

## HOW TO HOST A SUSTAINABILITY FESTIVAL IN TEN EASY STEPS

Learning about industrial food production is an eye-opening experience, and so is learning about the alternative – sustainable food. Tackling the problems with our current food system can seem overwhelming, but those who've starting eating sustainably know how much there is to celebrate.

You may find you want to share your new-found knowledge and experiences with friends and others in your community. If you're looking for a way to build community on a larger scale, think about getting together with friends to host a sustainable festival.

To help you begin to organize a community sustainability festival, we've put together some step-by-step, hands-on advice for getting started. Share these ideas with friends at a sustainable dinner, and see if you can adapt them to fit your community. Start a tradition your community can celebrate year after year!

### **Step 1. Think Positive**

Above all, always keep in mind that festivals are fun. While you may want to offer attendees an opportunity to learn about the harm done by factory farms, it's far more important to celebrate the alternative. Let people know there are easy, fun, and healthy ways to be part of the solution by connecting people with area farmers, local community supported agriculture groups, farmer's markets, and food co-ops.. If you are charging people an admission to attend, you might consider making your event a fundraiser for a worthy, sustainable cause.

### **Step 2. Think Teamwork**

Even for a small event, you will need help to make things go smoothly. As soon as you can, start gathering friends and community members who can take on some of the planning and responsibilities. Once you have a plan, divide the work into manageable pieces. Have one person or group of people be responsible for each of the following:

- a. Location
- b. Speakers and musicians
- c. Food and vendors
- d. Publicity

By getting yourselves organized this way from the outset you'll minimize the risk of important things falling through the cracks as the event approaches.

### **Step 3. Think Seasonal**

In order to attract a crowd, think about the best time to hold your event. Summer can be a great time for festivals, but if you live in a place where people go away for long periods during the summer, you may draw a bigger crowd in the Spring or Fall. Pick a theme – spring planting, fall harvest, tomato-fest, or any kind of fruit- or vegetable-fest!

### **Step 4. Think Local**

The right location is just as important as the right date. A small event could be held in a home or backyard. But for a larger event, you'll want to find a space that can accommodate a crowd. While holding activities outside is preferable, you will also want to plan for rain, and have a big indoor space ready just in case. Think about what local organizations in your community might be willing to donate or rent out the space. Community centers, schools, or churches, or synagogues are good places to start.

### **Step 5. Think Entertainment**

Nothing is more festive than live music. Consider what kind of music will appeal to the largest number of people. Acoustic music requires less equipment, and is easier to set up. But if you plan to have guest speakers, you'll most likely need a PA system anyway, so make sure at least one person on your music committee knows the basics.

For a well-rounded community event, make it family-friendly with children's activities. Face-painting, pumpkins carving, relay-races, and treasure hunts are always popular. Ample adult supervision can prevent a simple arts and crafts project from becoming a disaster, especially with small children nearby. You may also want to consider activities that are relatively easy to clean up!

### **Step 6. Think Money**

No matter the size of your event, time and commitment will only be part of the equation. Organizing a festival also costs money. With food, speakers, musicians, and kids' activities, the costs begin to add up. But don't despair! Share your vision with those in the community who may have goods or services to donate, or at least offer at a discount. If your festival benefits a worthy cause, you'll be amazed at the community support. Ask local businesses to sponsor your event in exchange for a mention or featured advertisement in the event program. It's great publicity for them, and a nice way to support the community. Also consider setting up tables to sell baked goods, or fair trade coffee, tea, and chocolate. You might consider selling local produce from a nearby sustainable farm, or having vendors sell sustainable goods to help offset costs.

### **Step 7. Spread the Word**

Engaging local musicians and businesses to participate can go a long way toward publicizing your event. Supportive store owners will often allow you to hang posters in their shop windows, while musicians may send out notice to their email lists. Other ways to get publicity for your festival are:

- a. Send out advance notice a few months, a few weeks and then a few days before the actual day of the event. Email is one of the best ways of getting the word out fast, but creating a flyer that you can attach to the email (pdf format works best) is easiest for people to print out and hang up as a reminder.
- b. Contact all the people in your community working on sustainable food issues. Get your nearby farmer's market to distribute leaflets. Local college and high school environmental science teachers may be willing to help you generate a buzz among students. Get your local newspaper to run a feature story on the event, or at least list your event in their weekly calendar.

### **Step 8. Educate**

Petitions and hand-outs are quick ways of educating and informing people about sustainability while they enjoy the festivities. **Sustainable Table** ([www.sustainabletable.org](http://www.sustainabletable.org)) offers handouts that you can easily download and print for your literature table. Set aside one room of your facility to screen short movies about food production, starting, of course, with **The Meatrix** ([www.themeatrix.com](http://www.themeatrix.com)) and **The Meatrix II: Revolting** ([www.themeatrix2.com](http://www.themeatrix2.com)). Invite a farmer, an educator, or someone from an environmental organization to speak at the festival and share their experience.

### **Step 9. Eat!**

As effective as speakers, films, or literature tables can be in spreading the word about sustainable agriculture, nothing promotes the movement better than a plate of sustainable food. In addition to offering a snack table throughout the day, set aside an hour or two for a community dinner at the end of the day. Organizing a potluck where volunteers donate dishes made from locally-grown, sustainable ingredients is a great way to build community. Don't forget to use biodegradable plates and utensils made from wheat or corn instead of plastic and paper.

Make sure to leave the schedule of events open during dinner, and emphasize this time with friends, family, and food as the main event.

### **Step 10. Rest, Reflect, and Renew**

After the crowd has left and you've rested, get back together with your volunteers to reflect on your accomplishment. Hosting a festival is no simple task, but by celebrating sustainability with your community, you've proven that you're not just passive consumers, but active participants in your local food system. That's a lot to be proud of!