



Understanding Restaurant Needs

Guest: Andrea Shackelford

Nick Burton: Hey, everybody. We are sitting here with Andrea Shackelford from Harvest Seasonal Kitchen in McKinney, Texas, filming at Water Boy Farms. And we're going to talk about bridging the gap between farms and chefs and how that looks and some of the obstacles chefs face buying from farmers. If you'll just give us a brief introduction and your background.

Andrea Shackelford: Sure. I'm the executive chef for Harvest Seasonal Kitchen which is in downtown McKinney which is just north of Dallas. And we are a seasonal kitchen which ultimately means we follow food based on the season.

If something is in season, we try to find it wherever we can locally, hopefully in Texas, and hopefully within 150 miles of our restaurant. That's kind of a cool challenge for me. So that's something I've always tried to do.

Our restaurant has been open for about two and a half years now. I moved up to this area from Dallas about four years ago and fell in love with just being closer to farms and closer to the ranches and everything. And I grew up in Dallas, so this is all foreign to me when I moved up here.

So I fell in love with it. And I already had a little bit of a background in using local farmers in Dallas. I just wanted to expand on that as I moved up here. And so I guess that's where Harvest was created. Rick and I worked together to come up with the concept and tried to make it as honest as possible.

That was our goal—just something that we knew that we would be in love with over time that would stand the test of time when it comes to trends and stuff like that. We weren't trying to be trendy. We just wanted to be honest.

Nick: Yeah.

Andrea: This is what we wanted to do. So that's Harvest.

Nick: One of the things that strikes me when I go to Harvest is all the details that go into it. It's not just the food. It's the paper that you guys use.

Andrea: Right.

Nick: It's the cut flowers. It's the herbs. It's the art. It's all from around here. And I think it ties it in very nicely. And it shows how far agriculture can go, not just from a food standpoint but from a production standpoint.

Andrea: Yup. As you know in the restaurant industry, you make a lot of decisions. And trying to make the correct decision can be a little difficult because a lot of times it depends on how much things cost.

Nick: Yeah.

Andrea: Ultimately, you have to run a business, so you have to be smart. But over time, we just thought, "If we're going to make this decision, we're going to do it the right way every time as much as we can."

So if we're able to use something local or if we're able to use a product that is going to be biodegradable, we're going to do it. Like I said, that was the decision we made early on. And we try to keep that constant and try to improve upon that over the years.

Nick: Okay. You guys obviously are a seasonal kitchen. And you guys go into menu planning.

Andrea: Right.

Nick: How far out does that process start?

Andrea: Well, over the years, especially with a seasonal kitchen, especially in Texas, you know what's going to come into season. So this time of year we know there's going to be cabbage. We know there's going to be broccoli. We know there's going to be cauliflower. That kind of stuff is always there. So that's at least your constant.

It depends. A lot times, it's like any kind of artistic thing. Inspiration strikes at any time. Sometimes, it takes me a couple days before we start the rolling the

menu to get something in my mind and get it completely the way I want it. But sometimes, it'll take a month and a half.

So a lot of times, it depends. If we're trying to grow something specifically—and we've only been doing this for a couple years. So we're just now getting to the point where we're planning based on how we can grow six months in advance and stuff like that.

But it's a little difficult. But it's hard to say that it's the same every time. Certain dishes, it's easy. I kind of know. But there are definitely a lot of artistic decisions being made along the way. But that kind of answers it.

Nick: Yeah, no. It makes perfect sense.

Andrea: Yeah, so like I said, we're getting to the point where we're growing things. And we're planning six months in advance. So that way we know we're going to put that on the menu in six months. Or we'll butcher a whole pig. And we know, okay, that pig we're going to grind up most of it most likely. And we'll use that on this dish that's going to last three months.

There are certain dishes where we're doing that. So our bratwurst, meatballs, we planned that far in advance because we had two whole pigs that we butchered. And we ground. And that's what we're using it for.

Nick: And speaking of butchering, I think it's important to point out here it's not just leafy greens that you're buying from.

Andrea: No.

Nick: It's apiaries. It's cut flowers. It's herbs.

Andrea: Right.

Nick: Is there any farm that you are able to get all of this stuff from.

Andrea: Not really. Even the really big produce, organic farms—and I say really big. They're not big. Like Johnson's Backyard Garden is in Austin. And that's probably one of the bigger ones where you can get a variety of produce. They still probably only have about 25, maybe 30 max, different varieties of produce at a time. And that's fairly large for a small farm.

