

# Local Foods Dinner Planning Checklist

This time line is based on the experience of the Land Stewardship Project's Local Foods Banquets held in 1999 and 2000. Most likely your time line will vary depending on the size and location of the event. These dinners served approximately 100 people and were held in church basements. The menu was planned and prepared by a professional chef with assistance of volunteers. A small committee of volunteers and staff met twice to provide ideas and suggestions for the event.

## **At least 6-9 months before the event:**

- Decide on the date. Keep in mind that the season will determine what food is available and so will influence the menu.
- Reserve a location. A commercial grade kitchen with large ovens, an industrial dishwasher, and plenty of counter space is best for serving a large group. Refrigerator and freezer space should also be ample to store ingredients for the meal, as they may need to be delivered a few days in advance of the event. Check on availability of dishes, glasses, silverware, linens, and cooking pots and pans.
- Identify who will be planning the menu and preparing the food.
- Identify farmers in your area who can provide food for your meal. Research what food items will be available at the time of your event.

## **3-4 months before the event:**

- Determine the menu for the event based on the food items available. Ask cook/chef to provide a detailed shopping list that gives the specific quantity of each food item needed. If serving meat, get specific details on type of cut needed.
- Plan program ideas (what will happen at the event in addition to the meal?) and begin recruiting program participants. Think about how you can educate your guests about local food and land stewardship issues. When possible involve local artists or musicians.
- Prepare a budget for the event. Determine ticket prices. If needed, identify other sponsors to help pay for costs.
- Begin initial publicity for the event. Let your group's members know that the event is coming up through your newsletter or some other means.
- Create flyer and/or invitation.
- Consider if additional liability insurance is necessary for the event. Many groups already carry general liability insurance and simply need to contact their agent to add a special rider for events. If the entire meal is prepared by a conference center, they will most likely already have coverage.

## **2 months before the event:**

- Make contact with local farmers to reserve food items, determine cost and work out transportation details. For especially large events, you may need to contact farmers earlier to reserve large quantities of food. This process can take a lot of time and many phone calls. It can be helpful to find one person to concentrate on this task alone.
- Mail out invitations and/or distribute flyers. If desired, send out a press release to local media. Make sure to invite local farmers, especially those providing food for the meal. If you have space, you might invite farmers to set up a display about their farm.
- Recruit volunteers to help with food preparation, food serving, setup, and clean up.

## **2-4 weeks before the event:**

- Process reservations.
- Finalize details for securing food items from farmers. If needed, adjust food quantities up or down based on reservations.
- Finalize details for program (what will happen, when, who will do it).
- Create materials that will be handed out at the event – program agenda, list of farmers who contributed food for the event, short evaluation, etc.
- Arrange for a place to deliver excess food after the event (food shelf, soup kitchen, etc.)
- Plan decorations for tables and room. If using cloth tablecloths and napkins, make arrangements with rental source if not available at the event location.
- Work out details for how food will be served.

## **1 week before the event:**

- Food from farmers is delivered or picked up. Arrange for storage at site of event. Arrange for payment to farmers.
- Confirm with volunteers who will be helping in kitchen, helping with setup, and helping with clean up.
- Confirm with people who will be providing music, helping with the program, doing the blessing, etc.
- Purchase items that cannot be obtained from local farmers. A local food coop is a good source for these misc. ingredients. They may also be willing to provide a gift certificate in return for some publicity at the event.
- Create sign/s to direct guests to event location.
- Make name tags.

**Day of event:**

- Prepare food. Depending on the menu, food prep may need to start early in the morning or even the night before.
- Put out sign/s to direct guests to event location.
- Decorate and setup space. Set tables. Set up information displays.
- Serve food. Celebrate meal.
- Educate guests about issues of local food and land stewardship.
- Clean up and take down. It really helps to line up “fresh” volunteers who haven’t already helped in the morning with food preparation. It can take several hours to do all the dishes, take down tables, package extra food, etc.
- Take excess food to donation site. (Bring extra containers to package food.)

**Follow-up after event:**

- Send thank you’s to volunteers and program participants.
- Review evaluations and write down any suggestions/hints for next time.
- Make sure all farmers have received payment.
- Complete feedback sheet and return to the Land Stewardship Project.