

Starting a Restoration Branch of The American Chestnut Foundation

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Charting the future of chestnut restoration.

This mission of The American Chestnut foundation is truly remarkable; restoring the American chestnut back to our eastern forests. As TACF moves forward with early testing and restoration efforts, there is a need for more local, grass-roots support to help further TACF's efforts.

Forming a local Restoration Branch of The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) is both a fun and rewarding experience and way for local communities to get involved with chestnut restoration. As we continue with our state breeding efforts, and eventually expand into early restoration efforts, TACF will need grass-root community support to move our mission forward.

The concept of a Restoration Branch is simple; host an annual dinner or event in your local community to share the conservation efforts of TACF. TACF Branches provide your community the opportunity to get involved locally to bring the American chestnut back to our forests. The price of the ticket *must* include the cost of a TACF membership. This way, all your attendees will receive TACF publications and have the opportunity to learn more about the American chestnut. By having the ability to communicate with these new members through TACF publications, chapters will enhance their ability to expand the on-the-ground volunteer force needed to accomplish state-level priorities.

Goals of TACF Restoration Branch

Goals of TACF Restoration Branch (specific goals depend on state objectives)

- Provide support to your TACF state chapter to build and support local breeding efforts
- Support testing and evaluation of *Restoration Chestnut* plantings including progeny testing, field testing, and future restoration plantings
- Share the story of the American chestnut with your local community through outreach to schools, establishing outreach and educational plantings (could include *Restoration Chestnuts*), etc.
- Recruit new members to help work on local restoration and breeding projects
- Provide opportunity for the local community to become involved locally with TACF conservation efforts
- Support germplasm conservation by planting pure stands of American chestnuts
- Raise funds to support local, state, and national goals

The Restoration Branch and the State Chapter

The success of each Restoration Branch is dependent on the relationship with the state chapter. Each Restoration Branch operates as an arm of the state chapter and under the direction of the TACF state chapter. Each TACF state chapter provides overall goals and objectives for TACF Restoration Branch projects. The state chapter establishes spending guidelines and approval for projects the Restoration Branch would like to implement in their community to ensure that state-level objectives are met. By having the local Restoration Branch working in step with the state chapter ensures that each and every project helps move the TACF mission forward in a coordinated and effective manner.

State chapters are encouraged to provide flexibility for Branch activities. The state chapter should foster a sense of ownership with the local Branch and support local creativity. The ability of a local Branch to brand and further the efforts to TACF are truly dramatic.

The TACF Restoration Branch also operates under the umbrella of the TACF national office. In other words, the Restoration Branch is not incorporated as a separate 501 (c) 3. TACF national office will process memberships and other income received during the event on behalf of the Restoration Branch. This is designed to remove this administrative burden from the state chapter and help ensure that all IRS standards are met. TACF national office will handle all IRS reporting and auditing and provide the Restoration Branch and the state chapter a complete accounting of all fund balances available to the Restoration Branch and the State Chapter.

CAPACITY BUILDING – TACF RESTORATION BRANCHES

As our breeding program continues to expand and concurrent testing is initiated to include testing and evaluation of our early lines of potentially blight-resistant trees, a large network of volunteers is mandatory. This increase in overall organization capacity is essential if TACF is to achieve our ultimate mission restoring the American chestnut to its historic range.

A key component in TACF's Tactical plan is a strategic approach to grow our state chapter infrastructure to enable the foundation to perform all elements of restoration.

The development of a Restoration Branch should not focus solely on planting *Restoration Chestnuts*. The purpose of the Restoration Branch is to expand the reach of the state chapter to more effectively implement the goals and objectives of the chapter. Planting *Restoration Chestnuts* in only one aspect of TACF's program; chapters must use extreme caution when promising *Restoration Chestnuts* as an incentive for starting a Branch. Continued management of existing breeding orchards and potential establishment of new orchards are of critical importance to the state chapter. In addition, the Restoration Branches serve a fundamental objective of building relationships at the grass-roots, local level to educate communities about the American chestnut and TACF's mission.

