

HEALTHY HARVEST  
*of* NORTH IOWA



*Farm***TOFORK**  
**DINNER**

# **EVENT PLANNING TOOLKIT**

**Created by:**



## Farm to Fork Event Tool Kit



A **Farm to Fork Event** is an all-local meal event designed to facilitate relationships and inspire community conversation in a delicious, fun, and healthy way. These events are intended to benefit your local community as well as contribute to the larger local food system conversation.

**Before we dive into structuring and planning, here's a bit about Healthy Harvest of North Iowa:**

Our **Vision** is that Healthy Harvest of North Iowa will serve as **the** resource for creating, developing, and supporting a community-based North Iowa regional food system.

Our **Mission** is to lead and strengthen diverse partnerships to build a sustainable regional and local food system that brings health and vitality to our communities.

*In other words: we see food is a critical platform for community and economic development as well as for public health – and we hope you will too.*

To date, Healthy Harvest of North Iowa has assisted with Farm to Fork Dinners in cities such as Mason City, Clear Lake, and Osage, as well as county-wide efforts in Franklin County and Floyd County. As this list grows, we continue to gain valuable insights into community Farm to Fork event planning. This resource is intended to serve as a base to your planning, with the acknowledgement that each community is different in resources available and the circumstances impacting dinner planning.

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### Building Your Team

A Farm to Fork event should be developed with support from a 5-7 community member committee. This will be a working committee. It's important to think not only of the usual local food advocates to serve on the committee. Consider who can bring good planning skills and community connections to the "table" and who has the capacity to understand the broader community development opportunities that exist through local food work. Some examples include representation from:

- Local producers
- Local grocery store
- Service clubs
- Chamber of Commerce
- Restaurants
- Local food advocates
- City government officials
- Schools
- Talented community members

It's important to keep in mind that some planning partners fill nuts and bolts planning while others will be dynamite at finite task aspects of the planning. You will need the "thinkers" and the "doers." Seek to involve both categories of folks. It can also be helpful to evaluate skill sets of each team member, such as graphic design/marketing, social media, fundraising, bookkeeping and event planning experience. The more diverse resources that your team has, the stronger and more fun your event planning will be.

Healthy Harvest staff or Board may be contacted for possible assistance with the planning process.

### Goal Setting

The life of the event depends upon how well it reaches target goals and advances connections set by the planning team. **The goals your team chooses will guide discussions around budgeting, partnerships, customer-base, and more.** It's important that each team member understands the goals agreed upon by the team, so that each decision supports the main goals of your event.

Healthy Harvest believes a main goal of Farm to Table events should be building relationships, including:

- with consumers - awakening the community to expect they **can** find local food in establishments such as restaurants, local caterers, etc.
- with food preparers – allowing them the opportunity to 'dip their toe' into the world of working with local food with this event.
- between producers and food establishments – helping to introduce new business connections.
- among committee members who may find this event serves as a spring board for further community investment in local food.
- between other community assets– i.e. artisans, musicians, etc.

Other goals may include highlighting local resources, raising funds for a project or group, expanding the capacity of the local food system (i.e. donating to other new or complementary efforts), and more. Each community is different; therefore, goals will vary. **Many communities set a goal to break even in their first year, with a plan to consider fundraising potential if the event continues.** It is important to regularly check to ensure that decisions are made in accordance with your team's goals.

Ideally, **a Farm to Fork event should not be an annual standalone event**; rather we are interested in exploring what other doors connected to local food development this event can help open for your community. A post-event evaluation meeting should be scheduled as part of the planning process to assess the event's experience against the goals you set and determine future plans.

### Planning Timeline

Planning generally should allow 4-6 months with monthly meetings and regular email exchanges. Team members should expect some delegated tasks to be completed between meetings.

