



CT Department of Agriculture

Briefs

OVER 100 ATTEND ANNUAL MEETING 1/21/09

Over 100 turned out for the 1/21/09 Farm-to-Chef Annual Meeting in Farmington. A recap of the meeting begins on Page 2.

NEW ONLINE NETWORKING GROUPS

Farm-to-Chef Members have created these new [Facebook](#) and [Google](#) networking groups. Check them out and network with your peers!

HARVEST NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE

The next Harvest New England Agricultural Marketing Conference and Trade Show is scheduled for 2/24/09 – 2/26/09 in Sturbridge, MA. For more info or to register online, go to the [Harvest New England website](#).

FREE ONE-ON-ONE ADVISORY SESSIONS FOR PRODUCERS

The [CT Farm Risk Management Team](#) is sponsoring free one-hour, one-on-one advisory sessions for CT Grown producers on 2/18/09 in Litchfield, 2/19/09 in West Suffield, 3/4/09 in Haddam, and 3/5/09 in Norwich. See last page for more.

CT GROWN TABLETOP SIGNAGE

CT DoAG is considering a collaboration with the state's winemakers to produce table toppers with information about CT wines on one side and about other CT Grown products on the other. These would be provided free of charge to restaurants and other facilities serving these products. If you would like some of these signs to display in your business, please contact Linda.Piotrowicz@ct.gov (860-713-2558).

WINTER MARKETS

A list of winter and holiday farmers' markets now is available on our [web-site](#). This year brings several new markets eager to welcome you throughout the winter months. Dairy, meat, eggs, seafood, breads, greens, herbs, and specialty foods are among the CT Grown products you can find. Put on your hat and gloves and head out for some delicious fresh, CT Grown food to warm your taste buds!

February 2009

CT Grown in Season FEBRUARY

Apples Cabbage Dairy
Eggs Fin Fish Garlic
Greens Herbs
Indoor Plants and Flowers
Honey Lettuce Lobster
Meat Onions Pears
Potatoes Scallops
Shellfish Specialty Foods
Turnips Winter Squash

If you need help locating any of these items, please [contact us](#).



Contact Us

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2009 Annual Meeting Recap

By *Linda Piotrowicz*

Over 100 food service professionals, producers, distributors, and others with a vested interest in local food came to the Country Club of Farmington on Wednesday, January 21, 2009, for the second annual meeting of the CT Department of Agriculture's Farm-to-Chef (FTC) Program.

Emily Brooks of Edibles Advocate Alliance LLC delivered the keynote address. Her talk centered on planning and vision for small businesses, including creative and outside-the-box thinking. Emphasizing bootstrapping and networking, she shared the concepts of innovative products and services, niche marketing, costs, and different products and approaches to gain competitive advantage in today's climate and achieve financial success. Optimism was a common theme throughout the talk, and Emily reminded the audience that some of our country's greatest innovations were born of necessity during the most challenging of times.

At the conclusion of Emily's talk, Linda Giuca, writer and former food editor at the Hartford Courant, led the group through the remainder of the morning as she moderated a lively panel discussion. (A list of the panelists appears at the end of this article.) The topics were selected by FTC members through a survey distributed in November. Some highlights and comments from the discussion follow.

Topic One: Competitively pricing CT Grown foods

Most in the room agreed that demand for CT Grown products is very high. The users' customers respond positively when they see local foods on the menu. Because demand is so high, however, the users must compete with the general public for the product and often are charged full retail. This makes it difficult for the users to purchase CT Grown and stay within their food budgets.

Many of the users list the source of the CT Grown ingredients on their menus or in accompanying materials. This is great free advertising for the provider and can be considered one of the benefits of selling to a restaurant or foodservice institution.

Nunzio Corsino of Four Mile River Farm explained that he gets a large number of new customers at his farm as a result of the restaurants he supplies listing him as the source of the meat. "The listing of our farm name on the menu is more advertising than I could ever afford to pay for," he said.

Another producer in the audience commented that selling to restaurants and institutions saves him considerably in labor and packaging because he packs in bulk.

These benefits could be considered by providers when setting prices for foodservice customers, and may offset a lower-than-retail price, resulting in a win-win for all involved.

Topic Two: Effective marketing of CT Grown foods

The users on the panel expressed that they and their customers desire information about the farms supplying them.

Carlos Cassar from Saybrook Point Inn and Spa and Reg Briggs from Country Club of Farmington explained that the list of local producers from whom they purchase has grown so long it has become difficult to include on their menus. Reg is considering a separate listing to be posted or inserted into the menu, while Carlos educates his staff about the source of the foods on his menu so that they in turn can communicate this information to the customers.