Although the Restoration Branches are a tremendous opportunity to assist the state chapter with planting and evaluating *Restoration Chestnuts*, this activity should not overshadow existing state-level priorities. As mentioned throughout this plan, *restoration* includes our current breeding program as well as planting and evaluating *Restoration Chestnuts*. Success of the Restoration Branch program is dependent on integrating the Branches into the state chapter system instead of the Branches working as autonomous entities.

BUILDING THE BRANCH SYSTEM

State chapters are each encouraged to establish a “Restoration Branch” state committee at the state board level to plan for future program growth. In addition, this committee will coordinate with new and developing Branches to ensure new events are started in a manner consistent with state objectives.

The Restoration Branch state-level committee should plan growth of Branches based on current and future needs of the chapter, and to foster increased fundraising and membership growth. There is nothing wrong with starting a Branch with the goal of membership recruitment and fundraising if that activity is something the local Branch would like to focus on.

The key to developing and *maintaining* a Restoration Branch is to ensure the Branch is provided enough direction and support to insure long-term interest is maintained. There are many people that would love the opportunity to become involved with TACF, but up to now have not had the platform to become involved; the Restoration Branches provide this platform.

The State committee should evaluate the potential for Branches based on the opportunity to support new and existing orchards, and future planting and evaluation of *Restoration Chestnuts*. It is easy to develop a “hit list” of likely towns where the establishment of a Branch is logical and needed to support chapter activities. Even if, for example, a local orchard already has a good volunteer base, there is still an opportunity to implement a Branch to involve additional people. An important point to keep in mind is that although you may have 150 or 200 people attend an event, only a handful will likely volunteer to participation with on-the-ground projects. But the *opportunity* to be involved and understand that something is being done “in their back yard” is very important to the growth of the Branch system.

What type of event should we have?

There is no set formula for a Restoration Branch event. The only requirement is that all attendees must purchase a TACF membership as part of their ticket price. By becoming a TACF member, TACF is afforded the opportunity to communicate with these new members through our publications. This education and outreach tool is critical. In addition, including membership as part of the ticket price allows TACF to better support state and national priorities. TACF is a volunteer, membership-based organization. Every member is critical to allow the organization to meet its mission.

For a newly formed branch, the first event may be a small wine-and-cheese reception to raise familiarity about TACF in the local community. Other groups may start out with a large dinner that includes raffles, silent auctions, live auctions, and other fundraising games. It is always best to fit the type of event to what will interest the community and still achieve TACF goals. Remember, TACF staff will help you plan your event.....it’s easy. For assistance, contact Bryan Burhans at the TACF corporate office at 828-281-0110.

To be a TACF Restoration Branch, you agree to:

- Submit “notification of event” form to Asheville Headquarters at least 60 days prior to the event
- Host the event and secure TACF memberships for all attendees (charged to attendees)
- Inform the audience about TACF’s mission and provide an overview of local projects in your area
- Submit all required financial information within 30 days of hosting the event

Does our event have to be a fundraiser?

No, you don’t have to raise funds at your event, especially for first-time events. However, after the Branch becomes established in the local community (usually after the first event) we strongly recommend fundraising at your event. In fact, most Branches will want to raise funds so they can secure the funding to complete restoration in their local area.

Fundraising at a Restoration Branch dinner is a very effective way to obtain funding for local restoration projects. TACF Restoration Branches are able use 50% of the net profit (after memberships and other costs such as meals) they raise on local projects. Each TACF state chapter will establish guidelines to provide the Branch with direction on what type of projects to implement. Input from the state chapter on local-level project funding is critical to ensure the entire organization is working in unison. However, by design, the local Restoration Branches have enormous flexibility in how they invest the money they raise at the local level.

How is the money raised at an event split?

The Restoration Branch program is designed to keep much of the funding raised by the Branch within the local community. However, Branches are encouraged to consult with their TACF state chapter to assist the state chapter with funding needs at the state level. Any net funds raised (gross profit minus membership and event costs) are held for the Branch by TACF headquarters for accounting purposes.

For a Branch to access funding for a project, the Branch will submit a *request for funding* through their state chapter for approval. The TACF state chapter will review requests for funding to ensure the project is in line with TACF state chapter objectives and goals. The TACF state chapter will notify TACF headquarters of the approval and headquarters will submit payment to the Branch.

