



Farm-to-Fork Dinner Fiasco

Laura Bledsoe – October 24, 2011

When an over-zealous regulator shows up at a farm dinner demanding that food be destroyed as hungry guests await, who do you call? Here's Laura's account written as a letter to her guests who had come to Quail Hollow Farm expecting a meal of foods harvested from local small family farms.

This incident shows the value of the 24/7 legal hotline for farmers like Laura who need help...even on a Friday night! A member benefit like the hotline is available thanks to the financial support of the many FTCLDF members and donors.

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Dearest Guests, (You have all become dear to us!)

What an evening we had this last Friday night! It had all the makings of a really great novel: drama, suspense, anticipation, crisis, heroic efforts, villains and victors, resolution and a happy ending.

The evening was everything I had dreamed and hoped it would be. The weather was perfect, the farm was filled with friends and guests roaming around talking about organic, sustainable farming practices. Our young interns were teaching and sharing their passion for farming and their role in it. (A high hope for our future!) The pig didn't get loose.

Our guests were excited to spend an evening together. The food was prepared exquisitely. The long dinner table, under the direction of dear friends, was absolutely stunningly beautiful. The music was superb. The stars were bright and life was really good.

And then, ...

for a few moments, it felt like the rug was pulled out from underneath us and my wonderful world came crashing down. As guests were mingling, finishing tours of the farm, and while the first course of the meal was being prepared and ready to be sent out, a Southern Nevada Health District employee came for an inspection.

Because this was a gathering of people invited to our farm for dinner, I had no idea that the Health Department would become involved. I received a phone call from them two days before the event informing me that because this was a "public event" (I would like to know what is the definition of "public" and "private") we would be required to apply for a "special use permit".

If we did not do so immediately, we would be charged a ridiculous fine.

Stunned, we immediately complied.

We were in the middle of our harvest day for our CSA shares, a very busy time for us, but Monte immediately left to comply with the demand and filled out the required paper work and paid for the fee. (Did I mention that we live in Overton, nowhere near a Health Department office?) Paper work now in order, he was informed that we would not actually be given the permit until an inspector came to check it all out.

She came literally while our guests were arriving!

In order to overcome any trouble with the Health Department of cooking on the premises, most of the food was prepared in a certified kitchen in Las Vegas; and to further remove any doubt, we rented a certified kitchen trailer to be here on the farm for the preparation of the meals. The inspector, Mary Oaks, clearly



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not the one in charge of the inspection as she was constantly on the phone with her superior Susan somebody who was calling all the shots from who knows where.

Susan deemed our food unfit for consumption and demanded that we call off the event because:

1. Some of the prepared food packages did not have labels on them. (The code actually allows for this if it is to be consumed within 72 hours.)
2. Some of the meat was not USDA certified. (Did I mention that this was a farm to fork meal?)
3. Some of the food that was prepared in advance was not up to temperature at the time of inspection. (It was being prepared to be brought to proper temperature for serving when the inspection occurred.)
4. Even the vegetables prepared in advance had to be thrown out because they were cut and were then considered a "bio-hazard".
5. We did not have receipts for our food. (Reminder! This food came from farms not from the supermarket! I have talked with several chefs who have said that in all their years cooking they have never been asked for receipts.)

At this time Monte, trying to reason with Susan to find a possible solution for the problem, suggested turning this event from a "public" event to a "private" event by allowing the guests to become part of our farm club, thus eliminating any jurisdiction or responsibility on their part. This idea infuriated Susan and threatened that if we did not comply the police would be called and personally escort our guests off the property. This is not the vision of the evening we had in mind! So regretfully, again we complied.

The only way to keep our guests on the property was to destroy the food.

I can't tell you how sick to my stomach I was watching that first dish of Mint Lamb Meatballs hit the bottom of the unsanitized trash can.

Here we were with guests who had paid in advance and had come from long distances away anticipating a wonderful dining experience, waiting for dinner while we were behind the kitchen curtain throwing it away! I know of the hours and labor that went into the preparation of that food.

We asked the inspector if we could save the food for a private family event that we were having the next day. (A personal family choice to use our own food.) We were denied and she was insulted that we would even consider endangering our families health. I assured her that I had complete faith and trust in Giovanni our chef and the food that was prepared, (obviously, or I wouldn't be wanting to serve it to our guests).

