



 **Local Line**

CHAPTER 9

# Farm to Restaurant

# Selling farm to restaurant

Selling to restaurants and chefs is a to-go for anyone new to wholesale. Many independent restaurants often look for specialty products and want to source from producers close to them. Restaurants also have ever-changing menus that correspond to the seasonality of farming – making them an ideal wholesale partner.

In this chapter, we go over the ins and outs of selling to restaurants. We discuss the pros and cons, what to bring to your pitch, and get advice on how to sell to chefs from a chef!

## Pros and cons of grocery

Whether you are to selling to cafes, food trucks, pubs, or hotels – selling to restaurants is a significant first step to selling wholesale. Often restaurants, depending on their size and ownership, have smaller order sizes, are more flexible and open to trying new products, and have an existing local program.

But deciding on whether selling to restaurants is right for you depends on many factors. Here is a list of pros and cons.

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Easy first sale, but it can be hard to get on the main menu.</li><li>• Often small businesses where the owner plays a large role in buying. Can be more approachable.</li><li>• Does not require a standard pack.</li><li>• For smaller, local restaurants, warehousing/distribution centers are not required.</li><li>• Offer more unique products that don't succeed in retail, but have higher margins (i.e., smaller vegetables, blossoms, cuts of meat).</li><li>• Co-marketing. Sometimes chefs will highlight farmers on the menu.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have a small order size but require frequent delivery.</li><li>• Can be picky. Higher-end restaurants require the highest quality and most aesthetic products.</li><li>• Often can be slow to pay.</li><li>• Requires relationship development and personal attention.</li><li>• High turnover of chefs. Volatile business. Restaurants frequently close or change management.</li><li>• For produce, must provide harvest schedule ahead of time.</li><li>• Requires a specific time window for delivery i.e. early morning.</li></ul>

# Types of restaurants

Depending on the scale of your business, your products, and whether or not you currently work with a distributor, you may choose different types of restaurants to work with.

## Single location or independent restaurants

This type of restaurant is pretty self-explanatory. These are your local restaurants in your community – owned and operated by a single owner. The owner or head chef has the majority of purchasing power. These restaurants can range from high-end to casual dining or even a cafe.

## Multi-location restaurants

A multi-location restaurant is a restaurant that is owned and operated by a restaurant group and has multiple locations in one area. Depending on the organization's size and type of restaurant, purchasing power is led by a procurement team or buying manager or on a per-restaurant basis by the chef.

An example is the [Charcoal Group](#) which runs nine restaurants in the Kitchener-Waterloo region in Southern Ontario.

## National or regional chain restaurants

A chain restaurant is a food establishment or brand with multiple restaurants or franchises. Depending on the size of the chain, large chains often have procurement teams and distribution centers responsible for sourcing the locations with ingredients. Working with a large chain usually involves high food safety standards, must have existing distribution processes, and high-volume orders.

An example of a regional/national chain is [Chipotle Mexican Grill](#). Chipotle has 15+ distribution centers throughout North America and has dedicated teams for sourcing each category (i.e., produce, dairy, proteins). Local Line recently partnered with Chipotle to source their 3200+ restaurants across the US with local produce. [Learn more about the partnership here.](#)

# How to prepare

## What to bring

### Sell sheet

This type of restaurant is pretty self-explanatory. These are your local restaurants in your community – owned and operated by a single owner. The owner or head chef has the majority of purchasing power. These restaurants can range from high-end to casual dining or even a cafe.

Additionally, it holds important information such as pricing, distribution, and pack options.

To learn more about what to put in your sell sheet, check out **Chapter 2**.

### Samples

If you have an organized meeting with a buyer or an existing relationship with the buyer or chef—i.e., you've visited their location a few times—it might be advantageous to bring a few samples to your meeting. This depends on your product type – however, it is a great way to show them why they should buy your product immediately. Along with your sell sheet and brand cards, bringing samples can be essential to your pitch.

In addition, food is very visual! If you're pitching that you have the freshest ingredients, bringing a few along can go a long way.

