

How to Get Started with On-Farm Events

On-farm events, such as weddings or farm dinners, can be a great way to host guests on the farm, introduce them to your products, and diversify your business without adding more farm work.

Ask yourself

- Are you zoned to host events? Be sure to check in with your local officials before hosting an event.
- How will events impact your existing business?



Photo courtesy of Pennings Farm, NY

Events are a team effort.

Your client may be your best (or worst) teammate

Good communication with clients is the most important (and time-consuming) part of hosting events. In addition to asking questions over email and by phone, clients will need to see the venue at least once before making the decision to rent it. You'll need to allocate time for these site visits and be clear with them about the length of the visit. If you only plan to host private events yourself, who else might be on your team?

You want your neighbors on your side, too.

Hosting events may also have impacts beyond your property lines. Communicating adequately with neighbors could make or break your success as a venue. Spend the time to help neighbors set appropriate expectations. Clarify with them about when music will be shut off, where guests will park, and how many events you plan to host each year.

Do you have support from family members or employees?

If yes, identify skills and how each can contribute to making a successful event. Consider how much time you have to put into organizing and planning events as well. If you don't have the time or expertise, consider hiring someone who does.

What do clients look for in a venue?

No venue will have all of these attributes, but having as many as possible will increase your desirability as a venue. As your business grows, you can add more of these features.

- A clean and safe space. Limited mud, dust, or manure where people will walk, sit, or rest. Limited animal smells or flies.
- Fresh, local, and amazing food.
- A farm experience: the opportunity to milk a cow, move the sheep (even if they don't take you up on the offer).



- Good customer service and clear communication (which might be where a hired planner comes into service).
- Parking that doesn't become muddy.
- Well-maintained fields, lawns. Flowers, fruit trees, arbors, pathways, attractive fencing are always enjoyable.

- Floors that are level, finished, and good for dancing.
- Little road noise or road exposure.
- On-site help available for set up.
- Nice barn/tent lighting. Bistro lights — a step up from Christmas lights — are very popular.



What else do clients look for in a venue?

Photo courtesy of ABC Acres, MT

- Event-friendly ordinances and curfews so music can be enjoyed until 12:30am.
- Commercial kitchen space to avoid renting equipment for a field kitchen.
- Comfortable, clean bathrooms or luxury portable toilets.



- Rentals included: consider tables, chairs, tents, vases, candles, tiki torches, directional signs.
- Avoid dishes, glasses, and cutlery (it's hard to get it as clean as the rental companies).

What about weddings?

For many farms, the land, vistas, and outbuildings make weddings a natural fit. Incorporating local farm products makes the day much more special.

To host weddings, your property needs a few attributes that make it attractive to prospective clients.

- An outdoor ceremony site within a 5- to 10-minute walk to parking, and with a car drop-off spot for elderly and/or disabled individuals
- A viable rain plan for the ceremony (e.g. indoor space or a nearby venue)
- An attractive on-site prep space for the wedding party with good lighting.
- Comfortable accommodations for guests within 30 minutes.
- Close proximity to an airport.