- 50% net proceeds are available to the Restoration Branch for local projects
- 25% net proceeds raised at the event are available to the state chapter for state-level initiatives
- 25% net proceeds raised at the event are available to national headquarters to fund national-level priorities, such as regional Science Coordinators.

Getting Started

The First Step

Developing an effective and large committee is the first step in establishing a Restoration Branch. Look for people in your community that are well respected, have many contacts, and are willing to commit to serving on the committee. Committee members are responsible for all aspects of the Branch event.

You should hand-pick your committee members. Find the leaders in your community, even if they are busy people. However, busy people often find a way to get things done. Invite local individuals to work on your committee that come in contact with many people on a daily basis. Examples include salesmen, dentists, realtors, bankers or other business leaders that support conservation. Remember, your committee does not have to be an expert on American chestnut biology.

Your committee members do not have to be TACF members. In fact, usually very few of the committee members will come from our membership. However, at least one person on the committee should be a TACF member and understand our mission.

The larger your committee the more likely your event will be successful. Eight to 10 committee members is a good goal. It is critical to gain the support of your new committee during your first meeting. Hold your first committee meeting as soon as you have identified most of your committee members.

Often, hosting a small dinner or BBQ or meeting at a local restaurant is an excellent way to kick off your first committee meeting. This type of function will provide a more relaxed and comfortable environment, especially for individuals new to the group. Obviously, in lieu of hosting dinners for your new committee, any type of meeting area will suffice.

Agenda for Organizational Committee Meeting

7:00 p.m.....Introductions

7:00 p.m.....State objectives and purpose of hosting a Restoration Branch Dinner. Give overview of TACF mission and progress in your state.

7:20 p.m.....Overview of committee duties

7:30 p.m.....Appoint a chairman

7:40 p.m.....Develop appropriate committees

 Finance

 Arrangements

 Publicity

 Auction/prize donations

 Ticket order

 Sponsors

8:10 p.m.....Determine the date, place and time for the event. If this is not determined at the first meeting, this should be decided at the second meeting.

8:30 p.m. Answer questions

Where should we host the event?

There are many options available to you for a location to host the event. Obviously, you can host the event at an individual's home, but not many homes are large enough to host a large crowd.

Other potential sites include your local fire hall, high school auditorium, Elks Lodge, or at your local community college. Always try to find a place that offers no fee, or at least will let you host the event for a nominal charge.

Can we serve alcohol?

In most cases, yes you can serve alcohol at the event, but be sure to check local laws for your state or contact the TACF headquarters office for assistance. Often it's easier to offer a cash bar and let the company that provides this service take care of any license issues. Many groups will want to offer alcohol, just make sure you are following state law. In addition, offering alcohol can severely dip into net revenue for the event; make sure you plan appropriately.

How do we raise money at the event?

Raising money to support the TACF cause is not only important but it can be lots of fun. TACF currently does not offer merchandise to use for fundraising at events, but we may be able to help you locate some items. However, you can often get items donated from your local community. Some items that work well include:

- Artwork, especially if it incorporates your local college football team
- Certificates for restaurants, sporting events, and other area activities
- Home décor items
- Gardening equipment (use as a silent auction)
- Outdoor recreation equipment such as tents, clothing, boots
- Furniture, especially made from chestnut. However, must be donated or you will not likely make a profit
- Cooking items, such as knife sets, cutting board, and/or specialty items

At times you can find clearance sales and pick up items at a significant discount. If you talk to the store manager, you may receive the items as a donation. When you receive a donation, contact TACF corporate office and we can send them a thank you note and identify their donation for tax purposes.

If you are unfamiliar with fundraising at an event, contact your local member of the National Wild Turkey Federation, Ducks Unlimited, or Ruffed Grouse Society. These members are typically very knowledgeable about fundraising at events. Invite them to serve on your committee. They bring expertise and many potential new members for your group. In addition, they may have merchandise they can donate to your event.