Nick: Yeah.

Andrea: But at the same time, that's not enough for most restaurants to survive off of. So that's probably your max. But most of them, three or four or five different varieties of things when it comes to produce.

And then when it comes to meat, you might get a couple different animals. And that's it. Chickens—like we have K Bar K. They give us chicken. And they give us grass fed beef. And we can get whatever we want within those realms. And I've got a lot of different people that have different types of chicken and stuff like that.

Nick: Yeah, so for the growers that would go, "Why are they using so many different people?" It's because you're buying the very best of the best from somebody that's specializing in a particular product.

Andrea: Exactly. And I'll have somebody that just gives me arugula. And that's all they give me. So I get arugula from them. And then, like I said, I'll get chicken from somebody else. And I'll get just mushrooms from this other guy that I get stuff from. So it's all over the place. So that's why you have to.

Nick: And then your network obviously has to be big.

Andrea: Right.

Nick: You have to be very plugged into all these different people.

Andrea: Definitely.

Nick: What are the limitations of buying from a small farm from a chef's perspective? And you're not going to hurt anybody's feelings here because this is stuff people want to know.

Andrea: Sure!

Nick: Here to learn from. So what do you see time and time again. "Oh my god! Again with this thing!"

Andrea: Right. I think when it comes to quantity, that's not an issue. And I think people think that it is an issue. They think that a lot of restaurants want giant quantities. And some do in certain situations. But a little, couple of boxes of herbs like that? That'll be good for a future. And that's good for me. I can deal with that.

I think sometimes there's too much available stuff when it comes to leafy greens right now. And that's all that's really out there right now because of the time of year.

I think people get a little, "Oh, I'm going to grow a lot of this. And then I'm going to have a bunch. And then I can sell it. And everyone's going to buy it."

And it's like, "Well, I only go through a pound or 2 pounds of arugula a week. So I can only buy that amount." But I think that's something that a lot of people have to think about. I prefer variety over huge amounts. I still think so.

Nick: So here's literally the million dollar question. Have you ever had a farm come up to you before they built their farm and go, "What can we grow for you? What are you not getting?" And ask you before they build.

Andrea: Right. I've actually gotten some random emails and stuff like that from ranches saying, "Hey, in about a year, we're going to have grass fed beef" and list off all these things. "Is that something that would interest you?"

And I'm like, "Well, sure. But I buy within the month, within the moment." And so I'm like, "When you're ready, come to me." But I can tell you that most chefs like me are going to be interested if you have something different, unique, or if you have something that you can provide for us that's going to give us an edge.

Nick: And I imagine it gets a little tiresome just seeing the same mustard greens over and over and over again.

Andrea: It is. And that's the thing. We want to buy from everybody. So we want to help out everybody. We're not being like, "Oh, we're only going to buy from this person." And some people might because they're like, "Look. We've been loyal to this person for years. We're only going to buy that from them."

But I try to buy from everybody. I create dishes on my menu so that I can do that. I create dishes where you sauté greens. And I can go through a lot at once specifically because I know there are a lot of greens coming in.

So I try to work with people like that. Some chefs don't do that because they don't want their creativity to be taken away from them from that. But it's tough, for sure.

But when you do have a lot of variety like that and you're in a small area that

only can do certain things—We're in Texas. We're in north Texas. We can only do certain things this time of year. We can only do certain cool crops and stuff like that. So it's hard to get variety.

But I think if people try to be a little bit more experimental maybe and do just smaller amounts of things—we don't need giant quantities all the time. Just give me a little box of something interesting. And I'll probably buy it from you.

So that's what I would say to most farmers. And I know this is what a lot of chefs say. Just give me something interesting. And it doesn't have to be in huge quantities. Just show me what you can provide. And we'll go from there.

If we want more, I'll let you know if we want more for the most part unless it's a potato or an onion. We'll take a lot of those because we go through generally a lot of potatoes and onions. But yeah, that's what I would say for sure.

Nick: And your menu, not only is it very extensive and also branches off into—you can do herbs in the cocktails that you do.

Andrea: Right. Right, right.

Nick: But I like your menu because it's broken down—beef, chicken, all this.

Andrea: Right.

Nick: And being able to come to your place over the last year and seeing those seasonal changes and then not only that but seeing the consistency that you carry on from the time that menu changes to right before it changes again—

Andrea: Right.

