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News

Dinners At The Farm: A Celebration Of Connecticut Food

In it's sixth year Dinners at the Farm has an established following.

By Bree Shirvell | [Email the author](#) | July 2, 2012

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In the middle of July on a warm evening 100 people will gather under a white scalloped canopy tent in the middle of nearly 100 acres of open space fields at [White Gate Farm](#) in East Lyme, Conn.

Rows of corn will border one side of the tent, 1970s style flatbed red trucks on the other and a white farmhouse will provide the backdrop to the sixth year of [Dinners at the Farm](#) at White Gate Farm.

Six years ago Dinners at the Farm established the benefit dinners that the organization says seeks to recreate, "a sense of connection to farming, cooking and eating."

Since 2007, Dinners at the Farm has hosted dinners throughout August at various Connecticut farms. Patrons pay a fee for a seven course meal that includes wine and a tour of the farm while a portion of the ticket price is donated to Dinners at the Farm beneficiaries. The beneficiaries are [Connecticut Farmland Trust](#), [Working Lands Alliance](#), [CitySeed Farmers Market](#), [Stanton Davis Homestead](#) and new this year CT Region 4 School Kitchens.

"Our goal is to offer support to farming, land preservation and humanitarian type organizations who promote the local food movement as to date there is a lack of marketing budgets and advertising funds for this," Michelle Paulson, of Dinners at the Farm, said. We act as their marketing arm if you will.

Guests slowly make their way to four long communal wooden tables, finding their seats on rough wooden benches and introducing themselves to the people on either side of them; strangers, who share at least one thing in common, a love and desire to support local food.

As the sun begins to set, grills on the beds of trucks spring to life cooking seven courses the menu created that day from Connecticut farms and Connecticut producers such as [Seawell Seafood](#) Stony Ledge Farm, and White Gate Farm. Chefs are Thomas Petelik, formerly the Yale Culinary Director and Jonathan Rapp, chef at the River Tavern Connecticut, and creator and co-founder of the dinners. While Rapp is traveling to farms across the state sourcing food for the River Tavern he often chooses the farms to hold the dinners. In the past dinners have included a watermelon cantaloupe tomato salad with feta cheese, a Thai vegetable curry with glazed pork belly and peanuts, and a grilled swordfish with tomato corn peach and tarragon salad all made from local ingredients for the seated guests.

If at all evident by the Dinners at the Farm at the environmental food movement is more popular than



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ever. Guests came from all parts of Connecticut, surrounding New England states, even a couple from San Diego, Calif. and London, England.

Anne Penniman, whose Landscape architecture and Site Planning firm donated to Dinners at Farm, said her reasons for supporting at Dinners at the Farm include the preservation of agricultural land, the local food, and artisan dining.

Diane Birdsall of Old Lyme, Conn., has attended because she felt it was a conscientious audience that would be attending; people who were interested in food, possibly art, and in general a better way of living and spending their money.

The dinners don't come cheap, prices range from \$100 to \$150 per person. Still tickets to Dinners at the Farm sell out quickly and the organization expects to donate \$5,000 to each of its beneficiaries this year.

Paulson says the majority of the money collected from the dinners goes to towards operational costs.

"This is not a money-making enterprise, it is designed to generate awareness about where our food comes from and to foster a connection with the land," Paulson said.

More information and tickets to Dinners at the Farm are available on their [website](#).

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