

Eat, drink, be generous

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By Jerry Shriver, USA TODAY

After years of celebrating world-class bounty in an elite high-altitude playground, the Food & Wine Classic in Aspen, Colo., will mark its 25th anniversary with a down-to-earth reseeded project for charity.

Organizers of the June 15-17 festival are launching Grow for Good, a campaign to raise \$1 million for Farm to Table, a national organization that supports local farms. The money will go toward education, tools and technology to promote sustainable agriculture in 25 cities.

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"We'll be helping farmers to stay alive and to stay in business. We hope to save maybe 1,000 farms over the next five years," says Dana Cowin, editor in chief of *Food & Wine* magazine, a Classic sponsor.

The campaign is one of dozens of charity initiatives started by culinary festivals and auctions, which have raised hundreds of millions of dollars for causes ranging from medical research to culinary education. Among the most successful has been the Auction Napa Valley (June 7-10 in St. Helena, Calif.), which has raised \$68 million for health care and low-income housing since 1981. More typical is the \$330,000 raised by Colorado's Taste of Vail (April 11-15) for local charities over the past 16 years.

At the Aspen event, 4% of each \$975 ticket will go toward the campaign, and another \$50,000 will come from the sale of 50 special \$2,500 tickets. Additional money will be raised through an online auction, sponsorships, donations and other special events.

And in case any attendees are concerned that the festival is changing its flavor, Cowin notes that this year's program will include a tasting of the rare Screaming Eagle cult wine and appearances by Thomas Keller, Masaharu Morimoto and other celeb chefs.

"So many individuals and corporations realize the responsibility that comes with living in America," she says. "So it would make sense to me that other food and wine fests that celebrate the good life would take on these charities."