Nick: The dishes are the same. And I can tell that the greens are different.

Andrea: Right.

Nick: But I'm a produce snob.

Andrea: Right. So you know. But, yeah, like I said, our enchiladas, we use succotash because we know we can get certain produce, squashes different times of year.

That dish will always be the same on the menu. But we know, because if we tried it a lot of different times, it changes throughout different times of year. Same with the roasted chicken.

Nick: It's a great example because that's the one I do have most consistently at your place.

Andrea: Right. And it changes. The base of it doesn't change. But yeah, the succotash on it changes a little bit with the season, like you said. The same with the roasted chicken. We change it seasonally with the greens and stuff like that. So that's kind of my goal with certain dishes on the menu, to make it easier to buy things from local farmers.

Nick: So let's talk a little bit now about what you would like to see and some maybe do's and don'ts about selling.

Andrea: Sure.

Nick: Coming up and selling to you or presenting to you. Give some insights into your schedule.

Andrea: Okay.

Nick: And that side of the industry because I think a lot of people miss really how busy you guys are.

Andrea: It's tough. So just to give you a rundown of our day—our restaurant opens at 8 o'clock for all of our cooks. They come in at 8 o'clock. My morning sous chef comes in at 8 o'clock. We get deliveries between 8 and 11 o'clock. 11 o'clock is when our front doors open basically for service.

Yeah, it's best to get them in the mornings just because that's when we're doing all of our food production and everything. When it comes to contacting a chef, most of us have emails. It's good to have email.

Probably the worst thing to do is leave a little note at the front desk of my restaurant because most likely it'll disappear. And then a name and phone number, it's just so tough to understand what that's for.

We have email cards and stuff like that up at the front desk. So that's the best thing to do. Just ask for my email or something like that from the host stand.

And then email me your product. If you have a website, any kind of information you have on yourself. That's the best way to get a hold of me.

But yeah, when it comes to deliveries, the mornings or even in the afternoons—our restaurant is closed between 3 and 5. That's when we're resetting and getting everything ready to go for dinner. If you schedule something, that's the best time for me to meet with somebody if you want to actually show me something.

It's not the best time to pop in though. I'm usually in meetings between 3 and 5. But like I said, if you schedule something with me, that's the perfect time to actually physically meet me for farmers and stuff like that if they want to bring in some product or something.

You can always drop something off for me to look at. Just make sure that it gets back to the kitchen. That's the hardest thing—being in a big kitchen.

Nick: Never go to the front door.

Andrea: Yeah. Well, you can go to the front door. Just come in. Don't worry about interrupting anything. Just come in and go to the back. That's the best thing to do.

We have an open kitchen. So it's easy for us to do that. Other kitchens, maybe not so much. You might want to go to a back door of other kitchens. But we always have at least two sous chefs in every day. So you can always ask who the sous chef is or if the chef is around. If not, then talk to a sous chef. Just say, "I wanted to leave these samples for the chef to see."

Nick: And for people that don't know, what is a sous chef's responsibility?

Andrea: A sous chef pretty much is the person that is responsible for all the prep, is responsible for making sure that everything is running properly, making sure that the cooks are all set up. The sous chef is the all-encompassing, does all of the productions stuff.

Nick: And he's going to make sure the stuff gets to you.

Andrea: Right. Yeah, exactly. He's like my number two. If I had one sous chef, he's my number two. And I have two, luckily, so they're both like my number two guys that when I'm not in the kitchen, they step in. And they're in charge

basically. They're kind of like the manager of the kitchen. So that's the best way to see them.

But yeah, that's how my day is. I usually get in, depending on the day mid morning or so. And then I'm there till usually late at night. So you can email me anytime, even text message if I know who you are. It helps that I know who you are to make sure that, "Hey is that okay?" Just so I'm not like, "Who is this?"

But yeah, honestly, email is the best thing because it's always going to be there. It's not going to disappear. It's just writing something down.

Nick: What information would be handy if somebody is dropping you something off? Obviously, price list, quantities, that kind of thing. Is there anything that you see missing a lot of time?

Andrea: When it comes to meat, I want to know where it's coming from. What do you feed it? How big is your production? If you're going to give me a sample of beef, how much can I get when it comes to meat because that's difficult.

If you have pigs, tell me how many pigs you have. And if I can only get one pig every quarter, stuff like that, okay, that's fine. Just let me know what that looks like for me.

