

# Food matters matter here

Furman University students in a three-week May Experience class on investigative reporting undertook investigations of underage drinking, the sustainable food industry and school discipline that are being published by the *Greenville Journal* this summer.

This story was reported by **BRADLEY BAKER, KELLY LEONARD, CHASE OLLIS** and **CAMERON SEYMOUR**

**INCREASINGLY, GREENVILLE** restaurants are going green.

A few grow some of the food served. Others use biodegradable to-go boxes. They compost food clippings and recycle paper and bottles.

"There are 48 Greenvilles in the United States, and we want to be the greenest," said Russell Stall, executive director of Greenville Forward, which acts as the facilitator for Vision 2025, Greenville's strategy for the next 15 years.

While the development of parks and other recreational places is important, the green movement also means changing behavior, encouraging recycling in all sectors, including the places we eat, he said.

"Live cleaner, and work cleaner," Stall said.

Shaun Garcia, chef de cuisine of Soby's, has guided his restaurant to a more sustainable approach.

"I've always been environmental my whole life. A lot of the practices that people looked at as different, I've looked at them as everyday," Garcia said.

These practices include using biodegradable take out boxes made with sugarcane waste products and recycled paper, recycling used fryer oil by converting it to bio-diesel for vehicles, and doing away with disposable cups in the restaurant. Instead, Garcia encourages his staff to bring cups and bottles from home.

Garcia also owns a 10-acre sustainable farm where he grows produce for Soby's kitchen. The farm, which is located 20 miles from the restaurant, greatly reduces the restaurant's carbon footprint and gives Garcia access to specific produce he wants, which he may not be able to find on factory farms.

"There are two things in the food industry I'm very passionate about. One is southern food, the second is

about being seasonal," says Garcia. "You should not eat a tomato in the middle of January, and you should not have asparagus in the middle of October."

The farm also allows Garcia to recycle biodegradable waste matter, such as food clippings, by placing it in a compost pile on the farm. The compost provides natural fertilizer for the crops.

Like many sustainable restaurants

in Greenville, Soby's is a member of Certified South Carolina's Fresh on the Menu. Garcia believes in buying locally and regionally as much as possible.

"If you keep your dollars local, those local dollars will come back and take care of you," Garcia said.

Soby's is also a member of Slow Food Upstate, an international non-profit with a local chapter focused on sustainable food.

Chef Nello Gioia of Ristorante Bergamo embraces the slow food movement. "Slow food is going back to our roots. It is the food that our grandfathers ate and that takes time to grow. Its natural food with no chemicals, vegetables that are not organically modified," Gioia said. "It's part of my heritage, part of my life."

Ristorante Bergamo uses free-range, chemical-free chickens, and does not use tuna, swordfish or shrimp that are not sustainable. During the summer, Gioia buys local produce only.

"I go myself on Monday mornings and buy produce for the whole week. Anything I can find from tomatoes, green beans, to local melons, or eggplant, I go there and buy it locally," says Gioia.

Ristorante Bergamo also uses organic herbs grown locally and in Gioia's garden and greenhouse.

Gioia believes by eating more sustainable foods and meat grown chemical-free, health problems such as diabetes and coronary disease will decrease.

Stall said city and county governments could learn from other cities to support businesses adopting sustainable methods.

Portland, Ore., for one, offers information on its website on how to find local food, how to grow food, how to start composting and find out what's in season, among other things. The City of Greenville's website has no such section.

"I wish the city was a little bit better about having a pick up for glass recycling. What they would pick up in glass and sell, I'm sure could finance a park, or something. Just look at the restaurants downtown and how many wine bottles they use. I know that's an area a lot of us >

## DID YOU KNOW?

In the 1990 Farm Bill, Congress defined the term sustainable agriculture as follows:

**Sustainable agriculture** will:

- satisfy human food and fiber needs
- enhance the quality of the environment and natural resource base that the agricultural economy depends upon
- efficiently use renewable and non-renewable resources and attempt to integrate natural biological cycles whenever possible
- sustain the economic viability of farm operations
- enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole

"Organic" is a label that indicates products produced under the Organic Foods Production Act.

**Organic food** is made:

- without using most conventional pesticides,
- without fertilizers made with synthetic ingredients or sewage sludge,
- without bioengineering, and
- without ionizing radiation

> need help on," Garcia said.

Janette Wesley of Slow Food Upstate says, "There are a lot of downtown restaurants that have now started recycling. They don't tell you all this stuff. You just have to find out."

Wesley said Evergreen Recycling started a service to go to local restaurants to pick up bottles and recyclable materials because the city would not take such items from restaurants.

"The only thing the city does for downtown [restaurants] is to try and stay away from corporate restaurants like big chain restaurants," says Gioia.

Mayor Knox White said as far as sustainable practices the city has focused on conserving energy.

Asked about how the city has supported local farms and restaurants, White said, "We do have a few neighborhood gardens that we support, in what are called special emphasis neighborhoods where we do spend federal dollars for some housing, some housing programs, and parks."

The neighborhoods use the products of these gardens for personal use and consumption. Also, the Saturday Farmer's Market in downtown Greenville offers local, homegrown produce.

Gioia said he appreciates the downtown market. "It's made up of small producers, local people from around here," Gioia said.

Though residents show interest in the green-oriented programs that exist, White said the city does not extend support, monetary or otherwise, to local organic and sustainable restaurants.

"It has been more of a private effort. Our only link has been with the produce gardens in the neighborhoods," says White, "The city can't spend public money on private businesses."

Several non-profit programs recognize sustainable practices in food production, both on farms and in restaurants, such as Slow Food Upstate, one of three chapters of Slow Food USA in South Carolina. There are more than 200 Slow Food chapters nationwide.

Wesley said the international mission of Slow Food can be wrapped up in three words: good, clean, and fair.

Wesley said slow food is about the enjoyment of food, sharing it with friends and family, building a sense of



community, preserving cultural traditions, and protecting foods that are disappearing from grocery store shelves.

"We have something called the Ark of Taste," says Wesley. "It is a catalogue of over 200 different foods in the United States that are endangered or in need of conservation."

One of these items is sourwood honey, which is native to the Appalachian area.

Wesley also said her organization tries to promote taste education in restaurants. Among the downtown Greenville restaurants that have shown support are American Grocery, High Cotton, Ristorante Bergamo, and Soby's New South Cuisine, along with Stella's Southern Bistro in Simpsonville.

Wesley said she would like to see more affordable options for Slow Food restaurants, but it's hard.

"Greenville doesn't have many restaurants at all that are really practicing this. We'd really like to change that, and I'm trying to come up with some ways that we can do that just simply by maybe inserting something as simple as a tea or a coffee or something like that. That is something that is part of our mission as well, is that we would like it to be affordable so that all classes of people can participate."

Fresh on the Menu is part of the Certified SC program that a restaurant can join if at least 25 percent of its menu items come from South Carolina. The main goal is to increase the per capita income of rural South Carolinians and provide more fresh food.

Some of these restaurants are more affordable, such as Foothills Deli & Catering, a small eatery near Travelers Rest, and Scratch, a café on Augusta Road.

"It's so hard here," Wesley said, "because we're such a convenient society, and everybody wants things very convenient. And a lot of times restaurants can't make it if they don't succumb to some of those things."