

**GRAZE PANEL DISCUSSION:** Our panelist's -- Graze: Huntsville Farmers, Melissa Julia of 4G Farms & Carla Stiles of J & C Local Farms -- provided "Tips and Concrete Tools" to improve your success, navigate hurdles, and integrate best practices for successful relationship-building with chefs & restaurants.

**THIS SESSION IS FOR YOU IF YOU:**

- Currently work with -- or plan to develop relationships with -- a chef
- Are experiencing barriers in building those relationships
- Need a system or process to document contact, communicate & categorize
- Participated in Graze and want to continue building your business, or if you're interested in participating in a future Graze farm to fork picnic benefit

**WHAT IS GRAZE?:**

- Graze is ASAN's signature farm to fork picnic benefit. Tickets go to support the ongoing work of our membership organization as we work towards a more sustainable food system in Alabama. This means funds go toward year-round farmer workshops and gatherings, participant stipends (including honoraria for our Graze chefs and farmers!), and general operating expenses to keep our nearly 25-year organization running.
  - Matched by ASAN, Farmer & Chef pairs collaborate on a single dish that features an ingredient provided by the farmer.
- Graze: Birmingham originated in 2015. The ASAN team and board members wanted to build community & awareness for farmers and the products they provide via a farm-to-table event:
  - Their ultimate goal was to give farmers hands-on experience so they could learn how to build and nurture relationships with chefs to sell their products.
- In 2019, the 5th year of Graze: Birmingham, Graze expanded into Huntsville. Through the encouragement of ASAN supporters, and farmer's market managers in Huntsville and northern Alabama, ASAN harnessed their "people resources" to build a committee who canvassed for participants, identified sponsors, researched locations, and spread the word at local markets.
  - On Sunday, July 14th Graze: Huntsville was held at Campus 805 in between Yellowhammer Brewing and Straight To Ale. Huntsville welcomed Graze with open arms -- and after a 5-year hiatus due to Covid -- we had a repeat performance on Sunday, September 8th at The Orion.

**GRAZE MODEL** = building a partnership between Farmer & Chef through:

- **COMMUNICATION/COLLABORATION**
- **RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING**
- **PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE**

During the session, we asked our panelists the following questions based on their Graze experience, and current status. No matter where you are on your journey -- currently working with or plan to develop relationships with a chef -- we hope these questions provide a spark so you can improve your success, navigate hurdles, and integrate best practices for successful

relationship-building with chefs & restaurants. If at some point you have said to yourself, “I’m feeling frustration or discomfort; “how in the heck do I have these conversations?” Carve out time to answer the following questions:

- **If you participated in GRAZE:** Why did you decide to participate, and what were your expectations?
  - Once matched, how did you communicate with your chef?
    - Walk us through a conversation
  - Was your relationship successful? If so, what made it successful? If not, why wasn’t it successful?
  - How could you apply the experience to your relationships with chefs that didn’t participate in Graze?
- Have you stayed in touch with your chef and do you sell to them? What other connections with a chef, or farmer did you make through Graze?
- How do you expand your reach? Do you ask for referrals?
- How did/could you educate the chef about your product?
  - What is your elevator pitch?
- How did/could you initiate and communicate with your chef and sell to them? How do you build consistency, and “Plant the Seed”?
  - Approach: walk-in, phone call, or email? What info do you share?
  - Follow-up: email, [newsletter](#), phone call, or in-person visit?
    - Frequency
    - Provide quick & dirty information - [4G order list](#)
    - Sometimes, the onus is on the farmer
- What templates, if you have them, do you use for communication?
  - What are most effective for you to document contacts & communication
  - What tools?
- Do you have an accountability partner, or have you offered to be one for someone else?

#### TIPS:

- Take time to create a vision and explore the possibilities of where it could go
- Be discerning re your relationship choices; you’re not for everyone, and that’s okay
- Be mindful, chefs and farmers have different personalities and priorities
  - It’s the long game
- Be persistent, don’t take NO for an answer ;)
- Fail - create - get up and try again
- Ask yourself often, how can I make it better?
- Don’t stop learning - it’s not a one and done
- Be open to exploring unique opportunities - think outside of the box
- Always take the opportunity to talk to people about your products!
- There’s no handbook for everything, create your own!

*If you have any questions, feel free to contact Mindy Santo: [graze@asanonline.org](mailto:graze@asanonline.org).*