When it comes to produce, similar kind of thing. If you give me a little basket of peppers, I'll be like, "Okay, tell me about how much you can provide." If it's only right now, that's fine, too. "Hey, I only have 20 pounds of these peppers. Are you willing to buy those right now from me? I might have some more in a couple months or stuff like that."

That's good information to know. Varieties, that's always good to know information about the actual produce.

Nick: Especially if it's oddball.

Andrea: Right. If it's odd. And like I said, I like the odd stuff. So bring me odd stuff for sure. At much as you can give me—some of the stuff, I'm like, "I don't need to know everything." But at the same time, it doesn't hurt to put it on there. I'm not going to be like, "Oh, I wouldn't need to know that."

Nick: Yeah.

Andrea: But it's good to know. And obviously, where the farm is. Where is this product coming from? Is it something that got shipped in and you have a lot of it and you're just trying to get rid of it? Is it actually from your farm, that kind of stuff.

Nick: How tight is the cooking community as far as chefs? Do you guys talk to each other?

Andrea: It's a small world for sure. Some of us might not talk that often, but when we see each other, we talk like normal. There are a couple of chefs that I see maybe a couple times a year that I've known over the years. And it's just like any sort of colleague situation. "Hey, how you doing?" Stuff like that.

But it's smaller than you think. You can see people pop up with new restaurants. And you're like, "Oh, yeah. I worked with that person six years ago."

But Dallas is especially small. And obviously, McKinney is super small.

Nick: Yeah.

Andrea: Because we pretty much all know each other in McKinney.

Nick: If you guys are out and about and doing a collaboration—

Andrea: Like Chestnut Square?

Nick: Yes.

Andrea: Yeah.

Nick: So you guys obviously get together a few times a year with other chefs, other producers. "How can we help each other out?"

Andrea: Right.

Nick: Which is very unique. I don't see that a whole lot. If you wanted to do a collaboration with other farms and other chefs together, do you have any words of advice of how to approach a project like that?

Andrea: Well, certainly, it helps if it's a fundraiser or something like that. It definitely helps to get that community involved. We do dinners with Chestnut

Square every year. We do it to benefit Chestnut Square and to benefit the farmer's market specifically.

And so it's good to get chefs involved that actually use the farmer's market or go into the farmer's market. So that's important. Make sure that everybody involved actually cares about the project. But just contact people.

We also do stuff with Community Garden Kitchen, another local charity group that is working on building basically a free dinner restaurant sort of thing that people that just don't have money to pay for dinner or pay for a meal for their kids, they can just come in, no questions asked. And it's in McKinney a mile from the Square.

So it's important to get people involved that care about the issue and that it affects. And so that's why we try to get people in the Square involved with that because it affects them because it's within a mile from us.

So it's not hard. It's not hard to find people that actually want to contribute when it comes to that.

Now, collaborations when it comes to not doing it for charity, those are always fun. And for us, that's our goal, to try to improve our community. So that's another way of doing it. If you're just trying to get people aware of a certain company, do a collaboration maybe with a brewery. We have several new breweries in McKinney.

Nick: Yeah.

Andrea: So we have plans to do collaboration with one of them or do a dinner or something like that. And it's usually just to get awareness of them or awareness of a new product that we're going to be working on or something like that. So that's the best way to do it, just everyone likeminded.

Nick: When we do collaborations, sometimes it's with other local farmers. Sometimes, it's with other vendors that aren't necessarily selling—

Andrea: Right.

Nick: Talk a little bit about the cross marketing, cross promotion because I would have never known about the paper you guys use for your menus without that being there.

Andrea: Oh, yeah.

Nick: And how important that is to those other people.

Andrea: Well, what we do in our restaurant because that's one of our main missions—when it comes to our goals as a restaurant to make money, we want that money to go towards our community and go towards bettering our community.

Our main mission is to educate people. And so we feel it's important to educate our staff. That's how we get our message across, through our wait staff. When people come in and sit and eat, we make sure that they know where this paper comes from.

And they know all the story back behind all the food that we have. “Hey, these bratwursts are from this pig that was raised in Farmersville and was taken care of by one person. There were only three pigs that lived on the farm.” And that information, I think, people buy into why we're doing it.

But also, it's important to get out there in the media. We have an Instagram account. We have a Facebook account. We have a website. We have several websites. Some focus just on the charity work that we do. And then one just focuses on Harvest as a whole.

