



## Foodways Demonstrations for Farmers' Markets and Cultural Events

Rachelle H. Saltzman, Ph.D.

Folklife Coordinator, Iowa Arts Council

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Foodways demonstrations can be a wonderful way to enrich your farmers' market or cultural event. They can promote local and traditional foods, feature specific chefs and/or traditions, and serve as a great new/old audience draw. Showing attendees how to prepare a dish highlights the unique foods and cultures your market offers and provides a window into a chef's heritage.

Creating a series of food demonstrations can be as simple or elaborate as you'd like. Here are some key points to consider, and make sure to give yourself, your vendors, demonstrators, and other staff the planning, promotion, and set-up time and resources necessary to make this a worthwhile, replicable activity!



1. Decide how many weeks you want to feature chefs or vendors with specialty foods for sale—maybe just once a month to start? Doing one each week could get to be a lot of work, but it depends on your time.
2. Contact a list of restaurants/chefs, cooks, or vendors, and find out if they'd be interested.
3. Plan on a 45-minute demonstration but have an hour on either side for set up, clean up, tear down.
4. Traditional cooks can use food as an introduction to their culture as long as they talk about their heritage as well as how to prepare the dish.
  - a. Consider having a [folklorist](#) or someone knowledgeable about the culture and foodways. This person can help the cook to talk by asking questions during the demonstration and encouraging attendees to ask the cook questions. It's a good idea to have a meeting beforehand to go over appropriate questions and topics and so reduce any nervousness on the part of the cook (most people do not cook for an audience!).
  - b. For example, if you have a Mexican cook, pick an item that is not a stereotypical one and that has significance for a little-known (to the general public) custom, e.g. three milks cake (*pastele de tres leches*), used for birthdays and other celebratory occasions. Clearly, the cook will not have time to bake the cake and decorate it, but s/he can talk about the tradition, the recipe, and then in between the talking/question asking, go through the ingredients, mix the cake batter, show what the finished cake looks like, and then how to soak it in milk, and decorate it. The idea is to show the stages of the process (think television cooking shows), since the full process can't be done in real time (not in 45 minutes, anyway!).

- c. You could also choose to feature foods that can be made more quickly; for these, hot plates can be very useful, e.g. for tortillas, chapatis, and other flat breads; anything w/eggs; etc.
- d. You can also reasonably ask the chef to talk about a variety of recipes w/in a category (sticking with our Mexican theme, a variety of salsas, which can be relatively easily made on the spot and with those great, fresh local ingredients).

## 5. Supplies

- a. Food for demonstration and other disposal items--depending on the chef/restaurant (and it's free advertising to them, so you probably won't need to pay them a fee, but you should consider offering to defray the cost of their supplies--another reason not to feed the masses unless the chef wants to supply the food!)
- b. If you are serving food samples, you'll need appropriate cups, plates, utensils, napkins, whatever. You can make up a checklist for each chef to fill out.

## 6. Set up at market. You can do this in a few ways.

- a. Very low tech with just two tables (one for demonstrating, one for preparation), hot plate (which means electrical hook-up, generator, or battery power), cooler, fresh water supply, headset microphone and portable battery-powered amp/speaker, sponges, etc. , two-poles with mirror set up (so folks in back can see) attached to the table (6-8' long table), trash can.
- b. It may be worth the investment, if you plan on continuing this, to get a stove, refrigerator, access to city electric power for both, and a covered booth w/tables, etc. consider asking Maytag for a donated stove and fridge (or ask some local appliance dealer and put their name in a prominent location!). You'll still need access to running water.
- c. A third and the easiest option is to find an inside venue VERY close to and accessible to the market and do one of the above there.



## 7. Food samples—why not to have them.

- a. You do not have an inspected kitchen setup, so you're just asking for trouble—not worth the liability, even if your county health department allows it.
- b. You'll end up w/folks swarming for the free food—not nice, not pretty, and not what this should be about.
- c. If folks want to taste, they can go to the restaurant where the chef works or to the vendor booth where the food is for sale! Make sure chef comes supplied w/sample menus, cards, contact info!
- d. Finally, let the folks who've worked hard behind the scenes (you will need clean-up and set-up folks on site) eat the results! Best to use your employees and/or volunteers for this purpose (refer to liability issue above)—it's a nice way to give them a special treat.

## 8. Documentation and Publicity. Let the media to know about this, use food demos as part of your marketing, and to get the demonstrations on the television news. You may want to video for some unknown future use (series, whatever).

- a. Make sure to get the chefs to sign a release form if you do this.
- b. Make sure to hire good photographers/videographers, or make a deal w/your local public television station.

- c. It's best to have your whole series figured out BEFORE you send out publicity—the media, particularly the newspapers really prefer this. They will not give you publicity each time, so you might as well get the word out about the whole series all at once.
  - d. Consider a website listing w/featured recipes, listing of restaurants associated with chefs, featured cultures, etc.
  - e. You could certainly consider a “year-round” farmers’ market publicity campaign by featuring food demonstrations using local products at a variety of locations (various restaurants?) around your town when the market is not open. This way you keep the momentum going, and the marketing impact is ongoing and not just seasonal.
9. Send a thank you note to the chef who’s done the demonstration.
10. Pat yourselves on the back for a successful event! And consider having an end of season “food festival” and featuring a full day with all of your demonstration chefs (you can’t do more than six or so in a day, so don’t stress over more than that).



For further resources, consult:

[The 1998 Smithsonian Folklife Festival Photo Gallery and Recipes](#)

[Foodways as Family Heritage, Iowa Folklife: Our People, Communities, and Traditions](#)

[Northwest Ohio Foodways Traditions](#)

[Iowa Place-Based Foods](#)

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