



by Judi Burton

As you browse the cool, brick-paved farmers' market in Conway on Saturday mornings, make sure to check out the small garden in the back entrance with the gigantic rain barrel that provides dependable, nourishing water for the herb and veggie garden planted there. This is just one of the public educational demonstration projects provided by Clemson University. The university is also an educational resource for local farmers for healthy, sustainable farming practices.

Did you know Clemson University does all of the certification for USDA Organic labels on foods grown in South Carolina? Clemson is the only state-funded school tasked with promoting SC agriculture, and, among many things, is responsible for keeping three of our farmers' markets on the Strand up and run-

ning, namely one in Loris, Conway and North Myrtle Beach.

Promoting and supporting the work of our local farmers, Clemson University Cooperative Extension encourages being a "locavore," or someone who buys his or her food locally from the small farmers in his or her community. First, let's understand why being a locavore is so important.

## Safety

Much of the food found in supermarkets comes from thousands of miles away, from industrial farms that commingle product from many large-contract agricultural operations. Oversight and management are overwhelming tasks when food is handled on such a gigantic scale, intended more for economy and profit than quality and safety. Several recent food contamination issues in the news bear out this truth. Small farmers oversee and supervise their own farms and crops personally, taking care to manage quality and safety. Food products from small farms aren't combined with many, where "one bad apple" could contaminate an entire season's crop. As one local farmer remarked, "This is the food I feed my own family, too. You know that it's the best there is."

## Local Economy

For the sake of our local and state economies, it is important to support

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our farmers who struggle to compete with these large, unmanageable industrial farms and food production operations around the world. The more we put money back into our local farming economy, the better our situation here in South Carolina will become. Consider it a very tasty investment.

## Cost and Carbon Footprint

As gas and shipping costs rise, so do retail food costs. Prices for simple fruits and veggies, such as tomatoes and spinach, are soaring as the farming industry tries to get a handle on shipping costs. To counter the “carbon footprint” of transporting food around the world, you can buy from your local farms and fish markets instead.

Blake Lanford, who heads the Horry County Clemson Extension, said, “We are working on something called Waccamaw Grown, which is a takeoff of the SC Grown program and label, only it focuses on farm products from just the Grand Strand and Pee Dee area.” The SC Grown label is funded by the South Carolina Department of Agriculture to certify state-grown farm products, not ones trucked in from out of state. There are hundreds of small farm stands alongside the roads and highways of this agricultural state, but what many don’t realize is a lot of that produce is not from South Carolina.

## Quality

Locally grown food is field ripened and fresh, not picked green to survive a long and bumpy journey from field to supermarket. Natural sun ripening increases nutrients, natural sugars and flavor. Large monoculture (single plant crop) farms are more vulnerable to pests, weeds and soil depletion, making pesticides, herbicides and chemical fertilizers more necessary to grow attractive and easily sellable products.

The fresh factor is probably the best part about being a locavore. Top chefs

in the Grand Strand and Pee Dee understand this and serve up “farm-to-table” menus, naming the specific farm they got their product from on the actual menu. Limpin’ Janes, a brand new Lowcountry locavore restaurant in Georgetown, boasts a “South Carolina only” menu just for that purpose. Croissants in Myrtle Beach has a special connection with Thompson Farms in Conway, and many of the seafood restaurants dotting Highway 17 Business get their seafood right from the fish markets on the Strand.

## Education

Clemson is also working on an agritourism campaign to encourage people to visit their local hometown farms to learn how the food that goes on their tables is actually produced. People don’t understand the complex process of planting, growing, harvesting, shipping, preparing, packaging and labeling to get to the store shelves. Taking the family out to the farm to see the chickens, cows, cornfields and strawberry patches, helps everyone find the real connection with the food they are eating.

## Certified Practices

Another project of the Horry County Clemson Extension is the Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Certification. While not an organic certification, which can be an expensive and challenging one to achieve, it is a step toward certifying local small farm food quality and practice. Certification will entice major retailers, such as Wal-Mart, to buy from local small farmers. “It is not expensive to take the class for the certification, but it can get expensive for the small farmer to change around his or her farm to meet the specifications the certification warrants,” said Lanford. “For instance, if Clemson came to your farm and saw the family dog roaming the fields, or livestock on the hill above the cornfield where runoff could flow in a heavy rain, you wouldn’t pass. We are really trying to get more of the small farms to certify and test; it isn’t

easy in the beginning.” Lanford states that major companies are very strict when it comes to buying produce, and the GAP Certification is a “must have” when selling produce to them.

Go to your local farmers’ market and meet the farmers who grow your food. Join your local Slow Food USA chapter or visit Local Harvest online for local foods near you. Make sure to check out the calendar section in the back of this magazine for several nearby farmers’ markets.

For more info on Clemson University Cooperative Extension, visit [Clemson.edu/extension](http://Clemson.edu/extension). To find your local Slow Food USA chapter, visit [SlowFoodUSA.org](http://SlowFoodUSA.org). And for local farmers in your area, visit [LocalHarvest.org](http://LocalHarvest.org).



**What:** Green Happy Hour  
**When:** Thurs., July 7<sup>th</sup>-  
Green Business Support  
4:30 pm, Drinks - 5:30 pm  
**Where:** Renaissance Bistro  
607 Chartwell Ct, Myrtle  
Beach  
(Just off 544, west of Bypass 17  
behind the BB&T Bank.)  
**Info:** 843-497-0390  
[www.greendrinks.org](http://www.greendrinks.org)

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