readiness for commercial markets and as a checklist for communicating on expectations held by specific buyers. **Market Ready™ Training** presentation, supporting resources, and additional helpful links are available at: <http://www.ext.vt.edu/topics/agriculture/market-ready/index.html>

## D-4. Sample Producer Tips & Tricks



### Tips and Tricks

#### **Use this event as an opportunity to:**

- Market your products, your farm and its growing practices.
- Sample your meat and produce/products to chefs and food business owners.
- Forge customer relationships with chefs and business owners.
- Take orders for your meat/produce/products.
- Learn what chefs and food business owners are seeking for their menus and inventory.

#### **Making the Most of Your Experience**

- We will send you a list of the consumers registered to attend. So, please do your homework -- research the businesses that have registered -- and have an idea of a few key businesses with whom you'd like to make contact. Let us know who they are so we can get them to your table.
- Be engaging during the event -- **DON'T** sit behind your table waiting for people to come to you. Get out in front and engage potential customers. "Hi there! I'm (YOUR NAME). I grow/raise the most incredible \_\_\_\_\_! I would love to tell you more about my farm and my products.

#### **What do Chefs and food business owners want to know?**

- History of your farm and your family farm story.
- Information about your growing practices -- are you using non-gmo feed?, IPM, or are you pesticide-free? Organically certified?
- A list of your products and their availability by season.
- Especially for producers who won't have fruits or veggies at the time of the event -- be sure to have a client list, so potential clients can see who is already buying your food.
  - Include testimonials from current clients

#### **Things to consider before you arrive**

- Do you have an ordering system in place?
- Create brochures/literature listing your products, pricing, website, or contact information.
- Do you have a plan on how you will get your goods to restaurants or stores wishing to place orders?

## **What to Bring**

A professional looking booth will indicate to a potential customer that you are organized and can deliver the goods they need to keep their business/restaurant running smoothly.

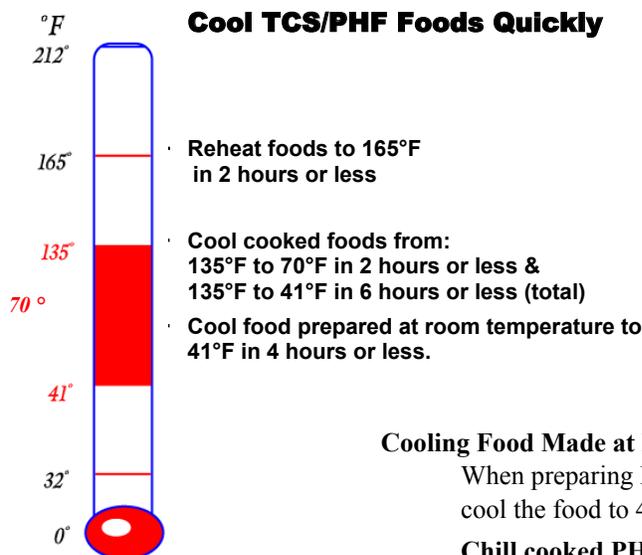
- Have business cards or brochures with your business logo.
- Create photograph montages with your (or use laptop/ipad slideshow)
- Bring your smart phone or notecards to take notes.
- Bring ipad/laptop/order forms and a pen to take orders.
- Depending on what food you are sampling, you should consider bringing the following items: (Costco/Party City/Webstaurant.com are great sources)
  - beverage napkins
  - tasting portion cups
  - tasting portion spoons/forks
  - paper towels
  - spray cleaner
  - tongs
  - food handlers disposable gloves
  - stainless chafing dish with sterno and serving pieces.
  - thermometer (see attachment on food safety)
  - ziplock bags
  - Avoid bringing crock pots
- Use interesting items to create a beautiful display at your table -- wooden produce crates, silver trays, wicker baskets, remnant fabrics like burlap, jute, or fabric that match your company logo. If you have these items but need help setting up your booth, we're happy to help.

## **Other Tips**

- Stand out
  - Table Runner adds depth
  - Business signage
  - Add different levels (Larger items in the rear, shorter in front)
- Free Stuff!
  - Giveaways
  - Drawings
  - Certificates on first order
  - Samples!
  - Flyers, business cards, product lists
- Bring Help
  - Having an assistant allows you to take breaks
  - If no help, bring signage to let people know you'll be back
- Be friendly and welcoming
- Make eye contact, smile
- Prepare a short elevator speech
- Connect with @Farm2ForkAffair on social media before, after and during the event!

## D-5. Food Sampling Guidelines

### Cooling & Reheating Potentially Hazardous Foods



Potentially Hazardous Food (PHF), also known as TCS (Time-Temperature Control for Safety), must be quickly cooled to prevent potential growth of dangerous bacteria. Bacteria grow more rapidly between 41°F to 135°F, the **Temperature Danger Zone (TDZ)**. Some bacteria produce toxins. Most toxins are resistant to normal cooking temperatures.

#### Requirements

##### Cooling Food Made at Room Temperature

When preparing PHF/TCS at room (ambient) temperatures, cool the food to 41°F or cooler within 4 hours or less.

**Chill cooked PHF/TCS from 135°F to 70°F in 2 hours or less, and from 135°F to 41°F or less within a total of 6 hours or less.**

#### Cooling Methods

Use a variety of methods for cooling foods, especially for larger portions.

- ◆ Reduce thickness of foods by placing in shallow pans or cutting into pieces.
- ◆ Stir the food frequently for even cooling and to allow hot air to escape.
- ◆ Vent containers or leave uncovered during cooling to allow warm air to escape.
- ◆ Use an *ice paddle* (at right) to cool food from the inside.
- ◆ Transfer the food to pre-chilled containers from the refrigerator or freezer.
- ◆ Use an ice water bath to cool food.
- ◆ Add ice as an ingredient after cooking.
- ◆ Place the food in a cooler or freezer. Be careful: too much hot food may cause a refrigerator and other foods to warm up. Cold hold PHF at or below 41°F.
- ◆ Use containers which facilitate quick cooling: stainless steel works better than plastic.



Ice paddle



#### Monitor the Cooling Process

Use a calibrated thermometer to Check times and temperatures during cooling.

#### Reheating Leftovers

Heat leftovers to 165°F in 2 hours or less. Stir for even reheating. Check the temperature.

**Microwave Reheating:** heat, stop, stir, and heat again. Check the temperature.

**Time as a Public Health Control (T-PHF).** T-PHF requires recording times and a written policy. Contact your Inspector if you are considering using this method.





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