- 5-6 months before event
  - Pull together interested team members to discuss event idea; Recruit key players
- 4-5 months before event
  - Meet with Healthy Harvest representative(s) to set goals and objectives for event
  - Decide on a target date for event
  - Identify short list of locations and discuss feasibility of each
- 3 months before event
  - Finalize meal format and list of food businesses to involve
  - Build budget, determine sponsorship needs, and plan for who will contact sponsors
  - Develop marketing plan
- 2 months before event
  - Recruit sponsors
  - Finalize core event details for use in marketing (date/time, main dish, sponsors, etc.)
  - Begin publicity of event: press release, flyers, social media, radio, etc.
  - Prepare for tickets sales: ticket design, sale location(s), bank account for deposits, etc.
  - Finalize menu and get products/producers lined up with food preparers
  - Verify completion of food establishment agreement with restaurants/chefs
  - Seek necessary permits, such as one-day food permits or alcohol permits
- 1 month before event
  - Continue with PR
  - Plan producer feature at the event, i.e producers as speakers, table tents, menu descriptions
  - Evaluate ticket sales
  - Develop supplies list (dinnerware, decorations, menus/handouts, displays, etc).
- 1 week before event
  - Manage any last-minute ticket sales
  - Finalize expected attendance count and inform food preparers
  - Provide any assistance as needed to aggregate product for food preparers
  - Assign committee members to day-of event roles
  - Create event-day schedule
  - Confirm any speakers (HH representative, producers, committee members, etc.)
  - Finalize supplies list (dinnerware, decorations, etc.)
- Event
  - Host/manage event, including set-up and break-down as necessary
  - Take photos and video for post-event promotion
  - Enjoy the meal and your hard work
- 2-3 weeks after the event
  - Host meeting to debrief strengths/challenges of event; evaluate how well it met goals
  - Finalize all budget issues
  - Consider next steps

### Meal Planning Tips

Farm to Fork events have some features that we hope to replicate between communities, but each community will have its own unique circumstances that will influence the design of its event.

To hold true to the spirit of the Farm to Fork meal, we expect the meal to:

- Feature as much local product as possible – vegetables, fruit, meat, honey, flour/baked goods, beer/wine, etc. –Healthy Harvest of North Iowa has a directory of more than 35 producers to help source products (see “Find Local Food” at our website: [www.healthyharvestofni.com](http://www.healthyharvestofni.com))
  - Note: We like to prioritize purchases from our Local Food Guide members, but this is also an opportunity to introduce other producers to our local food network & support.
- Explore the most effective way to feature the local producers – having the producers present to talk about their farm is one of the best ways to put a face on the products
  - Other ideas include: listing producers on the menu, having table displays or posters featuring producers, having producer information available on-site
- Hold the event at participating restaurants or at a central location that allows catering
- Consider meal format options: progressive meals offering different courses at different venues versus central location featuring the whole meal event at one location

Format	Benefits	Challenges
Progressive	Dynamic movement between sites, compliments healthy exercise message  Highlights restaurants who are willing to partner and are open to serving local, cross promotes the restaurant by possibly introducing new customers to their establishment  Opens conversation with restaurants to serve local on a regular basis	Need venues close together to consider/accommodate the mobility of the guests  May not have enough venues at the “ready” stage for this format to work  Logistics to coordinate with multiple sites including signage, parking, movement of guests
Central location	Simplifies details  Easier to incorporate educational features	May require catering and/or logistics outside of a host restaurant venue

We seek to design the events to complement partner efforts, assets and circumstances. For example, the Mason City Farm to Fork Dinner in 2013 was co-sponsored by the Mason City Blue Zones Project and was set up as a progressive meal to encourage walking - restaurants were within walking distance of each other. This may not be the best arrangement in every community. Alternatively, the Floyd County Farm to Fork Dinner held in Charles City in 2016 was held on their pedestrian bridge, which highlighted the beauty and versatility of the community asset. Clear Lake has done both methods: a progressive dinner in 2014 & 2015 and a central location meal held in an Opportunity Village greenhouse in 2016. Be creative with what your community has to offer.

