

Local Food Connection: 2011 Conference

WORKSHOP: Buying and Selling to Restaurants

Description: *What does it take to create a sustained and successful relationship between local restaurants and the producers they buy from? Hear from three successful restaurant owners and a chef on their needs, expectations and how they have formed working relationships with producers.*

Speakers: Katherine Lavine, Owner, Holy Cow Café & Catering; Iain Duncan, Owner, & Jason Biga, Chef, Le Bistro, Terzo, Aqua Seafood, Flat Tail Pub; Brendan Mahaney, Owner, Belly.

Moderator: Adam Bernstein, Owner/Chef, Adam's Sustainable Table

Workshop Notes:

Common Challenges:

- Timing in making introductions
- Timing in deliveries
- Clear lines of communication
- Price points – conflicting interest
 - Farmers may want to sell at Farmer's Markets for the prices they can obtain
 - Restaurants need a wholesale price, can't afford to pay market prices. Panelists are okay with buying value added products and see a large benefit in local for the increased shelf life and bigger products
- Consistency with availability: Restaurants tend to under order as a strategy and then ask for more

Methods to overcome challenges and to create successful and sustainable relationships:

- Communication!
- Research the restaurants/buyers you want to sell to. Be tenacious and ask what they want grown.
- Send an email and a letter as an introduction. It should start with 'hot list' prices and then your introduction. State that you will call at a certain time and will continue until you receive a meeting or a rejection
- Start small, consider contract selling with one restaurant for a core crop such as lettuce, carrots and celery
- Don't be afraid to sell #2 grade products as long as they taste great and have a good shelf life
- Offer chefs ideas on how to incorporate your products into their menus, use samples, recipes, examples of how other restaurants are using the products and ideas for preserving the items for use during a different season
- Streamline billing, delivery and communication exchange
- Inform restaurants where they can get your products in a pinch – for example do you stock frozen items

- Tell your story! Inform chefs/buyers, who will inform their staff, who will inform the restaurant guests. This makes your product memorable
- Be willing and able to make exceptions to build relationships
- Avoid service hours, know that chefs and buyers are at restaurants well in advance of when guests arrive
- If you sell to a restaurant, recommend that place to your friends, family and colleagues. Help that restaurant be successful
- Consider using your own containers to deliver products, ask the restaurant will clean and stock the containers to return at next delivery
- Once relationship is established, send price lists well in advance to help chefs plan their menus
- Consider developing a relationship with a local food processor to extend the selling season