CHICAGO GOURMET

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Kinship for Chicago Gourmet

LET YOUR TASTEBUDS DANCE!
CHICAGO GOURMET, POWERED BY INVESCO QQQ, TAKES CENTER STAGE WITH THE CULINARY FESTIVAL OF THE YEAR

Sip, savor, and sway to the rhythm this fall at Chicago Gourmet powered by Invesco QQQ!

CHICAGO, IL (APRIL 2026) - When the food sings, your tastebuds will dance! Chicago Gourmet, powered by Invesco QQQ, one of the nation's premier culinary festivals, is turning up the tempo in 2026 with an ensemble of award-winning chefs, a vibrant lineup of dance-inspired events, and the official launch of ticket sales today, April 29, in honor of International Dance Day.

This year's theme, "Let Your Tastebuds Dance," celebrates the shared energy and passion of food and dance. Chicago Gourmet is made possible by Title Sponsor Invesco QQQ, longtime Presenting Sponsor Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits, new Premier Partner Square, alongside Founding Partner Illinois Restaurant Association.

"Chicago Gourmet is where our culinary community comes alive in motion," remarks Sam Toia, President & CEO of the Illinois Restaurant Association. "Like dance, great food requires precision, timing, and passion. Chicago may be known for its iconic stages, but it's our restaurant community that truly keeps the city moving."

Chicago Gourmet 2026 will take center stage with a dynamic lineup of dance-inspired events, pairing fabulous cuisine and libations with rhythm and movement on the Harris Theater Rooftop at Millennium Park and iconic venues across the city. Additional "opening act" performances and experiences will be announced this summer.

Get ready to get down at this year's main event weekend schedule:

NEW in 2026! Live Chef Cooking Demos: Demos are back at Chicago Gourmet! Always a fan favorite, join us on Saturday, September 26, at the Pritzker Pavilion stage for a full lineup of culinary demonstrations from all-star chefs. Guests can add a demo ticket to any Grand Cru ticket purchase for the enhanced experience, including demos from chefs Stephanie Izard, Sarah Grueneberg, and Rick Bayless.

Tacos & Tequila: Tacos & Tequila, presented by Square and US Foods, returns on Thursday, September 24, from 6-9:00 pm on the Harris Theater Rooftop. Kicking off Chicago Gourmet weekend with a lively, salsa-inspired celebration of Mexican cuisine, agave spirits, and dance. Hosted by chefs Rick Bayless, Marcos Carbajal, and Diana Davila, the evening features a curated selection of gourmet tacos from top local chefs paired with premium tequila and mezcal. Guests can experience the energy of live mariachi, traditional Mexican folk dancers, colorful mojiganga performances, and a DJ set that keeps the rooftop moving all night long. It's an immersive kickoff where food,

music, and dance come together in one high-energy celebration.

Hamburger Hop: The Hamburger Hop, presented by the Home Grown Program and supported by Sysco, DoorDash, and Miller Lite, is back on Friday, September 25, from 6-9:00 pm, bringing high energy and a fresh rhythm to this fan-favorite event. Set against iconic Chicago skyline views, top chefs throw down for "Best Burger" bragging rights, serving up creative takes on the classic alongside beer, wine, and cocktails. This year, the experience is elevated with a live breakdance battle and music-driven entertainment that keeps the energy pumping all night long. Hosted by chefs Joe Flamm and Jeff Mauro, guests can enjoy an evening where great food meets great beats—while celebrity judges award the Judges' Choice and attendees crown the People's Choice.

Grand Cru: Like the world's greatest performers, Saturday's Grand Cru moves with precision, energy, and global rhythm. Taking over the Harris Theater Rooftop on September 26, this signature experience is an elegant choreography of standout cuisine from 30+ award-winning chefs paired with an exceptional lineup of premium wines and spirits, all in a gorgeous setting. Guests can groove into the afternoon session from 2-5:00 pm, hosted by chef Stephanie Izard and Lee Anne Wong, or step out for the evening edition from 7-10:00 pm, hosted by chefs Sarah Grueneberg and Chris Shepherd. Presented by UnitedHealthcare®, the Grand Cru is where flavor, flow, and atmosphere are in perfect sync.

Rise & Shine Gourmet: Sunday's Rise & Shine brunch brings a down-home country cookout vibe to the Harris Theater Rooftop on September 27, from 12–3:00 pm. Hosted by chefs Art Smith and Erick Williams, this lively gathering features a spread of sweet and savory bites from top-tier chefs, refreshing cocktails, and feel-good energy throughout. Guests are invited to soak in a vibrant, Southern-style atmosphere, where the celebration carries onto the dance floor with a little country line dancing. Presented by COUNTRY Financial, Performance Foodservice, and UNOX, great food and good times make Rise & Shine a high-spirited weekend finale.

