HOUSE PARTY TOOL KIT

This Tool Kit is designed to guide SFA chapters on hosting fundraisers in the homes of members or supporters. These events host 20-50 people (depending on venue size) who are current or potential members and who have the ability to support SFA financially by contributing $50, $100, $250, $500 or more.

House parties are 90-120 minutes and are usually held in the late afternoon/early evening or on a Saturday. Donated supplies can keep party costs minimal.

House parties are a fun way to build SFA’s network and engage leaders. They are casual, not a dinner or fancy affair. They are well-planned and emphasize relationship-building.

Most importantly, they convey SFA’s message that Agriculture, Done Well, Heals.
Host House Parties in 10 Easy Steps

1. So, you want to have a House Party! (90 days out)
   
   A. **Identify Host**: A person(s) in whose home or farm the fundraiser will be held (1-2 people).
   
   B. **Identify Planning Committee**: A team of people who will help with the event, identify invitees and help turn them out, provide food or beverage and who, ideally, will also donate to the event and appear as sponsors on an invitation (2-3 more people, worker bees).
   
   C. **Find Sponsors**: People who are donating and willing to put their name on an invitation to encourage others to attend and give. By the time the invitation goes out (45 days prior to event date) have at least five sponsors and eventually grow the list to 10 or more.
   
   D. **Time of year**: Events are wonderful in spring, summer or fall when guests can be outside: patio, porch, deck, garden party.
   
   E. **Invitees**: House parties are not open to the public, but rather, by invitation. This could include inviting all chapter members, or a portion living nearby. Gifts are accepted online before, during and after, and at the event and after.
2. Map Out Your Plan (75 days out)

A. Identify “House Party Purpose,” which will set an attendance goal
   1. Raise funds (identify a target money goal)
   2. Introduce attendees and donors to SFA
   3. Showcase/spotlight an aspect of SFA’s work that is important to invitees

B. Set up work plan and calendar & budget (based on examples)

INCOME: 30 people (15 @ $50, 10 @ $100, 3 @ $150, 1 @ $200, 1 @ $250) = $2,650.

EXPENSES:
Food. Appetizers/desserts mix of donated and purchased: $300
Ice: $15 Beer. Find brewer to donate, otherwise $50
Wine: $50 Glasses for 30 (rent 20 each for 30 people): $25
Other: Lemonade, iced tea, LaCroix or soda, small plates, eating utensils, napkins, glasses provided by committee or rented. Assumes tables and chairs sufficient for party are from host and committee, and cost for pick up of food, beverages, supplies is donated. Thank you cards/stamps: $500.

Net $2,150
A Host Committee of 5-6 can each provide 1 dessert or appetizer (30-50 items) and a bottle of wine sufficient for a house party of 25-30.

C. Plan, message, invitation list and ID sponsors, food and drink

1. Pick date, time, place and back up in case special guest, or weather require change
2. Identify key sponsors of ability to give $100 or more and decide who will make the approach. Their names can be shared on the invitation to encourage others to attend.
3. If possible (but not necessary) identify one lead sponsor with ability to match gifts given (or up to a certain amount). This can be an individual, a business, a couple or a foundation.
4. Determine speaker(s) or “draw” with backup options.
5. Begin thinking about theme and message.
6. Brainstorm food and drink – is it tied to message or theme?
3. Build invitation list and confirm speakers, sponsors, refreshments (60 days out)

A. Confirm speaker(s) or main draw.
   1. Ideas: Thom Petersen, MN Ag Commissioner; local or state elected officials; recognized Soil Health farmers; Lynn Rosetto Kasper, Sioux Chef Sean Sherman, or another renowned chef or restaurateur; SFA dignitaries
   2. Add music (single guitarist, small ensemble or playlist)

B. Confirm key sponsors and identify more sponsors

C. Build invitation list. For a house party of 50, invite at least 100.
   Use SFA’s membership list of the area as needed.

D. Confirm food and beverages including non-alcoholic options
   Light appetizers, cider, craft beer, wine, desserts, coffee, tea, sparkling water. Prioritize local artisans and chefs
   Theme-based appetizers featuring sponsor specialty or locally raised food or locally made product (wild rice, maple syrup)

E. Identify source for glassware, napkins, utensils, plates, etc.
   Avoid paper and disposables if possible.

F. Any gift to attendees?
4. Get the word out (45 days out)

Send via email and social media to invitation list compiled from names offered by Host, Planning Committee, SFA members

Sample Phone Email and Phone Followup Script:

I’m writing to you as [insert personal invite, such as “I’m writing to you as Farmer Liz”] asking to come learn about the Sustainable Farming Association, a group of farmers I adore. I think you will love what they are doing, too, [insert personal connection, i.e., “because I know you are a big supporter of the local food movement” or “you’re passionate about fighting climate change.”]

