



The Star Of This Documentary Filmmaker's Next Movie? Leelanau County Agriculture

By Craig Manning | Sept. 29, 2025

When Michigan filmmaker Keith Famie decided to make a documentary about “the relationship between the farmer and the chef,” he knew he had to bring his camera to Leelanau County. Famie, whose eclectic career spans from the Detroit restaurant industry to the reality TV show *Survivor*, will be in northern Michigan next month to film scenes for *Detroit: The City of Chefs III*, the latest installment in [his documentary series about Michigan’s culinary scene](#). Famie will shoot the core footage for the film at a “Michigan Harvest Vegetarian Epicurean Feast” scheduled to take place at Black Star Farms in Suttons Bay on Thursday, October 23.

The dinner, which Famie put together with the help of celebrated chef and restaurateur Jimmy Schmidt, will feature dishes from more than a dozen different chefs. Northern Michigan chefs on the slate include Les Eckert (of Northwestern Michigan College’s Great Lakes Culinary

Institute), Andrew Viren (Taproot Cider House), Sarah Bobier (Artisan), Jennifer Blakeslee and Eric Patterson (The Cooks' House), Myles Anton (Trattoria Stella), Emily Stewart and Andy Elliott (Modern Bird), James Broome (Bourbons 72), and Jen Welty (9 Bean Rows). Amanda Danielson, owner of Trattoria Stella and the mastermind behind [the recently-announced Loamstead Project in Leelanau County](#), will serve as sommelier.

That local talent will be joined by a smattering of Detroit area chefs, including Schmidt himself – a three-time James Beard Award recipient known for Detroit restaurants like The London Chop House and The Rattlesnake Club – as well as Amber Poupore (Cacao Tree Café in Royal Oak) and George Vutetakis (Inn Season Café, also in Royal Oak). Also on the list: Sarah Welch and Cameron Rolka, a pair of buzzy Detroit chefs who [recently traded the Motor City for northern Michigan](#); their new restaurant, called Umbo, will soon open its doors at 430 E. Front Street in downtown Traverse City.

“The foundation of this dinner is really how the terroir of Michigan – which is a term mostly used in viticulture and wine – reflects through all of the wonderful ingredients that we grow in our state,” Schmidt says. (In the wine world, “terroir” is a word used to refer to the “taste of the place,” or how a particular region’s soils, climate, and other factors affect the flavor of wine grapes grown there.) “The foods of Michigan are quite spectacular and quite unique because of the land they’re grown on, and I think that’s a very important message to celebrate about our state,” Schmidt continues.

In planning out *Detroit: The City of Chefs III*, Famie liked the idea of celebrating Michigan agriculture and terroir, and how they impart unique twists on the work chefs throughout the state do. But he realized the series was swiftly expanding beyond the boundaries of its namesake city.

“When I started doing documentary films, I said to myself, ‘At some point, I want to tell the story of our culinary heritage in Detroit,’ because we have this really rich culinary heritage that dates back to our early immigrants,” Famie tells *The Ticker*. “Two years ago, we did that film, and it won an Emmy, and it was a really great tribute to our Detroit chefs and culinary community. And then last year, we did *Detroit: The City of Chefs II*, which just premiered a few weeks ago and will be on PBS in October.”

Both of those films, Famie says, were more or less focused on metro Detroit. “Chefs I is really the historical look, while Chefs II is looking at things like ‘What is a master chef?’ or ‘What is the James Beard Award?’ or ‘Why do you do culinary competitions?’ The third one, I want to take a deeper dive into a sector of cooking that we kind of all take for granted, but it’s become so mainstream, which is vegetarian and veganism.”

Focusing on vegetables and produce necessitated putting the lens on agricultural producers outside Detroit. Immediately, Famie latched onto Leelanau County as the focus for the film. Famie says he has a “deep, personal love” for the Leelanau Peninsula, having spent summers here with family. He’s already made several documentaries that feature northern Michigan locales. Last year’s *The Razor’s Edge* had its world premiere [at The Bay Community Theatre in Suttons Bay last November](#).

Famie also says Leelanau made perfect sense as the epicenter of his film new thanks to its agricultural history. That story ranges from indigenous farming traditions to the arrival of European settlers to the modern prevalence of agritourism. While the harvest dinner at Black Star will be “the big closing ta-da of the film,” according to Famie, he also hopes to sit down with local experts to capture all that history, including interviews with local historians, people from multi-generation farming families, and members of the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians.

“When you start thinking about the journey that vegetables take and how they come to be, we take so much for granted,” Famie says. “You hear the term ‘farm-to-table’ all the time, but what does that really mean? And who are the individuals who have so passionately taken the time to put a seed in the ground, grow it, and then share it? Just think about that process and what it must mean for somebody to decide that's the life they're going to live. It's pretty profound, because these are the people that feed us. And that's what this film is about.”

[Tickets for the harvest dinner are now on sale](#), with proceeds going toward Project Feed the Kids, 5Loaves2FishNMI and Leelanau Christian Neighbors.

Detroit: The City of Chefs III is slated for release next fall, and Famie promises he'll be back for a screening or two.