To encourage recruitment of Annual Sponsor members, save a few large items to use in a random drawing for annual sponsor members. This is another great incentive to promote this important program. Conduct the drawing towards the end of the event so you keep people in house through any live auctions you plan on offering.

General Recommendations for hosting your dinner

- Any time of the year is a good time to host an event, except for holidays. Tuesday and Thursday nights are ideal days to host the event. Avoid Fridays and Saturdays during the fall due to conflicts with sporting events.
- Setting the price for admission is very important. Avoid the common trap of discounting a dinner in hopes of attracting a large crowd. Attendance reflects efforts of the committee more than price. Ticket prices must, at a minimum, include the price for a TACF membership and cover meal costs (unless you have meal expenses underwritten). A reasonable ticket price range is \$50 to \$80 per attendee. Some recommended ticket prices:
 - Single \$75 (includes one TACF membership and leaves \$35 for meal and expenses)
 - Couple \$110 (includes one TACF membership and leaves \$70 for meal and expenses)
 - Each accompanying youth \$35 (must accompany individual with a single or couples ticket; \$35 for meal and expenses)
- To encourage families, you can set pricing so only one TACF membership is included in a couple's ticket price. Usually, only the price of the meal is passed on the youth/spouses.
- All tickets (except for spouse or youth accompanying a person with a full-price ticket) must include the cost of a TACF membership. If an individual is already a member, ask the individual to donate their membership to a local library, or if they would like to use it to upgrade their existing membership and add an additional year to their current membership.
- If you do send out tickets via email or mail, you must have a due date for the registration. While you should not turn away people that show up the night of the event, you must make every effort to limit this or planning for the number of meals will be very difficult. The safest route is to only give tickets out to individuals at the time they make payment.

Step 2

Ok, you have held your first committee meeting and you've selected the date, time and location of your event. Your next step is to submit your ticket order to TACF headquarters (see Ticket Order). Submitting the ticket order to TACF accomplishes two things; first, it notifies TACF that an event is planned and allows TACF to help the chapter with PR efforts. Second, the ticket order provides TACF with the information we need to print your tickets. The sooner we have this information the sooner we can get the tickets back to the committee.

If the branch decides to print their tickets on their own, the Branch should still send in the ticket order form. On the form write in "do not print tickets" and include a copy of the ticket you are using with the form. This will still provide us the information we need to help the Branch with PR efforts.

Once you have your tickets printed you are now ready to split them up amongst your committee and sell the tickets. Sending invitations in the mail or email can result in some success, **but nothing is better than a personal invitation**. Do not rely on advertising or direct mail; you will be disappointed. Keep in mind that people attend these types of functions because someone

asked them to attend. Not to mention, this personal contact with prospective attendees is a perfect opportunity to tell people about TACF.

During this time, your individual committee members should be attending to their own specific responsibilities that were established at the first meeting.

Chairman's responsibilities

- Supervises committee activities
- Coordinates activities between committees
- Calls future planning meetings
- Check legal status of any raffles or auctions
- Personally invites area VIPs, dignitaries and TACF partners. However, do not give out free tickets if at all possible.
- Works with the auction and prize chairman to write any text for the program. Program should include committee member's names, donor names, auction list and a thank you message.
- Arranges for printing of the night's program
- Encourages area businesses to purchase tickets for a complete table. In this way, friends and clients can sit together and this produces competitive bidding with other tables.
- Design program format. Be careful not to make the program too long. Keep things moving. This must be an exciting event to ensure people want to come back next year.
- Work with auction and prize chairman to write the text for the evening's program. Program should include committee names, donor names, auction list and a thank you message. You should include language that "TACF is a 4-star non-profit according to Charity navigator."