### Harvest schedule (if relevant)

If you're a produce farmer, you want to be able to provide a chef with your harvest schedule – what will you have and when. This allows them to plan their menu based on your production schedule. You'll also want to inform them of any new products coming down the pipeline.

## Step-by-step

### Visit the restaurant

If there's a restaurant you want to sell to, start by visiting and eating there a few times before you pitch. Like any relationship building, you want to build a positive

rapport with the restaurant and understand their business. This will give you more leverage when you start pitching them. You'll also begin to understand their dishes if they work with other local suppliers and who you'll need to pitch to.

Businesses are relationships. If you are a business owner and want a relationship with another business – that relationship is the stepping stone.

### **Make your pitch**

After you've built a rapport with the restaurant, you can start to make your pitch. Come at a less busy time for staff (i.e., not in the middle of the dinner rush). Introduce yourself to the team and ask if the relevant person is available (head chef, owner, manager).

Don't come on too strong. Introduce yourself and describe what you do. You don't want to start with contracts and sell sheets. Start with a casual conversation about your business and offer some samples to leave behind.

Keep it short and sweet. Mention you will follow up with them in a few days.

After a few days, stop by the restaurant. During this encounter, bring a business card and sell sheet. Ask for feedback on the samples if you dropped off a few the last time.

**Note:** When starting out, you'll want to be flexible with order size. You shouldn't expect the restaurant to make a huge order right off the bat. They want to test the waters a bit before committing to you. When making the first order, offer them a smaller option to start. It'll take time for the restaurant to get used to new products, so do it incrementally.

Our tip?

Don't go to national chains right off the bat. Independent and local restaurants have more purchasing power. This will allow you to build relationships with those you will be ordering. It'll also allow you to test and experiment if this is your first time selling wholesale. Once you've built confidence and your business can handle the demand and requirements of selling to a national chain – explore different local sourcing programs near you.

## Questions to consider

Deciding whether or not to sell to restaurants can be difficult. Here are a few questions you should ask yourself to see if it's the right fit for you:

- How far in advance does a chef need to know my fulfillment schedule? Am I able to plan far enough so they can plan their menus?
- How often in a week/month do I need to fulfill orders? Can I meet this demand?
- Do I have the proper handling, storage, and delivery methods to ensure optimal freshness?
- What types of restaurants are the best fit for my products? I.e., cafes, high-end restaurants, bakeries, a certain cuisine?
- How are current restaurants sourcing my product? Do I offer a better version/service?
- How do restaurants want to communicate with me?

## Dos and don'ts when selling to chefs

To understand the dos and don'ts when selling to restaurants, Local Line interviewed the executive chef of [B hospitality](#), Aaron Clyne.

Aaron is an expert in purchasing from local farms. He's spent years developing his relationships and has helped us create a list of the main things to avoid and the things you have to get right if you want to make it selling to restaurants!

Here is his list of dos and don'ts!

### **Do make appointments, don't show up unexpectedly**

Restaurants are extremely busy, especially during service time. The chef will have no time to meet with you and, therefore, will not be able to give a fair assessment of your product. Be respectful of their time and call ahead. Making an appointment will increase the probability of selling your product, as the chef can focus on what you offer them.

### **Do be proud, don't be pretentious**

Every farmer should be incredibly proud of their harvest or product. It takes a lot of work to be able to produce; however, there is a difference between being excited and proud of your product versus being pretentious. If you are excited about your product, the chef will be too. They want to create a dish that will showcase the beauty of your product and want to share that excitement with the diner.

You must not put down other local food producers. This is a red flag for chefs. Local food is already in competition with large corporations, so there is no need to create competition between colleagues. Instead of bashing other products, let your quality speak for itself.

### **Do be persistent, don't be clingy**

It is important to note that no means no. If a deal does not seem to work out, realize that and move on. If it was not a good fit for the chef, it probably was not a good fit for you. If you had a great initial conversation and there is promise for a partnership, follow up; however, make sure you give them space.

Taking the step-by-step approach described above will help with this. Remember: relationship first.

