



# ***How to Get Started in Culinary Tourism – A Resource Guide for Farmers***

*Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources*

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## *What is Culinary Tourism?*

Culinary tourism is a subset of *agri-tourism* that focuses specifically on the search for, and enjoyment of, *prepared* food and drink. Culinary tourism promotes all distinctive and impressive “culinary experiences”. It highlights locally grown food and celebrates regional agricultural heritage. Today, culinary tourism is an important marketing niche that fosters economic and community development for specialty crop growers, farm wineries, breweries, and hospitality and tourism professionals alike. It provides innovative opportunities for an agri-tourism farm to increase and expand their customer base. Culinary tourism can be found in rural or urban areas and can be available to visitor all season long.

### **WHO is the culinary traveler?**

The culinary traveler is anyone who is looking for a unique and memorable “*Culinary Experience*” on or off the farm. The culinary traveler is typically younger, more affluent and better educated than non-culinary travelers. They are motivated by unique experiences. Those considered to be “deliberate” culinary travelers (culinary activities were the key reason for their trip) tend to spend a significantly higher dollar amount of their overall travel budget on food-related activities (\$1,271 average trip cost; \$593 or 50% spent on food-related activities).

### **Examples of “Culinary Tourism” include:**

- Behind the Scenes” Farm Tours
- Culinary/Wine Workshop/Classes
- Culinary/Wine Festivals
- Beer Event or Festivals
- Farm Restaurant/Café
- On the Farm Dinners
- Brewery Tours & Sampling
- Ethnic Market Tours & Sampling
- Food Production Tours & Sampling
- Restaurants that feature local products

## *Savor Massachusetts: One Taste at a Time*

In May 2008 the MDAR began to research the concept of culinary tourism in Massachusetts. It was determined that there was a great deal of interest in culinary tourism as well as an impressive collection of existing culinary tourism experiences. *Savor Massachusetts* was developed as a companion piece to the *MassGrown and Fresher* program that seeks to build a strong and profitable agricultural business in Massachusetts. *Savor Massachusetts* was created as a marketing opportunity for growers who want to attract the culinary tourist to their farm. These unique culinary experiences build on the farms current agriculture assets. The *Savor Massachusetts* program is for the agri-tourism farm that already has a culinary tourism opportunity in place, for those farm businesses who may want to expand their offering and for those who are just beginning to develop a culinary tourism idea. The web-based content hopes to bring your farm business a steady flow of locally-enlightened visitors throughout the year!

*Savor Massachusetts* is an on-line resource for the culinary traveler, the specialty crop grower and the locally minded chef. The culinary traveler will find an easy to use, up-to-date guide that includes a variety of one-of-a kind culinary tourism opportunities across the Commonwealth. The grower will find resources including this guide to help them become oriented and involved with the program; a brief survey is all it takes to be included in the program. The chef is offered an opportunity to research the farms that are interested in selling products directly to restaurants, as well as an opportunity to be included on our Restaurants that Buy-Local listing (certain criteria does apply), posting of restaurant events, and submission of a monthly recipe.

## “Farm-to-Table” Culinary Events

An on the farm dinner celebrates local farms, food and community while generating awareness of the importance and vitality of farming in Massachusetts. Special on the farm dinners highlight the abundance of the season, and savor the rich traditions of farming, fishing and local food and wine/beer production. Guests gather to enjoy an evening of eating the freshest food that was just harvested by dedicated food producers they know and trust. Use your farm as a venue for local chefs and caterers who are dedicated to utilizing and serving only the best products grown and raised in Massachusetts.

Like any special event, having a dedicated event planner is likely to result in a successful event. Consider collaborating with local non-profit group to design your event as a fundraiser. Solicit dedicated community volunteers who can manage the flow of responsibilities and details. Event logistics include not only the management of the food production and service, but everything in between including marketing, accounting and cleaning up. On the farm dinner organizers rely on volunteers and donations to keep expenses down so ticket revenue will benefit the non-profit organization. Food producers receive payment for their products.

### Some very important things to consider:

1. How many people can the farm reasonably accommodate?
2. Is there enough parking available?
3. Are there enough restrooms?
4. What types of food service permits are required from the town’s health department, including chef sanitation certifications?
5. Is an alcohol permit required?
6. Is a building permit required in the event an outdoor event is moved inside due to inclement weather?
7. Does the farm’s insurance policy cover public events?
8. Is the ticket price high enough to cover food cost and generate a donation/profit?

