



GUILD-RAISING



*Your quick and easy guide to
starting a Farmers Guild*

www.farmersguild.org / www.caff.org

Beginning in 2011, a small group of farmers and ranchers came together over dinner. Out of those evenings arose new opportunities and partnerships. Within a year that group grew to well over a hundred members. Dinner around a farmhouse table transformed into fresh-harvested feasts fitted with educational presentations, community outreach and visiting neighbors who wanted to start new Guilds in their own communities. Are you next?

**Get in touch! If you want to find out more,
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What is a Farmers Guild?

A Guild is a casual, yet powerful, alliance of local farmers and the community that supports them. It aims to amplify the growing excitement about a new wave of agriculture that demands creativity, intelligence and above all collaboration. We come together monthly to share food, drink a beer, and trade skills and resources all while celebrating our local food community.

- An **inclusive space** to meet fellow farmers, ranchers and food system advocates
- Opportunities for organizations and businesses to **share resources** with the farming community
- A state-wide **network of Guilds** to exchange information, ideas, advice and perspective
- An **online platform** to stay connected in between gatherings without having to leave your farm
- An easy way to **find what you're looking for**. Whether its land, tools, work, workers, livestock, or a loan, a Guild can help provide connections to buy, sell, borrow or barter for what you need.

Being a part of the Farmers Guild network supports and magnifies the work that you're already doing. Whether you're starting a new Guild or linking your group into the network, you deepen connections locally at the same time tapping into a state-wide network of resources, information, and grassroots knowledge. Collectively we're building economic viability, farm awareness, and the social networks necessary to attract, cultivate and sustain a new generation ready to work the land. Farmers never stop learning, and a Guild provides the venue for farmers of all experience levels to share what they know. Seasoned veterans can share their wisdom and in turn stay in touch with the newest tricks of the trade.



The Farmers Guild Values

We are the newest generation of farmers, ranchers, chefs, artisans and sustainable food system advocates. With a passion for feeding our local communities, we come together to share skills, knowledge and a meal after a long day in the field, pasture and milking barn. Founded by farmers for farmers, our community helps to support every scale of healthy food production by collectively striving toward the economic viability of agriculture as well as the social networks necessary to attract, cultivate and sustain a new generation ready to work the land.

Therefore, we value:

Sustainability

We promote practices that sustain the environment on which our continued production depends as well as policies and local economies that sustain the livelihoods of those growing our food.

Inclusivity

A healthy farming community thrives with communication between all those involved—farm owners and farm interns, policy-makers and farm-to-table chefs, bee-keepers and cattle ranchers, the young and the old, those working one acre and those working a thousand. Come to pass down wisdom or to find your first farm job.

Cooperation

We all have our own business to mind, but collaboration between farmers and among the wider community makes heavy work light and the growth of a robust, diverse and fair local food economy benefits all.

Being part of a network...

With great power comes great responsibility. Being part of the Farmers Guild Network means that you have a group of folks around the state supporting your local food community. We share knowledge, resources, and connections for all of our benefit. It means that when we speak, our voices are louder and carry more weight with a chorus of fellow farmers and supporters speaking with us. These benefits are made possible by sharing information and respecting our fellow guild members. To that end, we ask that all Farmers Guilds:

- 1) Welcome all Guild members and supporters into their mix. Guild activities should be open to all, and monthly Guild meetings should be free of charge to participants. We want Farmers Guilds to be fun and safe spaces, if something is disrupting that, please get in touch.
- 2) All Guild members should be able to influence decision making for their guild. We value transparency and opportunities for participation in determining content of meetings, collaborative projects, etc. for all Guild Members.
- 3) One Farmers Guild cannot speak for the whole. Please refrain from signing on to state or federally relevant letters, policy positions, candidate endorsements using the Farmers Guild name. Though we share a common sense of purpose and the values above, a Guild in Yolo County may not feel the same way as a Guild in San Diego. But you are welcome to get involved with CAFF's State Policy work.
- 4) Guilds share and share alike. To support network communication, we ask that all Farmers Guilds create groups on our shared communications platform at FarmsReach.com and share the email addresses that you collect with The Farmers Guild Network. We send out Guild-wide newsletters, and their content reaches beyond any one Guild—so if you've got something to share with the wider community, let us know!

Guild Raising 101

It takes a community to raise a guild. Just as each and every community has its own unique identities and challenges, every Guild has its own character and purpose. Your Guild can be as simple or as involved as you want it to be. Starting a new group can seem overwhelming, so we've boiled down our process for raising a new Farmers Guild into 10 easy steps.

