

# FARM TO PLATE DINING EXPERIENCE

Conference promotes profitable farms and healthy food on campus

By Grace Zarnas-Hoyer

**P**arkhurst Dining Services chefs recently participated in the Sustainability in the FoodService Industry two-day learning session during the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture's (PASA) 20th annual Farming for the Future Conference in State College, Pa. This widely regarded event brings together an audience of more than 2,000 farmers, processors, consumers, students, environmentalists, business, community leaders—and now chefs—who learned about practical training for farmers, environmental issues and sustainability. According to Brian Snyder, PASA Executive Director, this is the first time PASA has focused on chefs and supported a food service curriculum. “The Sustainability in the Foodservice Industry session is an important effort to bridge the gap between chefs and farmers. Putting farmers and chefs in the same room where they can gather new ideas and network not only improves their businesses, it also helps our members promote profitable farms that produce healthy food for all,” says Snyder.

Jamie Moore, Director of Sourcing and Sustainability for Eat'n Park Hospitality Group headquartered in Homestead, Pa., helped to organize this pre-conference session that 40 Parkhurst food service professionals attended. No stranger to PASA, Moore is a board member who serves as a resource to college and university administrators and their agricultural teams interested in growing their own—a trend where schools are making substantial strides to be more sustainable, while delivering a farm to plate dining experience.

## SEASONAL AND INTERNATIONAL FLAVOR

According to past PASA conference attendee Marcy Fickes, Parkhurst Executive Chef at Mercyhurst College in Erie, Pa., she learned about seasonal menuing at the workshop. “From the time we started dining services at Mercyhurst, the school contacted me and said, ‘We have started a garden and would like to partner with Parkhurst to supply fresh produce to the students,’” says Fickes. The produce is grown on a large parcel of land owned and farmed by the school. Although only four acres at present is farmed, this small parcel produces 60 percent of the dining services vegetable produce during the summer and fall months. Students enjoy fresh broccoli, heirloom tomatoes, yellow onions, squash, zucchini, green beans, eggplant, yellow peppers, red potatoes and all kinds of herbs. Fresh corn on the cob and pumpkins are harvested for fall dining, and sunflowers are grown and picked to help decorate catered events and dining hall tables.

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Chef Fickes and Farm Manager Tim Boucher also plan to start gardens where a variety of vegetables and herbs not normally grown in the United States will be planted. “We know our international students and those who travel abroad for jobs and research will appreciate the unique and fresh garden vegetables prepared for our Hemisflavors dishes. Most of our fall produce is picked from the farm and to the table in less than 12 hours! It doesn't get any better than this for all the students at Mercyhurst College,” says Fickes.

## NEW TECHNIQUES FOR A UNIQUE TWIST

Delaware Valley College (DelVal) in Doylestown, Pa., is a 550-acre campus, which includes 225 acres dedicated to field crops for dairy and livestock operations. The operations include beef and dairy cattle, sheep, swine and standard bred horses. Approximately 60 acres are used by horticulture plantings of apples, peaches and various fruits, vegetables and nuts. DelVal Executive Chef Frank Hummel attended this year's conference where he learned how



◀ Frank Hummel, Parkhurst Dining Executive Chef at Delaware Valley College (right), with grower Whitney Scott (left).



▶ Executive Chef Scott Rattan from Capital University (center) and students plant container gardens.

to menu meat from nose to tail. During the class, Hummel learned how to break down a lamb and half a hog. The instructor of the class also presented the different cuts and discussed suitable cooking and presentation techniques, from charcuterie to center of the plate. “We are now utilizing hamburger from dairy cattle raised at DelVal,” says Hummel. “In addition to hamburger patties, we use the ground beef for lasagna, shepherd’s pie, barbecue and other recipes that call for ground beef.”

Since partnering with DelVal in 2010, Parkhurst is also utilizing as much of the produce that’s grown on the farm as possible. “What’s beneficial is that Parkhurst can purchase produce that the students grow, including tomatoes, beans, cabbage and sweet corn from the farm, while they enjoy a farm to table experience,” says Hummel.

Scott Rattan, Executive Chef at Capital University in Columbus, Ohio, says that attending a past PASA cheese making 101 session for busy chefs gave him inspiration to create things in the kitchen that he would not have made, such as fresco cheeses, yogurts and smoked sausages. “When you see somebody do it and make the cheese in one hour, you realize that you can do this too,” says Rattan, who also posts signage to inform students about the freshly prepared cheese.

Rattan also partnered with students to plant container gardens in earth boxes made from recycled materials. Students planted cabbage, brussels sprouts, lima beans and squash. The boxes are on wheels and can be brought inside to continue the growing process over the winter. With the help of Parkhurst chefs, students prepared their harvest in front of their peers—a risotto and herb chicken with vegetables was a menu favorite.

### ADDING A LOCAL TOUCH

While Parkhurst partners with several local and community supported agricultural (CSA) farmers, purchasing from a CSA on-campus is a unique venture for conference attendee Dan Dooley, the Executive Chef at Chatham University in Pittsburgh, Pa. “What I learned at this year’s conference was to find more creative ways to incorporate local foods into the menu,” says

Dooley. Kerri LaCharite, a Chatham professor who teaches organic gardening and growing sustainably, will be harvesting honey made possible by pre-selling shares of honey to students, faculty and now Dooley, who has purchased 20 pounds. The honey will be harvested from apiaries installed at Chatham’s new, sustainable 388-acre Eden Hall Campus in Richland Township, about 18 miles north of the University’s 39-acre Shadyside Campus. When he collects his CSA shares, Dooley will use the honey to prepare baked goods like baklava, use as a marinade for grilling chicken, and even incorporate the fresh variety of herbs like basil, chives and oregano grown in the campus greenhouse to make a honey dijon vinaigrette.

Dooley has also expressed an interest in purchasing bushels of apples and other fruits from the campus orchards to bake pies. According to Leslie Ekstrand, General Manager of Dining Services at Chatham, who also attended the conference, “It’s all about learning how to support local agriculture, helping the campus to become more sustainable, all while giving the students the opportunity to enjoy the fresh ‘fruits’ of our labor.”

Parkhurst dining teams will continue to attend PASA conferences and learn new trends in farming and food preparation to bring a more sustainable and farm-fresh dining experience to its guests. “Knowing your source, where your food comes from, and making good use of fresh and wholesome campus-grown food on our menus every day creates a win/win for both Parkhurst and the schools we serve,” says Moore. 



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A member of Eat’n Park Hospitality Group, Parkhurst Dining Services provides exceptional culinary experiences and dining services to guests at the finest educational institutions, corporations and cultural destinations in its marketing region. [www.parkhurstdining.com](http://www.parkhurstdining.com).