So it's important to try to reach everybody in that sense through just word of mouth or just through taking pictures on Instagram and making sure everyone sees visually what we're doing, not just verbally.

Nick: I think when you have that abundance mentality of helping everybody in the community, it just strengthens the whole thing.

Andrea: It does.

Nick: I always try to bring these other products to market through our sales pipeline.

Andrea: Right.

Nick: Because other people, they just go to the farmer's market. And that's all they have.

Andrea: Right.

Nick: So if we can help them out and they tell their people about us, it just works.

Andrea: It does, yeah. And what's nice about being in McKinney is that we do work a lot with other chefs and other restaurants. So we work a lot with Patina Green. And we always tell people, "Hey, if you're looking for this product, go to Patina Green."

And they'll tell people, "Hey, if you're looking for dinner, go to Harvest. They have likeminded goals." So that helps, too. Everyone sends each other to their restaurants which is weird. But at the same time, we're a little bit different business types so we can do that.

But that also is a nice thing about downtown McKinney. We work together like that. We're trying to improve downtown McKinney as a whole for sure.

Nick: And within that collaboration, you still have to be different.

Andrea: You do.

Nick: Like you say, you're looking for—

Andrea: It's still competitive, yeah. Yeah.

Nick: Absolutely. Here it's a friendly competitive atmosphere.

Andrea: It is. It is.

Nick: What are you looking for constantly that you're not finding? We talked about different stuff. But is it herbs that are a problem? Or is it greens that are a problem? And this is going to be regionally different.

Andrea: Sure. It is. I always like a variety of herbs. I'm always looking for herbs, especially for us. I say "us" being Harvest. We use herbs in our cocktails and stuff like that. Another smaller restaurant might not use herbs at all because they don't sell cocktails. And they don't sell certain dishes that need garnish and stuff like that.

But yeah, I'm always looking for herbs and fruit. Fruit is the hardest thing to find up here. And I know that's because we live in Texas. There's not a lot of fruit that grows here. But I'm always looking for just interesting things— foraged stuff.

And that's becoming a huge thing. It's a lot of work to find foraged berries and stuff like that. But at some point, that's what we're going to be doing ourselves instead. So that's always stuff that we're looking for—interesting things that you find already on your land that naturally grows that's edible.

And I think a lot of people don't realize that a lot of things are edible. As long as it's nontoxic or non poisonous, we could figure out a way to make it taste like something.

Nick: And again, you're okay with just doing a special for a night.

Andrea: Yeah, exactly.

Nick: Or a small run there.

Andrea: Exactly. If it's for a special dinner or something—I do ten-people dinners all the time and stuff like that, that I could just garnish a little bit. I've had something that was literally this amount of lavender that I had on my farm that I incorporated into a dish. And every dish had lavender because it's so strong and potent that you don't need much. Bay leaves, stuff like that that I know I could use.

Nick: Given your connections, have you ever had to reach out to a grower to get something?

Andrea: You mean like in a sense of—?

Nick: If you knew you had a dinner coming up.

Andrea: Right.

Nick: And “I sure would like something purple” or some type of –

Andrea: Oh, have planned something ahead of time with them? I have with meat for sure. I've definitely gotten whole pigs planned ahead of time just because that's kind of a big investment for somebody. So they want to make sure that you're going to buy it for them.

But when it comes to growing things specifically for me, not yet. And I want to. I want to get involved with that. It's hard to plan that out myself. It's a lot better if somebody just gave me a suggestion and was like, “Hey, here's a list of things that can grow. Any of this interest you?”

And I will say that I do have an indoor grower that does do that. We have sat down and had a couple meetings. And he was like, “Hey, this is my catalog of stuff that I want to grow.”

Nick: Yeah.

Andrea: “Does any of this interest you?” And he grew some stuff like sorrel and celery. Celery is something that you don’t see very often grown. But it can grow indoors okay.

Nick: How often do you get to go to the farmer’s market?

Andrea: Right now, obviously, not much just because there’s not a farmer’s market. But I try to go. It’s obviously once a week. But I try to go on Saturday mornings. I’m not the 7:30 farmer’s market person like some chefs are. I have two kids that are young. And it’s really hard to get me out.

But usually, I try to get in before work. So about 10 o'clock is usually when I’ll go and just at least go visit with all the farmers. A lot of them are my vendors anyway. So I’ll see them throughout the week, the ones that sell to me outside of the farmer’s market anyway.