Brendan Martin from Litchfield Market said that he brings in local farmers whenever possible to speak at his market and meet the customers. Nunzio Corsino mentioned that he has appeared at River Tavern Restaurant, which hosts regular dinners featuring a particular farm. That farm's products are served and the farmer is invited to speak at the dinner.

Devin Sardilli from Sardilli Produce and Dairy commented that he often is challenged to get the producers to consistently label their product with the farm name so that the end user knows exactly where it was grown.

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2009 Annual Meeting Recap (continued)

After hearing the others' comments, Pauline Lord from White Gate Farm vowed to compose the write-up about her turkeys that she has talked about doing for the past several years so she could finally provide it to her customers.

Topic Three: Efficient distribution of CT Grown products

The group agreed that distribution is an ongoing challenge for restaurants and institutions using CT Grown. Buying direct from the farm ensures the highest degree of freshness, but it is inefficient for a chef to drive to many different farms to pick up product when his or her time is better spent in the kitchen.

Conversely, a farmer's time is more effectively spent farming than driving around the state dropping off small amounts of product to different customers. Most of the users at retail groceries and markets stated that they rely on delivery from the producer or a distributor, while a number of users at restaurants stated they pick up at least some of what they purchase from local farms.

Nunzio Corsino explained he considers delivery part of his relationship with the restaurants he does business with, and does not charge for it, while Pauline Lord said that she does not offer delivery, and that all of her customers come to the farm to pick up.

Mid- to large-sized distributors allow chefs to spend more time in their kitchens and farmers on their farms, but some feel freshness and quality can be compromised when product is held too long. In addition, it can be challenging to determine exactly what farm the product is from, because distributors may buy the same item from many different local producers, and, as Devin Sardilli pointed out earlier, producers do not always label their products clearly.

Small delivery companies like Deb Marsden's CT Farm Fresh Express fit the needs of some users and producers. Carlos Cassar explained that now he picks up only 20 percent of the local ingredients he uses while Deb's company delivers the remaining 80 percent. Carlos stressed that it is important for users to visit each farm at least once, however, and be familiar with the way it operates.

When several audience members realized there were

others in the group from the same neighborhoods, the suggestions of carpooling and combining pick-up/delivery trips arose. Networking and communication are key. Others also suggested back-hauling when deliveries are made to increase efficiency.

Topic Four: Users contracting with growers for specific CT Grown crops/products in advance of the season

Several panelists discussed their experience with formal or informal arrangements made in advance of the season whereby producers grow specific products for users. Jamie Jones from Jones Family Farm and Winery explained that they contract with winegrape growers frequently because they are unable to grow all the grapes they use in their wine. As a grower, he said, he would be interested in trying a new crop if a user asked him for it.

Pauline Lord stated that she has received wish-lists from a restaurant user that she has found extremely helpful in planning her crops. The arrangement is informal, but works out well for both parties.

A restaurant chef in the audience described his favorable experience making arrangements for specific crops ahead of the season with a microgrower. He emphasized that planning ahead is essential.

A small producer in the audience said she would be very interested in contract growing for users since she does not have the resources to grow the volume of staple crops to supply farmers' markets and prefers to specialize on unusual crops that would be of interest to chefs.

Topic Five: Creative uses for underutilized CT Grown crops/products

The group largely agreed that demand for previously unwanted cuts of meat, produce seconds, and other items has increased in recent years. Some of the users in the audience pointed out that European countries consider organs and other parts of the animal as delicacies, and feel that consumers in the United States are catching on to this idea.

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2009 Annual Meeting Recap (continued)

Nunzio Corsino said he has no trouble selling all parts of his animals. Restaurants are interested in lesser-known cuts and making them popular with their customers. Another producer in the audience said that he has seen an increase in demand by ethnic groups for items he used to throw away. This has resulted in much less waste on his farm.

Pauline Lord and a vegetable grower in the audience said they offer their tomato seconds at a reduced price and have no trouble selling them. Pauline lets users come and pick the seconds off the vines, while the other producer sells her seconds to prepared food counters in grocery stores and markets.

Another vegetable grower in the audience said he has some unusual crops, such as celeriac, that he has a hard time selling. Users in attendance agreed they are interested in such crops and that increased communication about product availability is needed.

Jamie Jones told the group that he would like to see local restaurants and other users take a closer look at CT Grown wines, noting that there are some very high-quality varieties available and worth trying.

