

## Farmer – Chef Communication

### **TIPS**

*The following are suggestions from chefs and farmers, compiled by the [Portland chapter of Chefs Collaborative](http://www.portlandcc.org/), <http://www.portlandcc.org/>*

### **Notes from a Chef to a Farmer**

- 1. Commitment.** Restaurants, for cost control, need to be somewhat automated in their purchasing patterns. When a chef commits to buying a certain amount from the farm, the chef anticipates it to be delivered accordingly.
- 2. Delivery Schedule.** Chefs depend on the arriving product. Work with your chef so the restaurant can have a steady stream of fresh produce during the week from you farm. Also, try to establish a delivery system that works for both the kitchen and your schedule. Know your restaurant's busy times and plan your calls and visits around these times, not in the middle of them.
- 3. Sell What You Can Deliver.** Don't short the kitchen; the chef is expecting a certain quantity. If the product is different than what you offered call the chef and ask if they still want it.
- 4. Sell Your Product.** Chefs love free samples. Be generous with your prized produce when you first stop by the restaurant (do call in advance!) and on that first delivery day encourage them to try and taste the difference. Offer samples at farmer's markets where chefs are known to cruise and taste.
- 5. Get to Know Your Customers.** Eat in the restaurants where you deliver. Lunch is a cheaper alternative if offered. Just as important as having a chef visit your farm, you'll see how your product is used. You'll be inspired.
- 6. Reinforce My Loyalty.** Part patience and part diligence -- remember to be consistent in your work and with your produce. Assist the person receiving the delivery by collecting your boxes, be on time, courteous, and prepare invoices ahead. Call if you will be late.
- 7. Billing.** Like any other businessperson you have a right to be paid on time. First time deliveries may be paid in cash, but it far more efficient for everyone to establish an account.
- 8. Specialize and diversity.** Diversify the produce that you offer and make yourself unique. Research the market so you know what others are growing and where the holes are. Talk to your chef about what they would like to see on their menus in the future. Sell flowers and vegetables offering them both to the same restaurant. Be creative.

### **Notes from a Farmer to a Chef**

**1. Commitment.** Buy consistently while a product is in season rather than for just a small amount of time, or communicate with your farmer that you may need a product for only a short time. This gives the grower the opportunity to sell it elsewhere. If a requested item isn't picked each week it ends up in the compost.

**2. Delivery.** Establish a delivery schedule with your farmer.

**3. Buy What You Can Use.** Both chefs and farmers think about their bottom line. Do not expect to pay full price even if you are buying the last cases directly from the farmer at the market. Challenge yourself to use it well. Establish a predictable routine with your farmer for phone calls, orders, and questions. Give the growers advance notice of what you would like for delivery.

**4. Learn about Your Product.** Continue to learn about the items your farmer grows and inspire your co-workers and employees to do so. Most farmers are great cooks because they cook directly from their garden. They are a great resource for learning about growing seasons, product use, and availability.

**5. Get to Know Your Grower.** Taste the produce with them and talk to them about what you plan to do with it and what it will be paired with. Ask your grower how they use it. If you are unhappy with something let them know and why. It is in our interest to make you happy. Talk to your grower about trends and request varieties you're interested in.

**6. Cultivate Trust.** There is always a degree of uncertainty regarding crop size and quality. Remain flexible and patient with your farmer, they know about disappointment and surprises.

**7. Billing.** Work out a system with your farmer. Most farms like to be paid COD or within 7 days.

**8. Be Flexible.** Use what is fresh and in season. It will make your plates better. Generalize your menus. If certain vegetables are fresh that day they can be incorporated into a dish without having to change the menu.

Chances are if you have someone growing your product directly for you, you'll find yourself with great starting ingredients and the potential for a rewarding relationship with a farmer.

The report, [\*Approaching Foodservice Establishments with Locally Grown Products\*](#) from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, June 2003, provides information from Chefs Collaborative members about their experiences buying locally grown products.