1

CONNECT TO THE FARMERS GUILD NETWORK

Think that you want to start a Farmers Guild in your neck of the woods? You're not the only one! Let us know that you're interested, and we can put you in touch with others in your area who want to work with you, set you up with technical resources to get started, and help you walk through the steps to setting up your own Guild.

2

ASSEMBLE A CORE TEAM

Your core team members are the local champions who have the passion, commitment and connections needed to keep a Guild alive and thriving. The key to starting an enduring Guild is identifying enthusiastic community-minded farmers and supporters from local non-profits, food businesses, schools, etc. that are willing to help keep a guild running smoothly. Don't worry, you won't be signing your life away, after you're up and running it should only take 1-2 hours a month. We highly recommend selecting one person with a little bit of tech savvy to take the lead on all things email and web.

3

BUILDING A GUILD FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

Each Guild starts with the basics: food, fun, learning and sharing. What does that mean to you? We suggest getting your core group to think about the big picture—what do you want out of your Farmers Guild? Most of the farmers we know aren't big on meetings, and their supporters usually attend too many. We've found the most productive (and fun!) way to do this is to start with a casual dinner at someone's home or farm.

- What's going great for your region's farmers and ranchers? What isn't going so well?
- What resources does your region have and what do you still need?
- Who are your region's go-to mentors and organizations?
- Where do farmers already get together? Who is making that happen?
- What do you wish you knew, but don't have the time or resources to make it happen?

To keep the conversation going... we'll help you set up a group in FarmsReach to keep the good ideas flowing. Everyone can stay up to date on progress, see where they can help out, and learn from what other Guilds are already doing.

4

FIND YOUR GUILD A HOME

What's a good central location for your monthly Guild meet-ups? You'll need tables, chairs, a kitchen, and plenty of room for a growing group to expand. Most Guilds pick a consistent location and stick with it. Moving your Guild meetings around your region can help to draw in new members, but we've found that turnout is consistently lower the further you stray from your home base. Need a location? We are partners with the State Grange, and many of our Guilds meet in their local Grange halls. There are over 200 halls around California, all of which have happily agreed to open their doors to our community in support of local agriculture.

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SET THE DATE AND TIME.

Guilds work best with a consistent date and time. For example, the Sebastopol Guild meets on the first Tuesday of every month at 6pm. What evening works best for your farmers and partners? Keep in mind other regular events in your community to avoid cross-scheduling.

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CONTENT FOR YOUR KICK-OFF

One of the best parts of each Farmers Guild meet-ups are the short, yet practical speakers at each event. Everyone may come for the beer and banter, but people stay because they actually learn something. What tools, skills or information would be valuable for your local farmers? Through the Guild network, we meet many people with various resources to share and we're more than happy to extend introductions and invitations. And there are likely opportunities within your own circle: more experienced farmers, food system advocates, local businesses, etc. We suggest aiming for three 10 minute presentations per month in these general areas:

- On Farm Production: farming methods, techniques, tools, etc.
- Sales and Marketing: product distribution, marketing tips, pricing, farm promotion, etc.
- Miscellaneous: agricultural policy, history, community events, etc.

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PROMOTING YOUR GUILD MEET-UP

Now that you've got all of the details worked out, it's time to get people to come out to the Guild. Work with your core team to build a list of local farmers, ranchers, interns, potential allies, supporting non-profits, etc. The Farmers Guild has tools to help you design and email out an invitation to the entire list, but a personal touch really helps get people to come out. We recommend dividing up the list among the core group, and sending out personal email invites to key people that you want to be a part of your Guild.

- Announce your event on FarmsReach, tap into facebook, post on local listservs, etc.
- Publicize where farmers already are: markets, grange, supply stores, etc.
- Word of mouth (this one works best!)
- Where else? Local radio show, town meetings, etc.

8

LAUNCH YOUR GUILD

After hosting dozens of meet-ups in various regions, we've taken noticed what works best in order to host a smooth, fun and effective gathering. Each Guild will be as unique as the people who form them, but we encourage you to take advantage of the proven format outlined on the next page: How to Host a Guild

9

KEEPING THE CONVERSATION GOING

Getting together for Guild meetings supports the socializing, networking, and relationship and trust building that can only happen in person. But the connections don't stop when the party ends... We can keep conversations and projects that start at the Guild going online through social media groups or listservs.

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STAY IN TOUCH

The purpose of a united Guild network is to extend our reach and multiply our individual efforts. We are happy to help and we also ask that you give back to the wider community by offering feedback, ideas, and resources for other Guilds. Keep us up to date on your group and we'll promote your events, find new presenters and share opportunities. Make your Guild something you and your community will be proud to be a part of.