Topic Six: New CT Grown crops/products desired but not readily available

Users in the audience voiced their desire for such crops as CT Grown wheat, spelt, rye, root vegetables for winter use, cooking oil, cheeses, and wholesale berries. Once again, the topic of communication and networking arose. A bulletin board or other online forum could help match up user wants with farmers willing to grow or produce them.

A discussion about online networking ensued. Sites such as Google and Facebook could be conducive to this effort. Linda Piotrowicz, Farm-to-Chef Program Manager, pointed out that State Internet usage policy prevents her from participating in social networking while at the Department of Agriculture. A media representative in the audience told the audience that they are "right where they need to be" right now, and encouraged everyone to get involved and start their own online group to continue the discussion and networking of the preceding three hours.

After the meeting, Tim Cipriano contacted the group to announce he had created a group on Facebook called CT Farm to Chef. Donna Lesczczynski created a group on Google entitled Farm-Fresh-to-Chef-Connecticut. This information was distributed to all Farm-to-Chef members, who are encouraged to make use of these tools for communication; networking; and posting product wants, needs and availability.

The discussion portion of the meeting concluded at approximately 12:45 PM, and a buffet lunch consisting of food prepared by FTC members was served (see list of providers at end). Linda Piotrowicz challenged attendees to meet every other person present and find out who they were, where they were from, and what they did, stressing the importance of taking advantage of the networking time while it was available.

During lunch, the food providers were gathered to give an impromptu presentation about what they had prepared and where the ingredients had been sourced. Diners were heard raving about how delicious everything was.

Surveys were distributed to attendees, who were asked to complete and return them before leaving for the day. A brief summary of responses follows.

AMONG THE PROVIDERS RESPONDING:

- Most have been part of the FTC Program for 1 to 2 years.
- All but one has increased sales of CT Grown products since joining the FTC Program.
- 33 percent of those have increased sales by 10 to 25 percent; 13 percent have increased sales by 25 to 50 percent.
- 81 percent have increased the types of CT Grown products sold since joining the FTC Program.
- 39 percent offer delivery.
- 100 percent feel the FTC Program has benefited their business overall.
- The effectiveness of FTC newsletters, website listings, one-on-one assistance, and annual meetings all received an average rating of 4.0 or higher on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being most effective).

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2009 Annual Meeting Recap (continued)

AMONG THE USERS RESPONDING:

- 32 percent have been members of the FTC Program for more than 2 years, while 29 percent are brand new to the program.
- All indicated that the FTC Program has increased their awareness of CT Grown products.
- 86 percent have increased their use of CT Grown products since joining the FTC Program.
- 23 percent of those have increased their use by more than 50 percent, while another 26 percent have increased their use by 25 to 50 percent.
- 50 percent purchase CT Grown products direct from the farm; 34 percent buy from distributors.
- All but one feels the FTC Program has benefited their business overall.
- The effectiveness of FTC newsletters, website listings, one-on-one assistance, annual meetings, summer workshops, and demo opportunities all received an average rating of 4.0 or higher on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being most effective).

After the meeting, a follow up email was sent to attendees asking for an estimate of how many new business contacts, potential new customers, and/or potential new vendors were made as a result of the FTC meeting.

- 48 percent reported 4 to 6
- 21 percent reported 7 to 9
- 14 percent reported 10 to 15
- 14 percent reported 25 or more

Comments provided on the surveys were extremely positive. Chef Tim Cipriano, Executive Director of Food for New Haven Public Schools offered this feedback:

Over 25 new business contacts were made as a result of the Farm to Chef meeting. Farm to Chef is THE best networking institution for me in CT. I have increased our use of CT Grown products through the Farm to Chef Program more than any other program available in CT. The support I receive is second to none, the marketing materials featuring CT Grown are very valuable educational tools to the students in New Haven Public Schools. Linda, Thanks for making this conference the best one yet, I can't wait till the next one!

Yesterday I made some serious connections that will help out the students in NH in ways I never conceived. Without the program the students may never have seen

the likes of the proposed programs we will be starting. We will be starting an internship program for my workers with local restaurants. I want my workers to work with real food so they can bring that real world experience back to the schools and ultimately the children. From the conference yesterday we signed up a few restaurants to work with. I was also able to connect with farmers who want to share their experiences with the students, teaching them where their food comes from and how. You can't make this stuff up. It is happening thanks to the connections I have made through FTC.

The FTC Program is grateful to all who participated in this event to made it a success. In particular, special thanks go to keynote speaker Emily Brooks, moderator Linda Giuca, and the panelists and food providers listed below.