I then asked if we couldn't feed the food to our "public guests" or even to our private family, then at least let us feed it to our pigs. (I think it should be a criminal action to waste any resource of the land. Being dedicated to our organic farm, we are forever looking for good inputs into our compost and soil and good food that can be fed to our animals. The animals and compost pile always get our left over garden surplus and food. We truly are trying to be as sustainable as possible.)

Again, a call to Susan and another negative response.

Okay, so let me get this right.

So the food that was raised here on our farm and selected and gathered from familiar local sources, cooked and prepared with skill and love was even unfit to feed to my pigs!?!

Who gave them the right to tell me what I feed my animals?



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Not only were we denied the use of the food for any purpose, to ensure that it truly was unfit for feed of any kind we were again threatened with police action if we did not only throw the food in the trash, but then to add insult to injury, we were ordered to pour bleach on it.

Now the food is also unfit for compost as I would be negligent to allow any little critters to nibble on it while it was composting and ingest that bleach resulting in a horrible death. Literally hundreds of pounds of food was good for nothing but adding to our ever increasing land fill!

At some point in all of this turmoil Monte reminded me that I had the emergency phone number for the *Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund* (FTCLDF) on our refrigerator. I put it there never really believing that I would ever have to use it. We became members of the *Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund* several years ago as a protection for us, but mostly to add support to other farmers battling against the oppressive legal actions taken against the small farmers trying to produce good wholesome food without government intrusion.

The local, sustainable food battle is being waged all across America! May I mention that not one battle has been brought on because of any illness to the patrons of these farms! The battles are started by government officials swooping down on farms and farmers like SWAT teams confiscating not only the wholesome food items produced but even their farm equipment! Some of them actually wearing HAZMAT suits as if they were walking into a nuclear meltdown! I have personally listened to some of their heart wrenching stories and have continued to follow them through the FTCLDF's updates.

Well, I made the call, told my story and within a short period of time received a phone call back from the FTCLDF's General Counsel, Gary Cox. When told the story, he simply suggested that we apply our fundamental constitutional right to be protected against "unlawful search and seizure." I simply had to ask Mary two questions. "Do you have a search warrant?" "Do you have an arrest warrant?"

With the answers being "No", I politely and very simply asked her to leave our property. As simple as that! She had no alternative, no higher power, no choice whatsoever but to now comply with my desire. She left in a huff making a scene shouting that she was calling the police. She left no paperwork, no Cease and Desist order, no record of any kind that implicated us for one thing, (we had complied to all their orders) only empty threats and a couple of trash cans full of defiled food. I will get back to "the inspector" and her threats shortly. Let's get to where it really gets good.

While I am on the verge of a literal breakdown, Monte and Gio get creative. All right, we have just thrown all of this food away, we can't do this, we can't do that, what CAN we do? Well, we have a vegetable farm and we do have fresh vegetables. (By the way, we were denied even using our fresh vegetables until I informed our inspector that I do have a Producers Certificate from the Nevada Department of Agriculture allowing us to sell our vegetables and other farm products at the Farmers Market. Much of our produce has gone to some of the very finest restaurants in Las Vegas and St. George.)

The wind taken out of the inspector's sails, Gio and his crew got cookin'. It just so happened that we had a cooled trailer full of vegetables ready to be taken to market the following day. Monte hooked on to the trailer and backed it up right next to the kitchen. Our interns who were there to greet and serve now got to work with lamp oil and began harvesting anew. Knives were chopping, pots of pasta and rice from our food storage were steaming, our bonfire was now turned into a grill and literal miracles were happening before our eyes!



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In the meantime, Monte and I had to break the news to our guests. Rather than go into the details here, you can see the [video footage](http://www.reallyvegasphoto.com/Events/CSA-Farm-Government-Inspection/19707296_v2zFML#1546717636_dJJDZjw) on Mark Bowers and Kiki Kalor's (our friends and guests) website at: http://www.reallyvegasphoto.com/Events/CSA-Farm-Government-Inspection/19707296_v2zFML#1546717636_dJJDZjw

We explained the situation, offered anyone interested a full refund, and told them that if they chose to stay their dinner was now literally being prepared fresh, as just now being harvested. The reaction of our guests was the most sobering and inspirational experience of the evening. In an instant we were bonded together.

