

Farm-to-Table

By Marilyn Nieves

The Farm-to-Table movement has become increasingly popular in recent years. More and more people are starting to eat locally grown food, shop at local markets, and visit restaurants that use locally-produced ingredients. We've seen numerous documentaries on the poor treatment of animals in large producing farms worldwide. The use of pesticides and hormones on crops has become common knowledge and all of this has been driving people to go back to our roots,

eating clean food we know comes from a local source.

But what exactly is Farm-to-Table? There is no specific criteria that defines it, but generally, if you know the farm the food comes from because you are buying direct, and if they are not using hormones or chemicals to alter its natural state, you are eating farm-to-table. With the growing interest in this lifestyle, it makes for a great theme this month to photograph for stock.

Uses for the Farm-to-Table theme as stock:

- ▶ Restaurants and anywhere that food is served
- ▶ Travel & tourism industries
- ▶ Agriculture industry & publications
- ▶ Health and wellness businesses
- ▶ Holistic practice
- ▶ Local city and regional magazines
- ▶ Culinary and food publications



This list is just the tip of the iceberg. There are a growing number of companies and organizations promoting Farm-to-Table as an effort to market themselves and gain customers that seek a healthier lifestyle.

Where to shoot Farm-to-Table Stock

When thinking of where to find opportunities to shoot Farm-to-Table stock photos, my first thought is the actual farm the food comes from. Try arranging a visit to your local farmer. Every farm I've ever visited has been very welcoming and the farmers take great pride in their process and are usually willing to talk to you about their practices. Of course, you will want to get in touch to get permission to shoot beforehand and find out if they are willing to model, as that would make for an even better stock opportunity. You may be able to work out a trade of modeling for photos they can use in their marketing materials.

You could also check to see if your area has a farmer's market. Many towns have open air markets where local farmers can sell direct to

consumers, especially in the summer months.

Maybe you or a friend has a vegetable garden growing at home. Even some simple potted plants or windowsill herbs could work for this theme. The farm-to-table idea is all about embracing local, small-scale agriculture, farming, and gardening.

Another angle to try is the "table" side of things, at a local restaurant or café who serves farm-direct meals. See if you

can ask them ahead of time and set up a shoot, or let them know you'll be taking some photos under the "farm-to-table" theme, and ask to sit near a window, where you'll have good light. It's always good form to offer them some of the best shots, too.

And finally, if you need to keep it simple this month, you can always set up a shoot in your kitchen using some fresh local produce that you know comes from a farm in your area.



What to shoot?

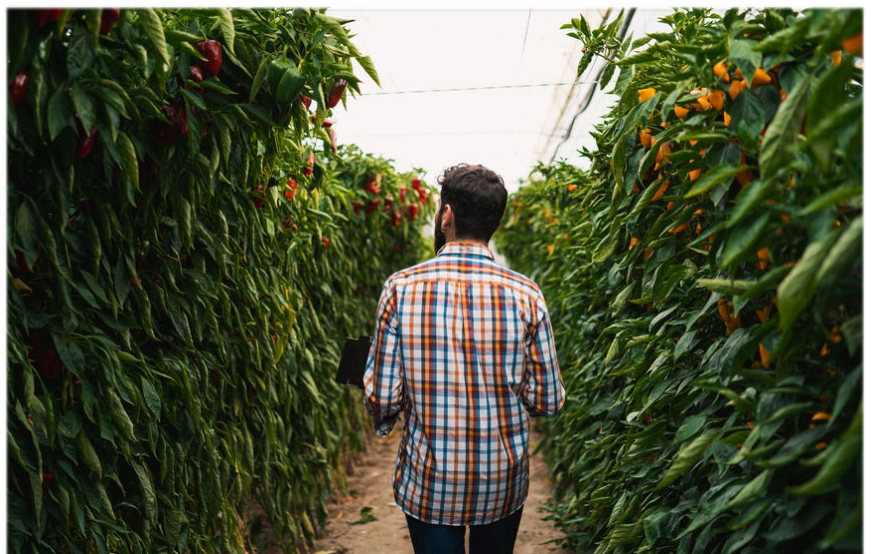
The Process

Farming is hard and often dirty work, so don't be afraid to show that side. However, you can also show a slightly more romanticized version of the process to recreate the nostalgic feeling we get when we think of Farm-to-Table.

For example, the bottom right photo of a man walking in a bell pepper greenhouse puts you right in the middle of the process. He's walking through his crops and inspecting them. The perspective not only gives you a sense of depth and space, it makes you feel that he's connected to his crops. That sense of responsibility comes through in this image.

This photo of a female farmer is as close as you get to eating raw vegetables. She has just walked up with a freshly picked bushel of carrots and a crate of potatoes. The dirty boots feel authentic and her stance speaks to pride in her work and a sense of accomplishment.

Get down and dirty while the crop is being harvested and capture the details of the plant roots being pulled. Photographing this theme



from many angles will give you a nice variety of images to submit to your stock agencies.

A great smiling shot of a farmer selling turnips to a customer directly at a market definitely captures Farm-to-Table quite authentically.

