

FINE *Dining* IN THE FIELDS

FARM DINNERS serve up the chance to connect with local food producers.

White Gate Farm

Summer nights call for dining under the Connecticut stars. Where better to do so than in a pastoral setting? Happily, several Connecticut farms invite you into their fields for fresh fare and dreamy ambiance.

Field House Farm, Madison

"They're a snapshot in that moment," Field House Farm owner Stephanie Lesnik says of the Madison farm's monthly summer dinner menus, "a picture of what Connecticut farms have that week." Guests can check out what's fresh at Field House Farm upon arrival, while sipping complimentary wine during a property tour.

Next, visitors are welcomed into the farmhouse's kitchen, where chef David Borselle is busily preparing the night's four-course, savory meal with plant and animal products fresh from the field. Later, Borselle's dishes and wine pairings are delivered outside to a large, family-style table. Dessert comes by way of Guilford's Hen & Heifer Bakery, with steamy cups of Ashlawn Farm coffee, and after-dinner drinks rounding out a perfect night. 623 Green Hill Road, 203-779-9187, fieldhousefarm.net

Max Chef to Farm, various locations

Known for its summer dinners at Simsbury's Rosedale Farms & Vineyards, Max Chef to Farm has 20 farm-to-table events slated in 2022, including at Brignole Vineyards in East Granby and The Farmer's Cow in Lebanon. "Our dinners started as a couple of grills and a dream 14 years ago," says Hunter Morton, culinary director for Max Restaurant Group. "We've grown so much, with most of our farm dinners selling out each year."

Various Connecticut chefs get to show off their skills at the dinners. Taking center stage this summer will be chef Prasad Chirnomula (June 21) of New Canaan's Chef Prasad. Morton says to also be on the lookout for the June 15 kick-off event at Brignole, followed by a series of fetes, including Father's Day Backyard BBQ (June 19), a dinner devoted to ballroom dancing

(July 14), along with their annual Oyster Festival (Aug. 7), LobsterFest (Aug. 28) and Hoptoberfest (Oct. 9). 860-651-3926, maxcheftofarm.com, maxrestaurantgroup.com

The Hickories, Ridgefield

Back in 1999, Jim Denevan founded Outstanding in the Field (OITF) as a way of connecting diners to the origins of their food. Since then, the event has become a veritable caravan, traversing 50 U.S. states and 16 countries. This year, OITF is launching a nonprofit focused on transforming lives through food.

Two Connecticut farms are featured on OITF's 2022 tour with a dinner at Stone Farms on Aug. 22 (read on for more info), followed by two nights at Ridgefield's The Hickories on Aug. 27 and 28. Helming The Hickories dinner will be chef Johan Jensen of Whitecrest Eatery fame.

Reaching The Hickories involves a drive along a country road with just the right amount of curves. A white barn bedecked with a vine-entwined

peace sign is the first indicator: You've arrived at Hickories. The farm's cheery store lures for perusing products made on site and from nearby vendors. If stomachs start to grumble, they're in luck, as the OITF dinner takes place in a picturesque field right next door.

A rolling green carpet with a view of a valley welcomes. Flanking it on one side is a flock of sheep, complete with the season's new baby members. On the other side are two apple trees, one with a swing that sways with every breeze. Serving as a protective hug to the evening's event is an ancient stone fence. This is a location that screams: Catch your sunset here! As for moonlight, grab a seat by the firepit and soak in the starlit sky. 136 Lounsbury Road, 203-894-1851, thehickories.org

White Gate Farm, East Lyme

There are 100 sprawling acres at White Gate Farm. Smack dab in the middle is a garden-framed meadow where farm dinners usher in revelry from late spring through the fall.

Live music, resident lambs, a wood-fired oven, and plentiful flowers signal: you've arrived.

Peek in the kitchen's glass French doors and say hello to farm chef Tami Grooney and one will likely be rewarded with a botanical refreshment, such as Lemongrass Thai Basil Limeade.

The five- to six-course themed dinners kick off at 6 p.m. on June 26. "My personal favorite is the night we feature Japanese cuisine," Grooney says. "Spring-soft, rainbow pastels, delicate textures and tiny sprouts showcase our chawanmushi, eggs with savory custard with kelp and shitake mushroom broths." Her favorite dessert also makes an appearance on this night. "Daifuku—homemade mochi stuffed with fresh strawberries, fresh bean paste, and matcha tiramisu."

Can't make one of White Gate's farm dinners (others are scheduled for July 24, Aug. 21, Sept. 25 and Oct. 23)? Check out their Saturday farm fests. 83 Upper Pattagansett Road, 860-739-9585, whitegatefarm.net

Stone Acres Farm, Stonington

Founder Dan Meiser describes Stone Acres Farm this way: "It's a picture-perfect New England farm, complete with historic boxwood gardens, flowers everywhere and gentle hay fields. I can't imagine a nicer spot to have dinner on a summer night." As there's no set dinner time (reservations are rolling), guests are encouraged to explore this idyllic setting at their leisure.

Cooking up the week's special menu is chef Chris Vanasse, who many will know as the sous chef at Mystic's Oyster Club. Meiser, who creates the set, weekly menu, oversees things. "Because of the summer bounty, we have a menu packed with amazing summer veggies, herbs and fruit, as well as great local meats and fish," Meiser says. "We also showcase special items from local farmers and fishermen."

Stone Acres Farm dinners start in early June and run through early fall. Meiser says, "We'll take a quick break, then begin a fall series this year that we're really excited about." 393 N. Main St., 860-245-4414, stoneacresfarm.com

—Bekah Wright