### Setting the Budget

Ideally, a Farm to Fork event should primarily serve as an awareness event. It can be planned to serve as a fundraiser too – for a lead partner, as seed money for your next event, as funding for another identified local food priority initiative – but **for many communities in this first year, budgetary goals are to cover costs and have a bit of surplus at the end.**

We encourage communities to identify a local partner to act as fiscal agent for this project or set-up an independent project account with a local banking partner.

Your team's budget needs to be built upon:

- **Cost of event** including meal, event space, supplies, etc. - Largely covered by ticket sales
- **Promotional expenses** – May need additional sponsorship support

It is Healthy Harvest's expectation that both food businesses and producers get paid reasonable and fair price for their products and services. We suggest that your team set the price of the respective meal portion ahead as part of the budget development, which will guide your agreements. **We encourage that paying producers should be the responsibility of the food buyer – this is one of the ways the dinner itself provides development of relationships.** It is not the planning committee's role to broker this aspect. Food preparers should invoice the Farm to Fork committee per their agreement (example on p.10). With this in mind, experience from other communities suggest planning committees may want to provide some protection to assure producers get paid. i.e. including a piece in the Chef agreement that full payment by the committee may be withheld until proof that all producers have been fully paid.

Some communities have asked participating food businesses and producers to contribute toward the marketing expenses as a shared benefit, such as providing a modest discount on product or services.

#### Sample budget items include:

- Income
  - Ticket sales
  - Sponsor contributions - consider sponsors with a common commitment to a healthy community
- Expenses
  - Meal costs (per chef agreements)
  - Alcohol
  - Location expenses (Facility rental, tables/chairs, linens, tableware, etc.)
  - Supplies (Decorations, handouts, displays, etc)
  - Marketing expenses (Design, printing, social media, radio air time, etc)
  - Optional: Seed money for future dinner and/or local food project

Other things to consider are the costs that are unique to your event. If you are hosting the event at established facilities, they may charge one fee for use of the space. Alternatively, an outdoor space brings expenses such as bathrooms, tables/chairs, electricity, tableware and more.

It is also **important to look at licensing and insurance necessary for your event.** You may need to acquire a temporary food service permit, a liquor license, dram shop insurance, or other legal documents. If you are unsure about requirements reach out to your food establishments or Public Health for direction.

### **Working with Restaurants**

Building a meal around all local ingredients is still a new concept for many restaurant partners. It's important to have enough time in your planning for conversations around which course each respective food preparer wants to provide, what foods will be available when the meal is planned, who to purchase food from, what to expect in terms of quantity, quality, delivery, etc.

When choosing which food establishments to work with consider the background of each chef/restaurant prior to entering a conversation with them. Team members are encouraged to share information that may warrant concern.

Remember we are filling the whole plate and want to include a diverse selection of local products (from fruit and vegetables to meat, eggs, herbs, honey, grain, etc). Keep in mind that many products are seasonal; this is not to say that they are unavailable other times of the year, but planning may be required for proper storage (i.e. freezing sweet corn or berries). Also, for many of our local meat producers providing product for a large event may require notice to raise the animals. Especially if you plan on using only one particular cut (i.e. a filet mignon). It will be helpful to assess how comfortable the restaurants are on sourcing these products themselves or whether they would appreciate help from the planning committee.

We recommend involving multiple food establishments, but be clear in what role each one plays. The Food Establishment Agreement should help with this process. It is helpful to lay out your meal schedule and convey that message to the chefs so they are aware of where they fit in the overall plan.

It is up to the committee how much input you would like to have over the menu. Some communities let the chef decide, while others choose the main protein and types of appetizer. When working with multiple chefs it is important that someone has a clear line of sight over the entire menu to ensure an enjoyable dining experience. Dietary needs such as gluten-free and vegetarian options should be considered during menu planning.