## On the farm Food Service

A visit to a family farm is a great experience, but even better is an opportunity to have something to eat on the farm that is “fresh” from the fields. Farms that have a licensed kitchen and the staff in place could consider adding a food service component. Farm stands can sell prepared foods including pre-made sandwiches, soups, salads and a variety of baked goods. Larger farms may offer a sit down service with a more extensive farm menu.

Any food service component (food that is prepared on the premises and then sold) on the farm is regulated by the town’s department of public health. A commercial kitchen will require an inspection and license as well as food safety and sanitation training for staff members who are handling and serving food to the public.

Farms with restaurants/cafes or prepared foods also should consider if they have adequate parking, restrooms, adequate space to accommodate tables, chairs or picnicking as well as a trash/recycling system in place.

Although building a commercial kitchen may be costly and will require inspection, the opportunities to increase your market and expand your farm product to include value added products, like prepared foods are increasingly popular and profitable.

## On the farm Education and Tours

Farming and agriculture create a natural landscape for a solid learning experience. Visitors of all ages are interested in learning about how a farm operates, how products are grown and how animals are raised. Your farm's story is compelling and will attract a variety of visitors to your farm. Whether you offer a self-guided tour, school tour, elder hostel tour, or a class or workshop consider the following "tips" from farms who already offer educational opportunities.

- Your educational opportunity can be big or small. Don't underestimate the everyday work you do on the farm from morning chores and weeding to planting and harvesting, there is an educational opportunity to be shared. For some people visiting a farm is an unknown experience and the smallest amount of exposure is rewarding and interesting.
- Larger groups, like school field trips are a good fit for a farm that may have a staff person who can dedicate their time to the school tour logistics and coordination. Consider utilizing a retired school teacher/educator to conduct your farm tour or educational opportunity.
- Professional group tour operators as well as The Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism are happy to work with you to provide a tour that your farm can accommodate. Both domestic and international travelers are increasingly becoming more interested in farm tours and agriculture.
- Self-guided tours are most successful when signage is clear and frequent. Don't be afraid to state the obvious so visitors do not unknowingly enter areas that are off limits.
- The non-financial rewards outweigh the financial ones. People who visit farms are typically friendly and respectful. They are looking for a place to relax. Tours market themselves. Word of mouth advertising will bring new visitors to your farm and locals will continue to visit each season.

## Selling to Restaurants

Sourcing locally for many chefs has become increasingly popular. It is very common to find menus inspired by local products all year long. Chefs and growers are likely business partners because local products offer a variety of benefits that many chefs desire. Locally grown produce taste better as they are typically purchased and consume within a day or two of being harvested. Many products, like farmstead cheese are produced by hand and in small batches. Pastured fed pork, lamb and beef when available offer a healthful and ecologically sound choice to diners, while sustainable local seafood is typically available all year long.

Chefs will take the time to research growers to learn about their farming practices to identify those that are using sustainable quality farming methods. It is not unlikely that a chef will replace more common products (non-local) purchased through a larger distributor with those from a local grower. Chefs will also look for interesting products that are useful in their kitchens. Massachusetts farms have come a long way and have made great improvements to expand products that are available all year long.

Delivering products to restaurants is very important, however many restaurant chefs shop at their local farmers' market and set up accounts with growers they know. Some use a produce distributors, but often chefs are happy to go directly to the source and pay market price.

Growers who are interested in selling to restaurants can contact restaurants themselves, be included on MDAR resources for chef's guide and/or join their area buy-local for business to business leads.

## Useful Resources

*Culinary Tourism* edited by Lucy M. Long, 2004, the University Press of Kentucky

*Culinary Tourism: The Hidden Harvest* by Erik Wolf, 2006, Kendall Hunt Publishing Company

Explore Ashville: Culinary Adventures - <http://www.exploreasheville.com/where-to-eat/culinary-tourism/index.aspx>

Food Tourism: <http://www.foodtourism.com/>

Ohio Culinary Tourism Toolbox:  
<http://ohiotourism.osu.edu/content/culinary.htm#resources>

Southern Foodways Alliance:  
[http://www.southernfoodways.com/tourism/culinary\\_tourism.html](http://www.southernfoodways.com/tourism/culinary_tourism.html)

The International Culinary Tourism Association: [www.culinarytourism.org](http://www.culinarytourism.org)

The Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism: [www.massvacation.com](http://www.massvacation.com)