

Cultivating a Farmer to Chef Partnership CHECKLIST

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Step one: Be Prepared

- Know the restaurant
 - Dine at the restaurant, familiarize yourself with the menu, patrons, as well as special features
 - Prepare an organic menu alternative (ie. "We can supply your fresh salad greens, beans, and beef which are all already items on your menu")
 - Know the strengths of your farm and the products you are offering; be able to speak about them with enthusiasm (try doing this with a friend first).
 - Prepare and bring a personal profile including a history of the farm, and testimonials (eg. "We already work with XYZ restaurant and they have said 'THIS' about our service and products" or "Our customers claim we have the best XYZ because ... ")
- Prepare a price & product listing ("sell sheet") including availability and seasonality of all the items you have available to restaurants.
- Stay up to date on Provincial and Federal food, safety and handling regulations.

Step two: Make a Good First Impression

- Call to schedule a meeting with the Chef, Kitchen Manager, or Restaurant Owner (try calling first thing in the morning, before it's too busy).
- Bring samples of your fresh product and encourage them to taste the difference. Always leave a sample – whether or not they show interest in purchasing your product.
- Be knowledgeable about your products; know the history, traditions and nutritional value of the products you offer. If your product is unique be prepared to offer original recipes.
- Invite them to visit your farm.
- Explain your growing season (you can also include this on your sell sheet, listing when your products are available and in approximate quantities) and discuss the potential limitations on your production – don't keep any secrets and don't promise anything you might not be able to deliver.
- Emphasize your unique practices and what makes your product better than the competitors (certified organic, rare breeds, heritage varieties, flavour, freshness etc...).
- Find out their ordering cycle, receiving hours and invoice procedures – casual is not an option.
- Be clear about delivery terms and sell them on your ability to provide. Ask what would be most helpful to them:
 - What day of the week is best? What time? Where to deliver?
Inform them of your current delivery schedule (eg. Farmer's Market days)
 - Inform them of your flexibility/constraints to deliver on short notice
 - Be clear about who will cover delivery charges (commonly included in your prices, but they should be aware of this)
 - Ask about product packaging preferences

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- Provide your full contact information highlighting the best way to contact you.
- Be flexible – demonstrate that you are happy and willing to make this relationship work. Thank them for their time.
- Find out if they are interested in seconds (for soup broths etc) – but be careful to only offer first grade otherwise.
- Bring a copy of your organic certificate.
- Never undersell another farmer, instead, work towards creating partnerships with other farms in order to offer your clients more products and services.

Step three: Maintaining the Relationship

- Customer Service: Deliver Professionalism
 - Be transparent, consistent and professional when communicating and establishing your farm and business practices.
 - Work on establishing a payment schedule that works for you and the restaurant – if it's an account establish a regular billing schedule ie. every week/month.
 - Make sure your labels, forms, and invoices are standardized, consistent and clear with your contact information always listed.
 - Be absolutely consistent on quality and quantity.
 - Standardize your packaging. Check out the supermarket and/or wholesale facilities to see how similar products are packaged (eg. how much parsley is in a bunch, what is a standard weight for potato sacks?).
 - Getting the right product to the right place at the right time is critical – make it a priority!
 - Whenever possible provide accurate projections for two weeks or more ahead of delivery.
- Establish open, clear and honest communication
 - Be sure to call back punctually and do your best to respond to spontaneous needs/desires from the restaurant/chef.
 - If the product is different from the order, call ahead and make sure they want it
 - Keep them current on your productions; there is always a degree of uncertainty – make this clear to the client
- Work to create and maintain a positive working relationship
 - Dine at the restaurant regularly (lunch is a cheaper alternative for higher end restaurants)
 - Invite them and their employees to your farm
 - Show up in-person when you can – be a familiar face in the kitchen.
 - Submit articles in newsletters (such as ACORN's monthly newsletter or the local paper) about your successful relationship with restaurants, thereby advertising both your farm and the restaurant.
 - Continue to offer unique products to your clients – offer to work out a growing plan with the chef or restaurant before planting so that you can be sure to supply their needs.