PANELISTS

- Reg Briggs, Country Club of Farmington
- Emily Brooks, Edibles Advocate Alliance
- Carlos Cassar, Saybrook Point Inn and Spa
- Nunzio Corsino, Four Mile River Farm
- Jamie Jones, Jones Family Farm and Winery
- Pauline Lord, White Gate Farm
- Deb Marsden, CT Farm Fresh Express
- Brendan Martin, Litchfield Market
- Devin Sardilli, Sardilli Produce and Dairy Company
- Chad Simoneaux, Gulf Shrimp Company
- Stephen Stern, Lawrence and Memorial Hospital

FOOD AND BEVERAGES PROVIDERS

- Reg Briggs, Country Club of Farmington
- Emily Brooks, Edibles Advocate Alliance
- Dawn Bruckner, La Belle Aurore
- Carol Byer-Alcorace, New Morning Natural & Organic
- Robin Chesmer, The Farmer's Cow
- Gary Costa, Center for Culinary Arts
- Peter Gorman, Unquowa School
- Shirley Markham, Whittlemore Thyme
- Scott Miller, Max's Oyster Bar
- Hunter Morton, Max Downtown
- Margaret Sapir, Wave Hill Breads
- Howard Shafer, The Whole Hog
- Peter Sonenstein, Chabaso Bread
- John Turenne, Sustainable Food Systems
- Lu Yertut, Harney and Sons Tea Company

2009 Annual Meeting Photos



Clockwise from left photo (all people identified left to right):

- *Panelist Jaime Jones*
- *Food providers Gary Costa and Shirley Markham*
- *Moderator Linda Giuca*
- *Panelists Nunzio Corsino, Carlos Cassar, Deb Marsden, Reg Briggs*
- *Discussion session attendees*

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF ALAN BUDNEY PHOTOGRAPHY

Happenings

The CT Farm Risk Management Team is sponsoring free one-hour, one-on-one advisory sessions for CT Grown producers on 2/18/09 in Litchfield, 2/19/09 in West Suffield, 3/4/09 in Haddam, and 3/5/09 in Norwich. Topics include crop insurance; estate planning and farm succession; farm business and marketing; dealing with local officials; transitioning to organic production; and alternative energy opportunities. Contact Norm Bender at 860-887-1608 for more information or to sign up.

The next Harvest New England Agricultural Marketing Conference and Trade Show is scheduled for 2/24/09 – 2/26/09 in Sturbridge, MA. For more info or to register online, go to the Harvest New England website.

CT NOFA will hold their Cultivating an Organic Connecticut Conference on 2/21/09 in Windsor. For more information or to register, please visit CT NOFA's website.

BuyCTGrown will host two workshops this month: *Telling the story of the "Face Behind the Food": Direct-to-Consumer Marketing* on 2/9/09 and *Tapping into Distribution Networks: Developing Strategies to Reach New Markets* on 2/23/09. For more info, contact Elise Cusano at City Seed, 203-773-3736 or elise@cityseed.org.

Chef Carol Peck of Woodbury's Good News Café will appear 3/8/09 at The Silo Cooking School in New Milford. This award-winning, nationally acclaimed chef awakens spring with her creative recipes using the freshest ingredients to prepare a simple yet dazzling menu. For more info or to register, go to the Silo's website.

Emily Brooks of Edibles Advocate Alliance will host a book talk 2/21/09 on Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America by Laura Shapiro at the Gunn Memorial Library in Washington, CT. Additional book talks by Emily will be held at the library on 3/21/09 and 4/18/09.

The Hill-Stead Museum in Farmington will host a May Market on Friday 5/8/09 and Saturday 5/9/09. Vendors currently are being sought. For more information, contact Jan Wright, 860-673-0542, janrw@worldnet.att.net or Anne Gerard, 860-284-5051, annegerard@comcast.net

IMPORTANT NOTICE FROM THE BUREAU OF INSPECTION AND REGULATION

Questions regarding what can or cannot be sold in a food service establishment should be answered by your local department of health (DPH). Your local department of health, and by extension, the state Department of Public Health, are the entities that regulate the sources of foods and the documentation of the sources of foods that can be purchased and served in a food service establishment.



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Farm-to-Chef is a free program that helps connect local culinary professionals with producers and distributors of CT Grown products. Informational newsletters, workshops, networking, promotions and other opportunities are provided to members as part of the program.

The program also helps the public locate restaurants and other dining facilities that serve CT Grown foods.

Farmers, wholesalers, chefs, and other food service professionals are encouraged to join. Please contact Linda at the CT Department of Agriculture, Linda.Piotrowicz@ct.gov or 860-713-2558, for more information.