### **Sourcing Product**

A Healthy Harvest Local Food Guide will be provided with complete listing of members. These members are suggested as they currently market in the area specifically and are organized by product type. This information is also available on our website at [\*\*www.healthyharvestni.com\*\*](http://www.healthyharvestni.com).

It is the role of the chef/food establishment to source the product, as we want to build those relationships and habits. The planning committee can encourage the process by mentioning producers that serve your community and/or that committee members might have a relationship with. While it is nice to include as many different producers as possible also keep in mind that if the restaurant does not have relationships with these growers it might be time consuming to coordinate with many different people. Be sure to discuss this and keep it manageable.

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### Marketing Hints

Promotion of your event is key if you want people to attend. It's best to get information circulated starting at least one month prior to your event, but six weeks is ideal. The tactics you use will be up to your committee, but successful methods in other communities have included social media, flyers, radio promos and interviews, and press releases (a sample is below). Healthy Harvest is happy to supply our Farm to Fork logo, as well as samples of past event logos, flyers, menus, and more for your reference and/or use. Consider designing a printed menu and/or handout with descriptions of menu, producer contact info, partners and sponsor recognition. Don't forget to share your event date and information with the Healthy Harvest team so we can list it on our website and Facebook page.

Food establishments and sponsors should be listed on promotional materials whenever possible and per your agreements. Be sure to share promotional materials with partners and sponsors to share with their customers and employees. Producer profiles or product highlights are also nice to include and easy to do on Facebook or websites over time leading up to the event.

### Sample Press Release

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#### CONTACT:

Contact name, phone number, email address

### \_\_\_\_\_ County Local Foods Committee Hosts Farm to Fork Dinner

*A unique dining experience with local flavor and connection*

(City, IA) – date – The (NAME OF LOCAL FOODS COMMITTEE) has partnered with local chefs/restaurants and local farmers to present the first annual (EVENT NAME) to be held (DATE). A brief statement about what makes the event unique to your community.

Quote from local producer contributing to event.

The event will be hosted at (LOCATION) beginning at (TIME). Explanation of schedule of events, highlighting each course with the chef/restaurant who will prepare it.

Quote from Committee Member about community impact.

Thank you to list of event sponsors for their commitment to our community and for support the development of our local food system.

Ticket details including pricing and where they can be purchased. Seating is limited, so early reservation is encouraged!

###

*(LOCAL FOODS COMMITTEE NAME) is a group of volunteers comprised of (PARTNER TYPES). All members share a common interest in promoting the local foods movement in (COUNTY NAME) and the North Iowa area.*



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### Sample Sponsor Letter

CONTACT NAME  
MAILING ADDRESS  
CITY, STATE, ZIP

Dear (CONTACT NAME),

The (NAME OF LOCAL FOOD COMMITTEE) is partnering with Healthy Harvest of North Iowa, (SHORT LIST OF PARTNERS) and local food producers to present “(NAME OF EVENT)” on (DATE). The purpose of this event is to showcase what locally-grown and prepared foods are available right here in (NAME OF COUNTY), how to find them and the benefits associated with buying local and fresh.

(DESCRIPTION OF EVENT INCLUDING WHAT MAKES IT UNIQUE AND WHY IT MATTERS.)

Please consider partnering with us in this endeavor to spotlight our local food producers and to keep ticket prices low and affordable by being an event co-sponsor for \$(TARGET AMOUNT).

Your sponsorship will include:

- (NUMBER) free tickets to the dinner
- Name listed on event flyer, if provided by (DATE)
- Name and/or logo included on event signage displayed at event, if provided by (DATE)
- Name included on event press releases as sponsoring partner, if provided by (DATE)
- Inclusion in the Facebook sponsor photo album for event
- One (1) original, dedicated Facebook post prior to the sponsored event
- Verbal recognition during the event
- (OTHER BENEFITS THAT YOUR TEAM DECIDES)

Please let me know if your company/business/organization would be interested in supporting this unique event. Your generous sponsorship would certainly be appreciated and acknowledged. (BREIF DESCRIPTION OF EVENT DAY SCHEDULE TO ENCOURAGE ATTENDANCE).

