

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

10/1/2018

Dinner with Friends and Flowers

Chris Beytes





Two hundred enthusiastic flower lovers dine alfresco in Wisconsin in early September, guests of Star Valley Flowers and the American Grown Field to Vase Dinner Tour. Yours truly was fortunate enough to be among the 200 attendees who enjoyed locally sourced food surrounded by the beautiful flowers and cut branches grown at Star Valley's 200-acre farm in the rolling "driftless" region of southwest Wisconsin.

Star Valley specializes in "fruiting, flowering and decorative branches for the floral industry," owner John Zehrer told the guests, one quarter of whom were florists or fellow cut flower growers. But more than half of those in attendance were consumers who were simply attracted to the idea of dining amid all that beauty.

This was the 28th Field to Vase Dinner since the American Grown program launched the concept in 2015 and the largest yet, said Kasey Cronquist, the event "ambassador" (and head of the California Cut Flower Commission). Normally, they'd cap registration at 150, but American Grown kept getting calls for tickets and farmer John kept agreeing to add tables (he's got a long dirt road, he joked). The next thing they knew, they had 200 people seated at a 200-ft. long dinner table under arches of farm-grown bittersweet.

Floral design work was provided by Greg Campbell and Erick New of Garden District in Memphis, Tennessee, who spent two days working exclusively with flowers and branches from the farm to create both the tablescape and the many vignettes throughout the property. Dinner was prepared by local chef and James Beard honoree Luke Zahm of the Driftless Café, using all locally sourced, mostly organic, ingredients.

If a Field to Vase Dinner pops up anywhere near you, I encourage you to go. Visit www.americangrownflowers.org/fieldtovase to get on the mailing list for the 2019 schedule. **GT**