Nick: I like that you say that you’re open to what’s brought in to you.

Andrea: Right.

Nick: So it’s okay to suggest, “Hey, this might pair up nicely with—”

Andrea: Right. I’m okay with that. I’m a pretty modest chef. I know I don’t know everything. And I’m constantly wanting to learn. So if you have suggestions, I’ll hear it for sure. If you want to make a cheese and you’re like, “I think this will really go well with this,” I’ll be like, “Okay, that’s good to know.”

And then obviously, I can always give suggestions, too. I work with somebody that makes cheese. And he was like, “Is there anything on your farm that you could give me? And I could incorporate it into my cheese, flavor-wise?”

And I’m like, “Sure.” So I’ve done a couple collaborations with some farmers like that and some cheese makers. So that’s been cool. And I’m always open to doing stuff like that for sure.

Nick: What would you say is the biggest disconnect between a farm and a chef or the restaurant industry as far as some type of barrier, some type of gap that needs to be crossed?

Andrea: I think the biggest thing for me is appreciating where it comes from and appreciating, even if it's just an onion, the amount of time that it takes to get to that onion. You don't just pick it and it's ready. It's got to sit. It's got to cure. It loses weight. A lot of it is charged by weight. So it's just learning that the process is not easy, even for an onion.

And knowing that, yeah, you can get an onion for \$20 for \$25 pounds. And it might be a little bit more expensive to get it from someone local. But you know all that money is going straight to them. And they're making more money because of that.

So that's what I think the value of all the produce that you get locally. I think a lot of chefs don't appreciate the value of it as much just because of the all the hard work that's put into it.

And that's where I've taught myself. And that's where I've learned that learning the value of things will help. And that will actually go into your guests in your restaurant. Once they understand the value of it, then it'll just keep going.

Nick: And from your point of view, what do you wish farmer's knew?

Andrea: Like I said, I think farmers need to know sometimes if we're really busy and we seem like we don't care, we do. A lot of them do. It's just that we have a lot of things that people throw at us at once.

Don't give up on us. I think that's the number one thing. If you keep emailing, unless somebody says, "Don't ever email me again," just keep doing it. At some point, we might bite. And that's the thing. Just try to open it up to people that don't normally use the product.

And it's really hard for places like hotels and stuff because they have a process. And they can't just write you a check or give you cash right off the bat. But you never know. I know some hotels that use small, local farms.

So that's what I say. Just be persistent. Keep experimenting with doing interesting things. But make sure that you have a product that's good and that you have something that you know that you believe in yourself. So I think

that's just my thing, just consistently contacting us and making sure that we know that you're always going to be there.

Sometimes, people are really good about emailing you and hitting you really early. And then they fade off. And you're like, "Well, I guess they're not doing anything anymore." And it's like, "No, they just stopped contacting you."

Nick: You just need that reminder that that they're still up in operation.

Andrea: You just need it, even if it's once a week. Even if it's once a month even. Just something to let them know that you're still out there. So I think don't give up on us is a good thing. I think most of us want something interesting. And that's the best way to get something interesting, getting it locally.

Nick: Right.

Andrea: I do have one situation where a gentleman emailed me and was very short information. He was like, "Hey, I've got some buffalo. Can I bring it by?"

And I'm like, "Okay. Sure. Send me some more information about where it's from."

And he's like, "Well, I'm going to come by tomorrow."

It was a really odd email exchange. And then he showed up. And he had these bags of buffalo. And it was mostly just ground buffalo.

Nick: Maybe. Maybe. We hope.

Andrea: Yeah, and so he's like, "Yeah, my dad came and went hunting up somewhere north and brought a bunch of stuff." It was basically a guy that just had a bunch of buffalo left over from a hunt. He was trying to sell me ground buffalo.

And I'm like, "Well, I don't really have a need for ground buffalo. It's not something special or anything that's local. It's just ground buffalo which is great. Someone else might want that for sure. But for my particular restaurant, I'm good."

But I try to be very cordial. And I understand everyone's situation. Hey, he had a bunch of buffalo. He's just trying to figure out what to do with it.

But for the most part, if you're a business and you understand that you're a business, just come in like you would and just give me your information. And that's pretty much all I want.

Nick: And be coherent.