They were, of course, out-raged at the lack of choice they were given in their meal.

Out-raged at the arrogance of coming to a farm dinner and being required to use only USDA (government inspected) meats.

Outraged at the heavy handedness of the Health Department into their lives.

Then there was the most tremendous outpouring of love and support.

One of our guests, Marty Keach, informed us that he was an attorney and as appalled as everyone else offered his support and counsel if need be, even if it be to the Supreme Court. He was a great comfort in a tense time.

With their approval, Giovanni and crew got cooking and the evening then truly began. The atmosphere turned from tense and angry to loving and supportive. As soon as I heard my brother Steve sit down and begin strumming his guitar, I knew something special was happening. Paid guests volunteered their services. Chef Shawn Wallace, a guest, joined Gio and his team his knife flying through the eggplant and squash. Wendy and Thierry Pressyler and so many that I am not even aware of, were helping to grill and transport dishes. Jason and Chrissy Doolen offered to run quick errands. Jeanne Frost, a server for the Wynn hotel, didn't take a seat and began serving her fellow guests.

Before long we were seated at the beautiful table and the most incredible dishes began coming forth. It was literally "loaves and fishes" appearing before our very eyes! We broke bread together, we laughed, we talked, we shared stories, we came together in the most marvelous way.

Now this is what I had dreamed, only more marvelous than I could have ever imagined! The sky being bright with glittering stars, we had the telescopes out and invited any guests who desired to look into our starry heaven. While we were looking into the heavens, heaven was looking down upon us! I can't tell you the number of times I have felt the hand of providence helping us in the work of this farm.

As hard and demanding as this work is, I KNOW that this is what we are meant to do.

I KNOW that it is imperative that we stand up for our food choices.

I KNOW that local, organic, sustainable food produced by ourselves or by small family, local farms is indispensable to the health and well-being of our families and our communities now and in the future! If this work were not so vitally important, the "evil forces" would not be working so hard to pull it down.

We were victorious, we will be victorious, we must be! Our grandchildren's future is at stake!

Back to the inspector. She did call the police. You must remember that we live in a small town. We know these officers. They responded to the call dutifully but were desperately trying to figure out why they had been called. Never in all of their experience had they ever received a call like this.



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Mary, the inspector, demanded that they give us a citation. The officer in charge said that she was to give us the citation, she responded that no, they were to give us the citation, which they then asked her for what violation. Even with the help of her superior on the phone she could not give them a reason. They asked her to leave which she did. The police were very kind and apologetic for the intrusion. All of this was done without fanfare and out of sight of our guests. The police officers are commended for their professionalism!

Now that we have come to the last chapter of our novel, I realize that it ends with a cliff-hanger. As happy as the ending was, it isn't "happily ever after" yet. This will remain to be seen in the ensuing days, weeks and even years ahead.

Tom Collins, our County Commissioner, furious by the events that took place, having formerly been a board member for the Southern Nevada Health District is putting together a meeting with himself, the current board members and ourselves to make sense of all this mess.

As so many of you have related verbally and through emails your desire to help and be involved, we will keep you informed as events take place. I feel that we have been compelled to truly become active participants in the ongoing battle over our food choices. This is just one small incident that brings to our awareness how fragile our freedoms are. We are now ready to join the fight!

We would encourage all of you who can to contribute and to become a member of the *Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund*. They are not only fighting for the farmers, they are fighting for the consumers to have the right to choose. You can find them at farmtoconsumer.org

As I close, I am reminded of the passage written so forcefully by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence:

"He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance."

The same battle continues. I pray the result of the battle will be the same, that we have been "endowed by our Creator with ... life and liberty".

We love you all, and thank you with all our souls for your continued love and support! We will stay in touch.

With warmest wishes for you and your families,

Monte and Laura Bledsoe
Written from Quail Hollow Farm
October 24, 2011
quailhollowfarmcsa.com

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Hyperlinks for the PDF

video footage – CSA Farm Inspection Videos from Quail Hollow Farm, 21 October 2011 =
http://www.reallyvegasphoto.com/Events/CSA-Farm-Government-Inspection/19707296_v2zFML#1546717636_dJJDZjw