Hosting a Guild

Each Guild will be as unique as the people who form them, but we encourage you to follow this proven format in order to host the most smooth, fun and effective gathering possible.

- At it's most basic level, a Guild meeting is a Farmers' potluck: this is a real deal farmer-to-table opportunity, so encourage folks to show off their harvest



- We strongly recommend keeping the first half of the evening casual, giving an opportunity for folks to arrive, meet and greet, grab some food and find a good seat



- Set-up I Have, I Need Boards so that members can share. I have extra compost, I need an internship for the season. Butcher paper works just fine too!



- Kick off the night with a brief overview of The Farmers Guild.

- Make sure to introduce your core team. Depending on the amount of time and the size of your group consider having everyone share their name, farm or affiliation, and a brief answer to a question of your choice, (i.e. favorite farm tool, if you were a barnyard animal...). If the group is too big, they can just share with a neighbor

- Invite group to share announcements. Any thing important people should know about?

- Presentations: 10 minutes, farm-applicable, keep it general enough for most to find relevant, encourage an action-based conclusion, i.e. how can people follow up?

- Show your appreciation! Be sure to thank core group, visitors, presenters, host venue, etc.

- Clean-up. Many hands make light work, so ask for volunteers while you still have everyone's attention.



Checklist

BEFORE THE GUILD...

- On-going- Suggest speakers and topics for the next Guild gathering.
- Two weeks before- Quick core group check-in to make sure everything's on track, see if anybody needs support, brainstorm new ideas, and share news about local and not-so-local things that could affect Guild members.
- One-week before- Forward invite to your people with a personal invitation or reminder to join us.

AT THE GUILD...

- Arrive 30-60 minutes early to help set-up and greet folks.
- Have a sign up sheet at the front entrance, so that you know who's coming and how to reach them (we have a template for you to use)
- Bring name-tags so that everyone knows who is there.
- Set up a table at entrance for any materials: event fliers, informational brochures, etc. that your members want to share.
- Help keep an eye out for newcomers. If you don't know somebody, say hello, and introduce them to somebody else. We want everyone to feel welcome right from the start.
- Check in with other Guild members. Are they having fun? What do they want to learn about? Etc.
- Think about what you HAVE and what you NEED. Seed the board!
- Work together to organize clean-up. It goes a lot faster with many hands, so remind everyone to wash their dishes, and help recruit volunteers to break down tables and chairs, wash dishes, sweep, etc.

AFTER THE GUILD...

- Follow-up on any promises or connections made at the Guild.
- Share any feedback that you're getting from Guild members and the community at large
- Post to the Guild group online to keep the conversation going between meetings.

Guild Raising 201

After your Guild is up and running, there are an infinite number of ways that you can take it to the next level. Take advantage of the opportunities provided by the Farmers Guild Network, or pilot new initiatives of your own. Here are just a few ideas:

The Farmers Guild Scholarship Fund

Because the education of those new to farming is key to our future, we have joined the Grange to establish a scholarship fund for Guild members seeking financial assistance for training programs, conferences and farm schools.

GuildRaising Community Celebration

Once a year we hold a combined Guild-Raising celebration, inviting Guilds from all over the state to convene for a celebration of our interconnected network of community-minded farmers.

Hands-on Workshops

Partner with a local organization (like CAFF, FarmLink, CRAFT) to host educational workshops on the topics important to you and your Guild.

Joint Purchasing

Facilitate an easy method for fellow Guild members to join together in their purchase of materials, seed, livestock feed, etc., taking advantage of less expensive bulk rates.

Aggregate Product

Encourage Guild members to collaborate by selling one another's products at market, diversifying their CSA's, or creating multi-ingredient value-added products.

Collaborative Research

Crowd-source the collective experience and knowledge in the room for any ag research projects you or your community are undertaking.

Public Awareness

Use the Guild to promote yourself and your farm by joining together to put on farm-centric events and outreach.

Impacting Public Policy

So long as you don't use the Guild Network without consensus (see above), use the power of numbers to speak out for programs and policies that will support farms and farmers in your community.

Negotiating Discounts with Local Suppliers

Promote the local importance of your work and of your Guild and then solicit local businesses to support local agriculture by offering discounts to members: farm supply, feed store, even your local bar.

Form Focus Groups

Invite members of your own Guild as well as members of other guilds to form discussion or working groups on specific topics, whether to share rotational-grazing tips between stockmen or to explore the possibility of collaborative farm models.