

Farm to Table and Agritourism on a working dairy farm

A long, narrow outdoor dining table is set with white linens and red chairs. The table is covered with a white tablecloth and set with white napkins, silverware, and glassware. A centerpiece of colorful flowers in a blue vase is placed in the middle of the table. In the foreground, a large, lit, woven basket lantern is visible. The table is set on a grassy area with trees in the background. Two wooden posts with lit torches are placed on either side of the table.

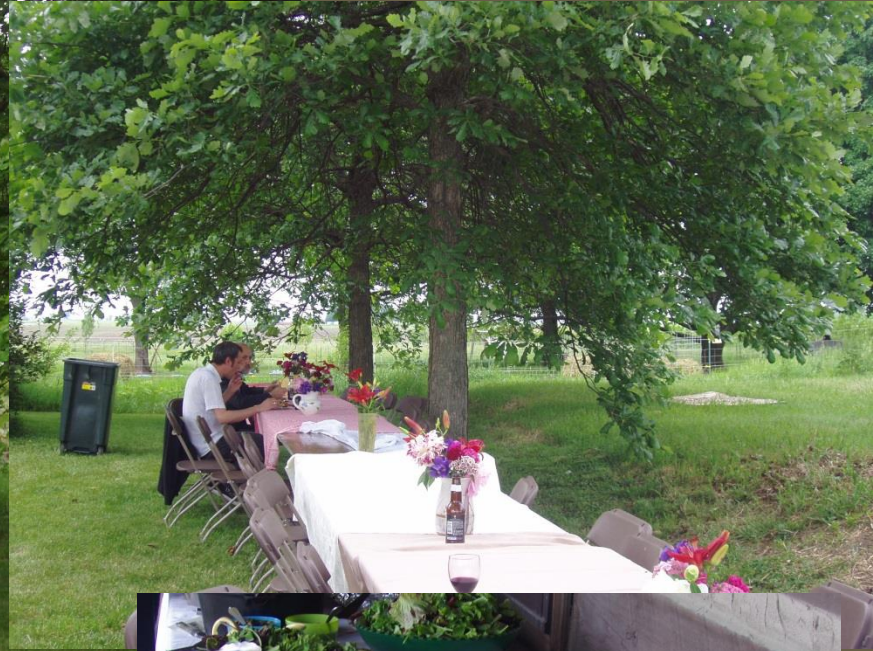
Leslie Cooperband and Wes Jarrell, Co-owners
Prairie Fruits Farm & Creamery, LLC
Champaign, Illinois

What possessed us to consider this?

- Proximity to customers
- Unsolicited visitors
- Very cute baby goats every spring
- Staff with culinary talents



Welcoming the founder of Slow Food to the farm in 2007



“If I believe in reincarnation, I would come back as a goat on Prairie Fruits Farm” (Italian translation from Carlo Petrini)

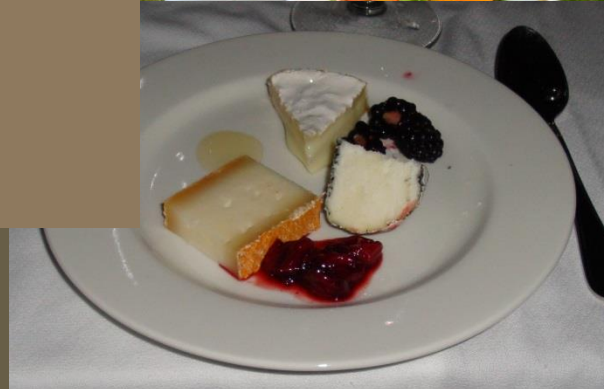
Early days of the farm kitchen

- Collaboration with assistant cheese-maker, CIA trained chef: Alisa DeMarco
- Wrote grant proposal to Frontera Farmer Foundation to fund portion of farm kitchen
- Raised additional funds (loan) to construct kitchen, went to several restaurant auctions to buy used equipment
- Hosted “trial dinner” for family and friends

The trial dinner

Valuable lessons learned:

- Quality and quantity of the food
- The importance of the dining experience
 - weather
 - insects
- The value of trained servers



