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# How to Develop Successful Farm-to-Table Dinners

Farm dinners provide an opportunity for food lovers to learn more about the people and places that grow their food. By participating in a dinner, they will hopefully develop greater appreciation for the process of growing, harvesting and preparing meals with high-quality, locally grown ingredients.

There is not one model to follow to produce a successful farm dinner. Creating an experience that best represents your farm and your goals will provide your guests with the most authentic and enjoyable experience. Producing successful dinners is time consuming and can be complicated, especially when it comes to executing them without disrupting your current workload. You will need to address elements such as safety, signage, liability, permitting, event production and zoning. This section is intended to get your planning off to a good start.

## Zoning

Your land use zone determines which activities are permissible on your property with and without a permit. Refer to [Section III](#) of this handbook for more detailed information. Before you begin planning your farm dinners, contact your local planning office and determine if permits are required and if so, what the process to obtain them entails. See page X for more detailed guidance.

## Liability Insurance

Although your current insurance may cover having guests on your property, make sure you also have coverage for the preparation or consumption of food and alcohol. Be sure to contact your insurance agent and share your intentions so they may provide you with the proper policy. There are numerous types of liability insurance, but you will want to discuss the following with your agent:

- Premises
- Product
- Property damage
- Personal
- Liquor
- Employees

## Meal Preparation and Permitting

Food served to the public must be prepared with health and safety in mind. If you are planning to do the cooking yourself, you will need to speak to your local health inspector to determine how to safely and legally prepare food on your property. You will also be required to obtain a temporary restaurant permit to serve food to the public if you are not currently operating a commercially licensed kitchen on your premises. Typically, a permit application must be submitted six weeks prior to an event and will require an onsite inspection of your refrigeration, sanitation and cooking equipment.

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One way to simplify the planning of your dinner is to hire a commercial caterer who not only holds the necessary licenses to serve food and alcohol, they will also be skilled at setting up events and have a relationship with a party supply rental company that will provide the equipment you need to create both a field kitchen and dining area.

You might choose to work with a local chef who uses your products in their restaurant. Although restaurants operate with their own set of permits, you will still be required to obtain a temporary restaurant permit for the food preparation on your farm.

Any individual who is producing or serving food must have a current food handler's permit issued by a county health department in Oregon.

## Alcohol Service Permits

If you will be selling or serving alcohol at your dinner you will need a liquor license.

A liquor license is needed at special events where:

- Alcohol will be sold.
- Alcohol is available (but not being sold) and you are charging or accepting donations for admission, or where payment is required to attend the event.

A liquor license is not needed at special events where:

- You are making alcohol available, but there is no payment or purchase required and no donations of money are accepted for alcohol or for entry/admission, or for any other product or service (e.g. a wedding reception where you make alcohol available, but you don't require payment or purchase and don't accept donations of money).

Temporary/Special Event liquor permits are available for a small fee. Your local planning office will need to review your permit before you submit the application to the Oregon Liquor Control Commission (OLCC) and in some instances they may charge a fee as well. Plan on a minimum of six weeks for this process. Applications and instructions are available [here](#).

Individuals serving alcohol must have a current, state-issued service permit.

## Top Ten Tips for a Successful Farm Dinner

Think about the experience from the customer's perspective, from the time they arrive at your farm until they head home.

1. There's clear directional signage and plenty of parking.
2. Attendance is limited so guests can easily engage with the hosts and the location.
3. Outdoor events will be subject to factors like heat, rain and stinging insects. Find methods for deterring/repelling

critters without offending your guests. Monitor weather forecasts and adjust your plans accordingly.

4. Staffing is sufficient to serve the meal and provide guest service.
5. Presenters at the dinner are clear on the key messages you wish to deliver to your guests, prepared to answer questions and concise in their delivery.
6. Keep your dishes and décor simple and elegant. Minimalist décor offers a more authentic experience and frees up time and resources that could be put into the execution of the event.
7. Make sure that as many ingredients as possible are from your farm and work closely with your culinary partners to craft a menu that best represents you and your community.
8. Have materials ready for people to take home: your CSA order form, a schedule of future events or a schedule of farmers markets you attend. If you have a mailing list, make sure a sign-up sheet is available.
9. If your event is raising money for a specific cause — new fencing, expanding beehives, remodeling the farm stand, supporting CSA shares for low-income families — share this information and make sure your staff provides consistent messaging about how the funds will be used and how guests may contribute.
10. Preparing your property to host an event of this scale can be more time consuming than anticipated. Take care to determine where you can set up the dining area and kitchen so that it makes the least impact on your daily operations. Budget time to prepare for the event and to return the space back to its regular working order.

This information was compiled from information presented on the websites of various Farm Dinner operations, and then combined with the personal experience of the author. This information is for education only, and should not be considered legal advice.

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