

Chef Wade Sirois of Calgary gave the keynote address at Local Bounty 2009.

At his catering business, Forage – Farm to Fork Foods to Go, 70% of the food on the menu is sourced directly from farmers, but not all of it is necessarily Albertan. Wade's motto is "Food you know, from people you know." In other words, good, naturally and sustainably produced food from artisanal and small farmers across the prairies.

(Word has it, he was quite enamoured with our Saskatchewan cherry. Watch for that on his menus.)

Wade had advice for both farmers and chefs who want to tap into each other's markets.

For the Farmers:

- Start by building a relationship with one chef.
- Drop off some samples of your product to pique interest.
- You can't compete with the industry suppliers on price, but you can compete on service. Superior service includes timely delivery, superior product, attention to detail and working with the chef at a personal level.
- Build customer interest in your product (such as at farmers' markets, food festivals, etc.). If consumers are talking about your product, chefs will want to serve it.
- Some chefs don't make the buying decisions for their establishments. Make sure you're talking to the person who decides what goes on the menu.
- Try producing unusual and unique products. Chefs want their menus to stand out.
- Be clear on your price upfront and ask to be paid when the bill is due.
- Spend some time in the chef's kitchen observing what happens to your product after it's been delivered.
- Set up a useful website or blog.

For the Chefs:

- Expect to spend 7-8 hours a week sourcing and purchasing directly from producers.
- Visit the farms and gardens who supply your kitchen.
- Be clear upfront about what you want to buy. Purchase what you've ordered (in other words, don't change the menu and leave the farmer holding the bag).
- Design your kitchens to handle local food. For instance, more freezer space in order to buy in season.
- Pay your small suppliers on time.

Here's a parting thought from Wade: "Agriculture doesn't end until someone puts that food in their mouth... What we do (as chefs) can actually save the world."