Please do not hesitate to contact me at (PHONE NUMBER/EMAIL) for additional information. Donation checks should be made payable to (EVENT ACCOUNT OR FISCAL AGENT), with “Farm to Fork event” in the memo line.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

(NAME OF SENDER)  
On behalf of (PLANNING TEAM NAME)  
CONTACT INFORMATION

## Farm to Fork Dinner Food Establishment Agreement

This agreement is to help all parties understand the mutual expectations.

This is not legally binding, but encourages all to follow through in good faith to the best of their abilities.

**Farm to Fork Event** – We are hosting a Farm to Fork event at \_\_\_\_\_(location) on \_\_\_\_\_(date) at \_\_\_\_\_(time). Our goals are to: \_\_\_\_\_(goal #1) and \_\_\_\_\_(goal #2). We appreciate your interest in supporting this event by providing your services. Our meal schedule is as follows: Appetizer – (TIME); Soup/salad – (TIME); Entrée – (TIME); Dessert – (TIME). You are responsible for having the \_\_\_\_\_(course) ready for service and served at \_\_\_\_\_( time) so the whole meal can flow smoothly. Please tell us how much prep time you require. We have a number of participating food establishments and are reviewing with each one in detail.

**Sourcing local food** – As the provider of part of the meal, you will be responsible for the purchase of the local product and paying the producer(s) directly. If you would like assistance with sourcing local products, our planning committee will be happy to help. A Healthy Harvest Local Food Guide will be provided to you with complete listing of active local producers in North Iowa. In addition, we can outline a number of local producers as a starting point. Our priority is to purchase from producers who work with Healthy Harvest of North Iowa, but we recognize you may have established relationships with other local producers. We ask that you source as much of your course as local as possible. Seasonal menus are recommended, but if out-of-season produce, such as fruit, is desired, please give ample notice to our committee so plans can be made to prep and freeze the desired product ahead of time.

**Marketing contribution (Optional)** - All food establishment partners are encouraged to contribute \$100 toward our marketing budget, as promotional materials will mutually benefit the event and your establishment. A check can be made out to \_\_\_\_\_ (Event Account/Fiscal Agent) or a deduction may be reflected on invoice.

**Price you will be reimbursed for your service.** \_\_\_\_\_ (\$ amount per meal course) is budgeted for the course you are providing.

While our goal for ticket sales is \_\_\_\_\_ (ticket goal), the final number of meals to be prepared and served will be determined by \_\_\_\_\_(date- ideally 1 week before the dinner ) confirmed by a member of our planning committee. The number reported on this date will be the number you invoice the committee for reimbursement of your service. The invoice should be made to: (Event Account/Fiscal Agent), (Billing Address)

*Note: Food preparers will be paid a 50% deposit one week prior to the event, and the remaining 50% be paid after verification that all producers have received payment.*

**As a representative of** \_\_\_\_\_ (food establishment participant), my signature is my commitment to participate in the Farm to Fork Community Dinner, following the outlined criteria in this Agreement.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_  
Food Establishment Participant

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_  
Member of local planning committee

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Other References**

We hope this manual is helpful in your Farm to Fork event planning. All the information and advice provided is pulled from our experiences in the communities we've worked with in North Iowa. We encourage you to use this as a reference point, but hope that you bring creativity and originality to your event.

Other online resources that you could reference:

- “5 Tips for Hosting a Farm to Table Dinner” by Hobby Farms  
(<http://www.hobbyfarms.com/5-tips-for-hosting-a-farm-to-table-dinner-3>)
- “6 Tips to Better Farm-to-Table Events” by Brown Paper Tickets  
(<http://community.brownpapertickets.com/wp/farm-table-beyond>)

## **Contact Information**

**For more information, please contact a Healthy Harvest of North Iowa staff member:**

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