Evolution of the Dinner Series

- Started with 5 in 2008
- 10 dinners in 2009
- “Slow Food,” five- course, all-local foods, 4 hours
- Each dinner had a theme
- The “100 Yard Dinner”
- Dine outside
- Resident farm chef (part time) and guest chefs from Chicago
- Liquor License-pros & cons
- Guest farmers



2010-2015

- Demand for dinner tickets crazy in early years: tickets sold out in minutes
- Offered 14 dinners (late May to early December) every two weeks
- Hosted private events (no weddings)
- Grew more of own food for the dinners, finished 'dining room' inside barn for inclement weather events
- Raised ticket price from \$85-100 to \$125 per person in 2014; slowed rate of ticket sales
- Chef Alisa's last season was 2015



Kitchen Economics

Capital

Kitchen construction: \$40,000 (30%
Frontera Farmer Foundation)

Equipment: \$20,000 (used, stainless steel)

Revenue breakdown (Variable)

Salary: chefs/cooks, servers, set-up and
take-down: 30-35%

Ingredients: local, 25 - 30%

Debt service: 15%

Overhead: 15%

Profit: 5 – 10%

Kitchen Economics (cont'd)

Dinner charges

\$85 – 125, plus sales tax (and processing fee)

Not including tips (discouraged) or alcohol:
initially BYOB only, now optional on-site purchase

Other events

Focus on education and food-related themes

Depends on staff, ingredients, duration

\$200/day for facilities

\$85 – 125 for high-end dinners, \$40 – 80 for other
dinner events (min. 30)

Breakfasts: \$12; Lunches: \$15 (min. 20)

Farm Food Plans for 2016

- Partnering with guest chefs
- Dinner-Brunch series with chefs from Chicago
- Limited private events
- Price-friendly “happy hour” style events with small plates and wine/beer
- Cheese tastings and pairings events
- Winter “dinner and a movie”

Growth into Agritourism

- Started with unsolicited tours of farm
- Tours during farm dinners
- Farm open houses-spring, summer
- Moved into tours/tastings for school groups, adult education groups - \$5/8 fee
- “Fork in the Road” Tasting Trail
- More food-related events—private meals, “Third Friday” pop-ups, pairings classes

Farm Breakfasts in spring

- Initial rationale: feed people to get them to come out to the farm and buy farm products before farmers' market season
- Baby goats and breakfast: a winning combo
- Short season, short duration: 6 Saturdays in late March-April, 9-12
- Insane turnouts in first few years (2009-2013): >300 people in 3 hours
- Helped sell cheese, other farmers with early season products too



Agritourism: Tours

- Adult tour groups
- School groups
- College classes



Tasting Trail

A Fork in the Road Tasting Trail

Sunday, July 21st

"When you come to a fork in the road - take it." -- Yogi Berra

Take the Fork in the Road Tasting Trail and taste and tour your way through Prairie Fruits Farm, K&D Ranch/Sugar Shack Antiques, and Sleepy Creek Vineyard.

For more information go to: www.prairiefruits.com or sleepycreekvineyards.com --- Tickets are \$35 each --- The tour begins at noon at Prairie Fruits Farm in Champaign, then continues to Sugar Shack, and the trail ends at Sleepy Creek Vineyard.



Third Friday Pop-Ups



- May-September, Third Friday of each month
- No reservations
- A la carte menu (\$3-12/item—sides & entrée)
- 5:30-7:30 pm
- Live, local music
- Family friendly
- Sell other farm products too



U-pick Fruits: Summer Open House



Issues for Consideration

- Lots of people on our farm, how to control traffic flow, parking
- Liability—proper insurance coverage
- How best to get the word out? –social media, paid advertising
- What happens when novelty wears off?
- How to set pricing since folks think food shouldn't be expensive?
- Biosecurity (keeping our animals safe)
- Managing the day to day operations of a working farm while guests are here.
- What are we? A restaurant on a farm? A farm with food events?
- Looking critically at revenue stream (how much are we really making?)
 - Full time kitchen staff versus guest chefs
 - No reservations versus reservation based events

Current and Future Trends

- Farmer Training
 - Partnering with The Land Connection, University of IL
- Farm Experiences
 - Farm to table dining, volunteer opportunities on the farm (e.g. community volunteers during kidding season)
- Integrate more directed education into school group tours
- Culinary Classes
 - Harvesting and cooking with farm products
- Cheese Classes
 - Cheese pairing classes
 - Cheese making classes