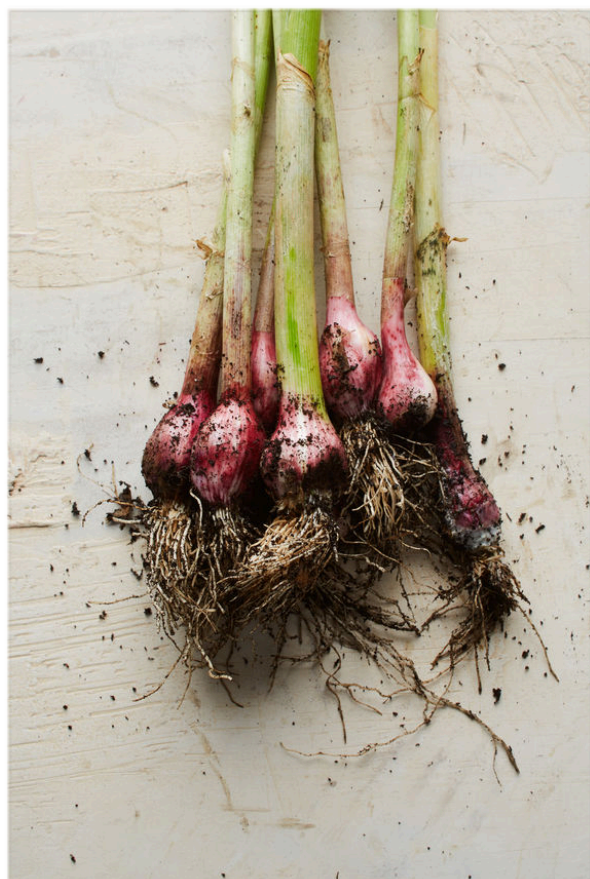
The Food

A still life setup using beautiful fresh vegetables. The small quantities give you a personalized feel and the wood and burlap material used as a backdrop adds to the rustic feeling of the center right photo.

Texture and Color

The beautiful textures of the fresh vegetables just pulled from the ground create a lot of interest in this shot in the lower right corner.

The background you choose can also be the texture to enhance your image. In the photo below, the worn wooden background adds a warm, farmhouse feel.



The Animals

The other aspect of Farm-to-Table are the animals. Think of free roaming animals that are cared for in a humane way. The photo of this woman gently carrying a hen portrays the care that goes into raising animals in these kinds of farm settings.

Or, a wide-angle shot of chickens roaming a field gives you a sense that the animals are healthy, happy, and well cared for.



Shoot the "After" Experience

We've shot the process and the food ingredients, so the next natural progression would be to photograph when it is served.

Photographing a meal in an outdoor, natural environment will help give you the feeling of Farm-to-Table by association.

If you have a restaurant in your local area that specializes in Farm-to-Table, consider approaching them to see if you could take some photos in their space. Again, you may be able to do a trade of images in exchange for a signed property release from the owner.

Another option would be to set something up yourself. Any outdoor, natural space would lend itself to a picnic dinner with friends featuring locally grown food that you could photograph.



What Equipment to Use

You really can shoot this theme with just about any lens you may already have. My preference is shooting with a long lens, like the 100mm F2.8 macro, that provides a lovely, shallow depth-of-field. However, you can create a similar effect with just about any telephoto lens if you use a low aperture number such as $f/2.8$, $f/4$, or $f/5.6$ and get fairly close to your subject.



Overhead shots are created with a wide-angle lens, like a 17-40mm, and give you a sense of the environment. It can also give the photo a feeling of abundance when the frame is filled with your subject.



Using a zoom lens, like the 70-200mm, you can keep a safe distance from animals and capture their natural state without disturbing them.

The best advice is to work with the lenses you have to their fullest potential while also paying careful attention to composing your shot in the best possible way to get the Farm-to-Table concept across.



More Shooting Tips:

- ▶ Plan your shoot at the peak of the season for whichever food you'd like to photograph. (Summertime gives you many options for subjects!)
- ▶ If you are picking food to shoot as a still life, make sure it's looking fresh and delicious. Freshness is key.
- ▶ Brightly-lit but soft (diffused) light is most pleasing, especially with a texture-heavy subject. (Think window light or outdoor shade.)
- ▶ Capture the vibrant colors of the vegetables and fruits against a deep color like slate stone or a bright background like white painted wood to provide contrast and make your subject stand out.
- ▶ Use engaging models and capture interactions. Anytime you can include people or hints of the human element in your shots, do it!



Keywording from Farm-to-Table

When thinking of Farm-to-Table, some keywords that come to mind are freshness, healthy, farm and organic. As examples, here are a few images and the keywords that can apply to them.

**Beets, vegetables,
freshness, preparation,
cooking, bowl, healthy
eating, farm-to-table**



**Cooking, garlic,
vegetables, food,
kitchen, healthy
eating, farm-to-
table, freshness,
table, chopping,
preparation**

Good keywording is the key to the success of your image selling on any of the stock agency websites, because it's how a customer will find your photo.

This theme is making me hungry. I hope you are as inspired as I am now to plan a shoot for this Farm-to-Table themed stock photo challenge. It's a timely and popular theme that should sell very well.

Now get out there and find what's fresh and local in your area and make the most of it!



**Basil, plant, agriculture, herb,
garden, carrying, organic,
care, healthy, farm-to-table,
planting**