

Fresh Food Brings More Funds to the Table

Please welcome guest blogger Sherry Truhlar of Red Apple Auctions LLC. Today, Sherry is sharing a strategy to help auction committees incorporate a trend in the dining experience – always a good seller at a fundraising auction! Sherry works with volunteer auction chairs who want to plan their most successful charity auction yet. In addition to offering the auctioneer “fast talk,” she works with clients nationally to teach them the tricks of auction procurement, audience development and marketing. She regularly provides advice and tips for charity auctions on her [blog](#). Thanks Sherry!

Fresh Food Brings More Funds to the Table

By Sherry Truhlar

Have you plugged into the latest trend in auction ideas related to procurement?

-Locally inspired food is hot and your school auction can benefit from the donation

To be most effective with your auction fundraiser's procurement strategy, you should target your donation requests to items sought by your audience. And for even higher auction returns this year, make sure you're tapping into the **farm-to-table** trend!



Dining experiences have always been a tried and true money maker at charity auctions, but recently bidders have been seeking chefs, meals, baskets, and other items that fall into the niche of “locally produced.”

Let's define some terms.

Farm-to-table is the concept of eating locally grown or raised animals, vegetables, herbs and fruit. Instead of importing food from all over the world – beef from Australia ... spinach from Mexico ... plums from Chile – the *farm-to-table* movement encourages us to leave a smaller “eco footprint” by eating food produced locally, usually within 100 miles. Because the food isn't shipped over great distances, it doesn't need to be sprayed with chemicals to protect it in transit. So not only does the food taste better, but it's better for you.

The movement is so popular that the New Oxford Dictionary bestowed the 2007 “word of the year” to the term locavore. A locavore – clearly a play on the words carnivore, herbivore, and omnivore – is a person who actively seeks locally grown ingredients and seasonally available food.

Hey, if locavore is popular enough to be a word of the year, you should probably be looking at this category for your auction! Your auction bidders will be excited to try food and drink that appeals to their taste buds and gives them a chance to experience locally sourced food.

When you start soliciting donations, you'll want to look for key words and phrases associated with *farm-to-table* dining. Here are a few I've seen:

- Fresh local food
- Pesticide free food
- Farm fresh flavor
- Organic
- Sustainability
- Seasonal food
- Hormone free
- Free range chickens
- Pasture raised humanely treated pigs living in stress free conditions
- The season's bounty

Now let's talk about how to incorporate the trend into your auction fundraiser.

1. Some restaurants specialize in this trend. When you are soliciting, target one or two of them in your locale. In the Washington, DC area, Equinox is one such establishment. Even its name implies the restaurant is working within the trend. Its website explains that “the chef scours the region for seasonal ingredients which he cooks in new American style”. A second example is Restaurant Eve where chefs buy “seasonally fresh” and are “mindful of what is used in the production and growth process of these ingredients so as to not add anything harmful to the body.” Similar restaurants may be in cities near you.

2. See if the CSA (community supported agriculture) in your area would donate a membership. CSAs allow consumers to buy local, seasonal food directly from a farmer or group of local farmers. Usually you can learn more about them at your local farmers markets, but you can also visit <http://www.localharvest.org/csa/> to search CSAs in your area.

3. Investigate companies like Outstanding in the Field, Dinners at the Farm, and Plate and Pitchfork which travel the country offering locavores dinners on farms. *Literally* on farms. Diners eat their dinner *in the field* on outdoor tables.

Here is an example of a pricier item I've sold at two charity auctions – once in the silent auction and another time in the live. It was popular at both!:

“Enjoy all natural, elite organic beef for up to one year from XYZ Farms. Black Angus verifiable pedigree cattle are naturally and organically raised on this 3500 acre farm located near Charlottesville, VA. Which do you prefer...a freezer stocked with your beef delivered to your home or order as you need it? Either way, butchers will cut the beef to your specifications and either wrap it in paper wrap or vacuum seal it.”

At another auction, I sold an apple pie made by the auction chair. The pie was baked from *“wholesome crisp apples picked at their peak from a backyard tree tended to with love, water, and natural compost.”*

Get the idea?

With just a little bit of research, your auction will be able to tap into new donors this season and offer your supporters an updated twist on the ever-popular dining experience. I encourage you to use the *farm-to-table* trend in a way that makes sense for your market and your guests.

After working for more than a decade in sales, events, and marketing for top 10 companies, Sherry Truhlar founded Red Apple Auctions. The boutique auction firm specializes in benefit auctions and teaches volunteer auction chairs how to raise more money selling their donated items. To learn about other terrific auction ideas, download the company's FREE Auction Item Guide. The Guide lists the top 100 best-selling auction items to offer at your event. Get your Guide at www.RedAppleAuctions.com.

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What a unique and fun idea for an auction! Farm-to-Table is really a growing trend and your ideas are spot-on.

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Great idea Sherry! I love how this connects a nonprofit fundraising event with locally-grown food. What a great way to raise more money and possibly attract new donors.

Sandy Rees

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