I [insert your personal work on SFA’s behalf, i.e., joined SFA’s board years ago and have found a nimble, genuine, connected group of farmers who help each other get smarter and more efficient]. Their singular goal is to be successful by adding to the health of our environment, not depleting it. They are fast becoming high-profile leaders in soil and water health, climate change, and farmer education.

I’m co-hosting a “seed money” party to spread the word about their work and bolster funds for expansion of their staff, message and programs. I’m also looking forward to [i.e. “some delicious food may by XX” or “a visit with a local celeb.”]

Let me know if you’ll join me. It will be fun!

5. Check on RSVP list, cheer, work on details (30 days out)

A. Send second blast of invitation, adding any new sponsors as they are recruited.
B. Work on message for the Host and for Speakers/Special Guests
C. Plan setup and layout: identify places for sign-in table, food and drink, seating, tables, rest room. Identify volunteers for setup, sign-in table, serving food and beverages, keeping area clean, clean up

D. Determine if a microphone is needed and confirm.

1. Poster needed for any special food and drink, sign in, signs for parking? Assign.
2. Plan what’s needed for literature, brochure, remit envelopes, Square (for online giving), name tags, pens, Sharpies and any SFA display banner. Assign.

6. Check on RSVP list and cheer some more! (15 days out)

Presentation is everything. Work off original messaging, invitation and call scripts.

A. Third blast of invitation with more sponsors and another piece of the message
B. Work on welcome, presentation and fundraising pitch with overall team and those who have speaking role
C. Double-check food, beverage, dishes; literature, signs and remit envelopes
D. Confirm greeters and sign-in table people, identify people who will know guests. Assign
7. Week of event: Final push on RSVP list. Confirm details.

Practice Message

- Final invitation blast with key guests featured and another piece of the message
- Planning Committee and host make key (pick five most important) calls and email invitees personally to remind. Leave phone messages or texts as reminders
- Make final presentations notes and do a dry run with those with speaking role
- Confirm when set up helpers arrive, when food and beverages arrive, when tables, chairs, glassware and eating ware arrive and remember to get plenty of ice!

8. Come armed with conversation starters

Clear short story/anecdote about a farmer story or practice that is compelling, easy for people who are unfamiliar with farming to understand.

Focus on benefits and impacts. A farmer who is more profitable because soil is healthy and therefore more productive. Cows that aren’t affected by heat or drought, grazing in shoulder high pastures full of moisture on 90-degree days. A new farmer who is armed for success after Deep Roots or Farm Skills 101. A Kent Solberg-style “A-ha moment.”
9. Day of the Event: Sample Program Prep and Program

**Prior to Program**
- Set up
- Speakers/SFA staff arrive
- Hosts arrive
- Hosts, speakers and food/drinks ready
- Guests mingle and connect

Allow 90+ minutes*
- 60 minutes prior to start
- 30 minutes prior to start
- 15 minutes prior to start
- Upon arrival until program

**15-20 Minute Program**
- Welcome & Acknowledgements 2 minutes
- About SFA/Its Vision for Agriculture 3 minutes
- Guests Speakers (2-3) 8 minutes
- Hard Ask 2 minutes

**After Program**
- Mingle and connect 60-90 minutes
- Circulate baskets and remit envelopes
Sample Program Messages

Event Introduction (Emcee)

Acknowledgements:
• House host
• Noteworthy guests/celebs
• Food/beverage donors
• Matching gift donors (if applicable)

Why are we here? (Emcee)

The Sustainable Farming Association – known as SFA – has an uplifting story to tell amid disheartening and frustrating headlines. Put into context of [add relevant/local headlines guests can relate to] – clearly, farmers – producers of our food, drivers of our local economies and leaders in combating climate change – need our help.

Every day, hundreds of SFA farmers across Minnesota are proving that farming differently works for them (increasing productivity and profits); for you (better food, and vibrant communities), and for our environment (healthy water and land).

SFA farmers run small farms, some organic, some bigger than others. They help each other grow more and clean up – row-by-row, pasture-by-pasture. On farms and off, SFA farmers share with each other invaluable knowledge and experiences that increase profits, protect our environment and provide us local, healthy food. Meanwhile, SFA staffers provide on farm assistance, organizing, networking, classes, conferences and seminars at prices farmers can afford.
If Minnesota didn't have what SFA offers, “better ways of farming” would not move forward rapidly enough to meet our growing desire for change.

I’m so excited to introduce [SFA Rep] who will you tell you more.