Andrea: And be coherent. Well, know about your product. I know all of us are learning and we might not know everything about our product. Some chefs might know more about shiso leaves than I do. But like I said, just coherent. It makes it seem like you have an actual good business plant.

And I think, "Okay, well, this guy is going to be here in a couple months. So that's good. I can start buying from him. And I can plan on using more product from them in the future." That's how I want to see it. If I'm going to start working with somebody, are they going to be around?

And we want to do everything we can to keep you around as much as possible. We want to be able to buy from somebody so that way they can actually be a business.

Nick: Have you seen anything from the customer side about asking—how important is it to the customers that things are local?

Andrea: Some customers are more than others. Some people come in because of our location. And they love the vibe. And they love the service. And some people come in because of the food. They like the freshness of it. Everyone has their reasons for coming in.

And some people love the stories behind all the food. And so we definitely want to make sure that everybody gets the opportunity to hear that for sure with educating all of our servers.

Nick: So how handy would it be if a farm gave educational materials for your staff?

Andrea: Oh, that'd be great! The more information we know about you, the better. That's just more things. We have certain servers that can go on and on and on.

Nick: And they do.

Andrea: And they do.

Nick: The staff is great.

Andrea: Certain ones do more than others. And that's fine because some people want to hear it. And they'll be like, "Look. If you want more information, you can go to our website. And then if you want to actually be involved and help out, here are some organizations that we work with and stuff like that."

Ultimately, that is something that we feel like that has shown that people are actually listening and they actually care, the support we get through all the organizations and all the charity work we get from our diners.

Nick: Do you have any advice for chefs that are coming up or fixing to start something on how they should approach a small farm or going local?

Andrea: So what I did when I first started was I found other restaurants that were doing it. And a lot of times, if they're using local products, they'll list the farms. And I just did searches, Google searches. As weird as that sounds, you'd be surprised how much that stuff pops up.

But I just started emailing people, contacting people. Going to the farmer's market is the number one first thing you should do because once that word of mouth is out that there's somebody out there looking to buy local, the farmers all talk.

And they'll say, "Hey, this person is looking for product. Why don't you give them a call if you're trying to get rid of some stuff or you want to sell some stuff?"

But I think word of mouth was the easiest way to get it out there—going to the farmer's market, talking to other farmers, just one. That's all it really takes, just talking to one. And like I said, they all kind of know a lot of different other farmers too because it's the community as well.

So that's the best way to do it. And then just start contacting as many as you can. Nowadays with the internet, it makes it way easier. And a lot of them have email. So it's not hard.

Nick: Well, and one of the things that we did was we looked at a chef that you and I both know. And we saw where they had checked in.

Andrea: Yeah.

Nick: And now we know where the chefs are eating.

Andrea: right.

Nick: And to that point, I always highly, highly suggest that other farms—if I wanted to sell to you, go eat at your place.

Andrea: Right.

Nick: At least to pick up the vibe and see what's important to you.

Andrea: It helps. And that is something important. Before you go into a restaurant and you want to sell something to them, understand what they're serving. Go look at their menu. Go in and eat there.

Understand where they're at, their price points. If you know you have a bunch of tenderloin but the restaurant's price points are pretty low, you're probably not going to be able to sell it to them. But you certainly can try. But just know the price points and know what kind of food they sell for sure.

Nick: It's still market research at its core.

Andrea: It is. It is. And market research is a big deal. And I think a lot of farmers don't think about it that way. But you should. You should know who your buyers are. And you should know what you're trying to sell.

Nick: If you want to see to a five star restaurant, you need to go eat at five start restaurants to understand—

Andrea: The quality, yeah.

Nick: If I bring this bok choy to you, now I get to see the end result.

Andrea: Right.

Nick: That connection is made of what actually is going to happen.

Andrea: Well, and one thing—another chef that I know was like, “I will take all of your organic arugula that has holes in it because I'm going to put it in a sandwich. And you won't even see the holes.” But if you go to a five start place that they're going to use it for garnish, they're probably not going to use it. So

like you said, it's just knowing your restaurant, knowing your buyer, knowing how they use that product for sure.

Nick: Well, I cannot thank you enough for your insights.

Andrea: No problem.

Nick: I can't thank you enough for changing your menu, including your cocktail menu.

Andrea: I know. We're trying. We're excited about what's coming up.

Nick: Alright.

Andrea: So it'll be a good year for sure.

Nick: Well, thank you for your time again.

Andrea: Thank you so much.