Auction and Prize Chairman's Duties

- Work with committee to secure prizes for auction and raffle
- If possible, obtain services of an experienced and qualified auctioneer. You must have someone in front of the crowd willing to generate excitement
- Offering a good door price and listing this on the ticket will promote ticket sales. It is better to have one good prize that have several lesser-value prizes
- Work with treasurer and committee members to execute the raffle and auction and ensure all payment get to treasurer throughout the evening.
- Try to get raffle prizes with a minimum value of \$40. For a crowd of 250 individuals, 30 to 35 prizes is more than enough.
- Do not provide too much merchandise. If attendance falls below projection, pull merchandise rather than suffer a loss.
- Set out your raffle prize with a plastic bucket beside each prize. Sell raffle tickets for \$20 per sheet of 30. You can also hold back an item of high value, and provide a special ticket for anyone that purchases \$40 worth of tickets. The individual places the bonus ticket in the bucket.
- Be careful not to have too many items in the live auction. Remember to keep the evening moving along. A well-run live auction (with a lively auctioneer) can provide significant profit to your event.

- Use spotters to help the auctioneer identify the bidders. The spotters should help create energy in the crowd.

Ensuring Success

1. Select event chairman
2. Chairman appoints committee members and a chair for each committee
3. Chairman determines the event date, time and ticket price
4. PR committee work with headquarters to get word out to local community
5. Merchandise committee solicits prizes locally. Contact headquarters for availability of merchandise your event can use.
6. Finance committee handles all income and accounting, and names a treasurer
7. Ticket committee identifies list for attendees and distributes tickets for sale
8. Host event and follow up with thank you note to sponsors, committee and attendees.
9. Treasurer sends net contribution and membership list to headquarters for membership processing.

Tips for success

- Use a good sound system for larger events
- Control your costs!
- Do not over-order food
- If you are going to hold an auction use a good auctioneer
- Use people that enjoy selling when selling tickets during event
- Membership is a must at all events
- Sponsor memberships help your net-to-gross ratio and is important to help TACF move forward with our mission

Sample Event Schedule

6:00 – 7:00	refreshments and cocktails, raffle ticket sales, silent auction
7:00 – 8:00	Dinner with keynote speaker
8:00 – 8:20	Thank you to sponsors and honored guests
8:20 – 9:30	Auction, prizes, raffle, door prizes, etc.
9:30	Event ends

The event

If your committee has kept up with preplanning, hosting the actual event will run smooth, and most of all, will be very enjoyable for all.

- Provide some type of name tag for all participants. The simple adhesive-type name tags will work fine.
- Using a color marker, make some type of marking on the name tags of new members, such as a dot in the upper right-hand corner of the tag. Instruct the committee and

existing members to make every effort to introduce themselves to new members. Thank them!

- Provide a sign-up chart (poster board is fine) with a list of local schools and libraries. Offer the opportunity for individuals at the event to sponsor a school by purchasing a TACF membership for the school or library. The member school or library will receive all of TACF's publications for their library. Make periodic announcements during the event to encourage people to sponsor a local library or school. It is important that the committee obtain the names and addresses of all schools and public libraries in their area before the event. TACF publications are probably more appropriate for middle and high school students. TACF will send a letter to the school with the name of their sponsor.
- Provide a sign-up chart (poster board is fine) for attendees to upgrade their current membership level. These upper-level memberships are critical to TACF's ability to fund our mission. Make periodic announcements during the event to encourage people to upgrade their membership level. Incentive gifts are good ways to encourage people to upgrade. Gifts can include a TACF hat or other appropriate item. In addition, you may want to have some "sponsor" gifts (use a random drawing) donated to your event to help recruit upper-level members. Prizes could include gift certificate to local restaurant, golf outing, etc.
- If alcohol is served, provide some type of identification mark (such as a wrist band) for any member that is 21 years old or older. Any type of stamp with a water soluble ink will work.
- Keep your program on schedule during the event. Don't let speakers go too long. People appreciate when events start and finish on time.
- If you have a large crowd, you may want to rent or borrow a sound system for presenters and to play music during the event.

After the Event:

The night of the event, the entire committee should meet and go over all financial information after the event. TACF will provide forms to help our Branches keep track of all financial information. The Treasurer along with the committee should complete all necessary financials and submit to TACF immediately so can process memberships.

During this meeting, the committee should discuss the event and write down what worked and what did not work. This information is very helpful for the hosting the next event. In addition, please provide your comments to TACF so we can see what does and does not work for our Branches. The Restoration Branch concept is new for TACF and we expect we will have to make adjustments as we move forward.

Congratulations!