**About SFA/Its Vision (SFA Rep uses this message bank)**

I’m so happy to be working with SFA because [tell very brief personal story].

SFA’s mission drew me, as it unifies farmers – from small to big, conventional to organic – with eaters, food advocates, business people and consumers who all want better, safer, tastier food that is grown and marketed as if the health our land, water, air – and our communities – truly matter.

25 years ago, SFA was founded by passionate farmers and advocates – perhaps people very much like you – who were alarmed with the direction industrial agriculture was taking the environment, food, farming and rural communities. They envisioned agriculture whose destiny wasn’t solely in the hands of corporate ag giants and government programs.

SFA has grown mightily since then, and we feel it’s critical more people know us and our work, particularly [insert location].

SFA is the Farmer-to-Farmer Network. We focus on people (building knowledge) and practices (building skills). SFA chapters are organized by geographic area, and enable farmers to address local concerns – how to ensure farmers can make a living, how to produce healthy food and grow a vibrant local economy and work with diverse producers, and how to farm WITH the environment, NOT against it. Chapters send delegates to state board which shapes relevant, useful programs.
We’ve made huge gains, but we face challenges. COVID laid bare the inequities in the food system and consumers like you have increased support of locally grown and processed food, something SFA nurtures and supports. And, as Big Ag and the USDA see the need to address climate change and offer incentives to farmers such as carbon credits, the need for SFA’s education, farmer-to-farmer networking and innovation critical. Who teaches the farmers to get this work done? We do.

Meanwhile, existing challenges persist. Conventional farming – corn/soybeans monoculture has changed the countryside, and many producers have a hard time transitioning to practices that restore our soil, add livestock to the landscape, and reduce the run-off that pollutes our waterways, that damages our fish and wildlife. And there’s still a steep decline in pollinator populations.

The interconnectedness of these challenges shows us all how the agriculture done well, heals. What does that mean? The farmers SFA is training . . . the practices we’ve helped develop . . . the relationships and network SFA is building . . . are solutions you and the rest of the world wants and needs.

But, it requires taking agriculture off autopilot and choosing to farm without a playbook of prescribed seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides. Our core programs, [insert current list, i.e. SFA’s Soil Health Network and Professional Development Program, Minnesota Garlic and Asparagus projects, Silvopasture and Agroforestry, and network of special events and festivals] are designed with this in mind. SFA members, farmers, ag professionals, food systems experts and educators are solving these challenges, and it’s so exciting.

Here to tell you how is [insert guest speaker(s)].
Hard Ask (Emcee, a Board Member or a Friend to SFA)

SFA is entering a new and exciting chapter, of which we all can be a part. It must expand to support the growing number of farmers who want to create solutions, rather than follow a recipe for growing crops and livestock. And, let’s face it, we are facing so many challenges that it’s up to US to do the right things now, today, that foster pollinator habitat, heal our watershed and soils, and feed our children and animals with chemical-free food.

You can help in two ways.

First, invest...invest in change that is real, happening across fence lines where the message is best received by farmers. Invest in education for the vegetable farmers at your farmers market. Invest in pasturing classes for grass-fed meat producers. Invest in the network for conventional farmers searching for alternatives to making a living AND decrease or eliminate their dependence on expensive and polluting chemicals.

There is simply no other organization primed for meeting this desire. To expand and better market its offerings that are working so well – and ultimately increase the number of farmers addressing our environmental and food challenges – SFA must grow its unrestricted operating fund. Unlike other non-profits, SFA limits its office space or associated costs, doing most of its work on farms, as they have for a quarter century.

Tonight, we have an opportunity. As you know from hearing [insert guest speaker[s]] story, the SFA’s farmer-to-farmer network helps food producers be both more profitable and environmentally sustainable. We are currently working to raise [$XX,000] to [i.e., “meet a match by ____”]. We are nearing the [$XX,000] mark in cash and anticipating the excitement in the room will get us to at least [$XX,000].
We suggest you start by considering a gift of $XXX. If you are able to contribute more it would be much appreciated. Your gift is tax deductible. Please know we’d be grateful for a gift of any size.

Second, open doors. SFA needs input as it grows and welcomes ideas, advice and connections. Tell us what you think and introduce us to people you know. We’d like to meet more people like you – people who want better food, clean water and healthy land, and who understand that farmers who succeed at farming differently are the solution to myriad of problems.

Thank you for supporting SFA and its growth!!

10. Thank you’s!

Right after the event, tally the income and share with Planning Committee. Send out thank you’s (usually by 1-2 folks handle this) within a few days of event. Send follow up email to any sponsor or pledge that hasn’t been received, sharing info or photos from the House Party. Evaluate and celebrate!

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