### **Do something memorable, don't show just any product**

Chefs get many calls a day from suppliers wanting to sell them their products. Make sure to stick out from the crowd. Offer to send them a sample, invite them to your farm or show them how the product is produced. Tell them the story of your product. This way, chefs will remember you and your product, and put you higher on the list of possible suppliers. Make sure to think about what you are showing them and pick a product that showcases your farm or business.

The most critical point Aaron emphasized is to remember that selling to a chef is a relationship. If you respect their business and are open to dialogue, they will be too. Understand how their business works and how your business plays into that. The better the relationship, the longer and more successful the partnership will be for both of you.

# Restaurant readiness checklist

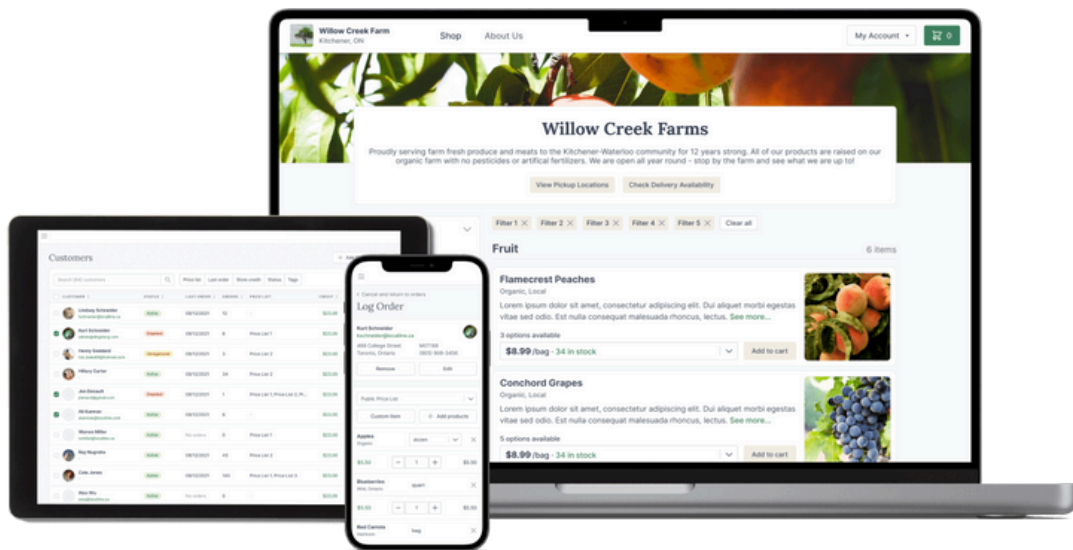


- Define your USP and prepare your pitch before speaking with a buyer. This will make you feel confident.
- Figure out your minimum order value size and order lead time.
- Define the list of restaurants you want to sell to. Does your business fit the description of a supplier they work with?
- Have an accurate schedule of what you will harvest and when for chefs so that they can plan their menus. Keep them informed of variations and upcoming new products.
- Sell to executive chef, but build relationships with the whole team. You want to have a strong relationship with those you interact with at pick-up.
- Keep an open line of communication. Ask if they are satisfied with pack size, quality, delivery, and variety. Give them the opportunity to provide feedback before it becomes an issue.
- Constantly sell to your customers and if possible, broaden your product line. You want to become the go-to for your customers. If you're scaling up another product to offer, bring samples along with your delivery.
- Leverage your customers as a source of market information. Find out what's trendy right now. What are chefs looking for? What are their customers looking for? They will know what the next big thing is before you do.



# Start Selling with Local Line Today!

To support you in your wholesale selling journey, consider [Local Line's all-in-one farm e-commerce platform](#). Local Line is an easy-to-use software tool for farmers to connect with local buyers, such as restaurants, schools, hospitals, and businesses looking to buy wholesale from local farms in their area.



Try selling online with Local Line today. We can get you up and selling online within an hour.

[Sign up here today!](#)

Happy selling!  
The Local Line team

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