With over 100 participating chefs yearly, the 2026 troupe includes renowned names such as: Marcos Ascencio, (Mariscos San Pedro, Taqueria Chingón), Rick Bayless (Frontera Grill, Topolobampo, XOCO, Bar Sótano, and more), Marcos Carbajal (Carnitas Uruapan), Thai Dang (Crying Tiger, HaiSous), Diana Dávila (Mi Tocaya Antojería), Norman Fenton (Cariño), Joe Flamm (Il Carciofo, Rose Mary, BLVD Steakhouse), Joe Fontelera (Boonie's Filipino Restaurant), Lorena Garcia (CHICA, Food Café), Sarah Grueneberg (Monteverde), Stephanie Izard (Girl & The Goat, Duck Duck Goat, Little Goat, and more), Brian Jupiter (Frontier, Ina Mae's Packaged Goods, Migos), Gene Kato (Momotaro), Beverly Kim (Parachute Hi-Fi, Anelya), Dominique Leach (Lexington Betty Smokehouse), Jeff Mauro (Mauro Provisions), Oliver Poilevey (Mariscos San Pedro, Taqueria Chingón), Tony Priolo (Piccolo Sogno), Jonathon Sawyer (Kindling Downtown Cookout & Cocktails), Chris Shepherd (Southern Smoke Foundation), Art Smith (Blue Door, Reunion, and more), Paul Virant (Gaijin) and Erick Williams (Virtue Hospitality Group) to name a few.

Chicago Gourmet programming will benefit the Illinois Restaurant Association Educational Foundation (IRAEF), a 501 (c)(3) dedicated to building and promoting the health and prosperity of the restaurant industry by investing in both youth and the workforce.

Chicago Gourmet also benefit the Restaurant Employee Relief Fund, developed by IRAEF to provide financial support to restaurant workers facing hardship due to the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as those impacted by accident, illness, injury, the death of an immediate family member, or natural disaster.

The complete chef lineup plus new 'opening act' experiences in 2026, detailed event information, and more ticket sales will be announced this summer at chicagogourmet.org.

Chicago Gourmet 2026 is made possible by the generosity of the following sponsors: Illinois Restaurant Association (Founding Partner), Invesco QQQ (Title Sponsor & Official ETF Partner), Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits (Presenting Sponsor), Square (Premier Sponsor), Choose Chicago, UnitedHealthcare®, DoorDash, COUNTRY Financial, American Airlines, South Walton Florida, S.Pellegrino, Acqua Panna, Mariano's, Miller Lite, Home Grown Program supported by Sysco, JCDecaux, UNOX, US Foods, Fever Tree, Bank of America, Ecolab, Performance Foodservice, McCormick Place, OVG Hospitality, Chicago Magazine, CSoap.com, Turano Baking Co., Gibsons Restaurant Group, Peroni USA, Millennium Garages, Show|Ready, Ballet Folklorico Xochitl, Bollywood Groove,

Windy City Cowboy Club, Phaze II Crosstown Crew, The Langham Chicago, Fairmont Chicago Millennium Park, Hyatt Regency Chicago,NBC 5 Chicago, 93XRT, 101.9 The Mix.

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ABOUT CHICAGO GOURMET.

Chicago Gourmet, the nation's premier culinary experience, returns in September 2026. Created by the Illinois Restaurant Association to honor Chicago's culinary achievements and the creative vision of the chefs, Master Sommeliers, and wine-, spirit-, and beer-makers who participate, it spotlights Chicago as an international culinary destination via its unparalleled epicurean talent. With the present and future of the hospitality industry at the forefront, the 2026 festival will benefit the Illinois Restaurant Association Educational Foundation. Chicago Gourmet is possible with the support of title sponsor Invesco QQQ, presenting sponsor Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits, and premier sponsor Square. For more information, visit chicagogourmet.org and follow on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

ABOUT INVESCO QQQ

Invesco QQQ is an exchange-traded fund (ETF) that tracks the Nasdaq-100 Index®. The fund provides a way to gain diversified exposure to some of the largest non-financial companies listed on the Nasdaq Stock Market. For more information, visit invesco.com/QQQ.

ABOUT SOUTHERN GLAZER'S WINE & SPIRITS.

Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits is the world's preeminent distributor of beverage alcohol, building brands for moments that matter. The multi-generational, family-owned Company has operations in 47 U.S. markets and Canada, as well as brokerage operations through its Southern Glazer's Travel Retail Sales & Export Division in the Caribbean, Central and South America. In 2026, Southern Glazer's was recognized by Newsweek as one of America's Greatest Workplaces for Culture, Belonging & Community. In 2025, Southern Glazer's was recognized by Newsweek as one of America's Greatest Workplaces for Diversity and America's Greatest Workplaces for Women. Southern Glazer's urges all retail customers and adult consumers to market, sell, serve, and enjoy its products responsibly. For more information visit www.southernglazers.com. Follow us on Facebook, X and Instagram @sgwinespirits.

ABOUT THE ILLINOIS RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION.

Founded in 1914, the Illinois Restaurant Association is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting, protecting, educating, and improving the restaurant industry in Illinois. The IRA owns and produces Chicago Gourmet – the annual food and wine festival uniting hundreds of restaurants, chefs, and beverage experts for a weekend filled with food and drink tastings, entertainment, and more. The Association is also a proud co-host of the James Beard Foundation Awards, which will be held in Chicago through 2028. For more information, visit www.illinoisrestaurants.org and follow on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

ABOUT THE ILLINOIS RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION.

The Illinois Restaurant Association Educational Foundation is a 501 (c)(3) dedicated to building and promoting the health and prosperity of the restaurant industry by investing in youth and workforce. It has awarded more than $3.6 million in scholarships since its inception. For more information, visit www.illinoisrestaurants.org/IRAEFAboutUs.