

photos by John D. Ivanko



FEAST IN THE FIELDS

The Rise of Pop-Up Organic Dining

by John D. Ivanko and Lisa Kivirist

The flip side of enjoying farm to table is taking the table to the farm. So-called “pop-up feasts” are booming at farms throughout the country during growing and harvest seasons. While the format varies, dinners are typically hosted on working rural or urban farms, last about three hours and include aperitifs and a tour before the meal. Wine pairings or beer tastings and live music may be among the enticing activities offered.

Gabriele Marewski, owner of Paradise Farms, near Miami, Florida, was a pioneering forerunner of the trend. For 10 years prior to retirement, she hosted more than 50 chefs, served thousands of guests an organic Dinner in Paradise and raised more than \$50,000 for area charities. Periodic onsite dinners continue (*ParadiseFarms.net*).

“Many chefs are active in farm-to-table dinners on the West Coast. We also see participation among wineries, orchards, cheese makers and breweries,” says A.K. Crump, CEO of TasteTV, in San Francisco, which also supervises *PopUpRestaurants.com*. “People like to meet the meal maker and know more about the origin of what they eat.”

“I started Dinner on the Farm nine years ago to create unique experiences that connect people to the places their food is grown and the people that grow them,” says Monica Walch, whose pop-up dinners are served picnic-style for friends and families that bring their own tableware. Her company’s Midwest events, usually offered on Minnesota and Wisconsin farms, always feature local chefs, food ingredients and breweries (*DinnerOnTheFarm.com*).

“There’s nothing like being comfortably seated in the field where your food is growing and having the opportunity to enjoy it just hours after it’s been picked. Then, add in one-on-one conversations with your chef, brewer and farmer, as well as like-minded community members,” observes Walch, who grew up on an organic dairy farm in Minnesota.

Setting the bar for high-end, white tablecloth, adults-only communal events, Outstanding in the Field tours

the country to offer a taste of fresh, local cuisine prepared by top regional chefs. They're known for serving meals on long tables set up in fields on prairie ranches, in olive groves or fruit orchards, as well as at urban rooftop farms or near vegetable row crops.

"Our mission is to get folks out to the farm and honor the people whose good work brings nourishment to the table," says organization founder and chef/artist Jim Denevan. More than 90, five-hour events that include appetizers and a guided farm tour are being held all the way through November in more than a dozen states (see *OutstandingIn-TheField.com*).

"Some of our most popular events feature farmers of the sea, and are set alongside the ocean or other bodies of water," adds Lisa Supple, publicist for the company. "They feature local fisher people and oyster and abalone farmers."

"Epicurean San Diego offers pop-up farm dinner events at Dickinson Farm, in National City, California," explains owner Stephanie Parker (*EpicureanSanDiego.com*). "We strive to completely source our produce from the farm." The veteran-owned, certified organic Dickinson Farm features heirloom fruits, vegetables and herbs grown on a large city lot. "We have focused on urban farms to inspire



Pizza on the Farm event at Dream Acres, served by a waiter on stilts, in Rogers, Minnesota.

more people to grow their own food and to show that you don't have to live on a huge piece of property in the countryside," Parker notes.

Some pop-up feasts are managed directly by local farmers in partnership with lead chefs. Others serve as annual fundraising events, like The Foodshed Alliance's Farm to Fork Dinner and Wine Tasting, now in its seventh year (Tinyurl.com/Foodshed-AllianceFarm2Fork). It's held at the Alba Vineyard, in

Milford, New Jersey, which practices renewable viticulture.

"We already have eight chefs lined up to prepare an eight-course, locally sourced, wine-pairing dinner served among the vines," explains Kendrya Close, executive director of the alliance. Expert winemakers select each course's pairing.

"We're proud to be the hardworking roadies that set the stage for America's rock star farmers," says Denevan.

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MooGrass Band performance at Dinner on the Farm event at Sandhill Family Farms, in Brodhead, Wisconsin.