



# March 2022 Newsletter

March 4, 2022

## Happy Friday!

With all of the blooms, buzzing, and warmer temperatures, a new season is certainly upon us. The weeks following last year's 2021 Regroup Assembly in March are when we peaked with our community engagement and this year looks to be similar, with many projects in the local food work underway and new ideas and initiatives springing forth. On the county food assessment front, we have a team of students from Clemson University assisting with data collection on SNAP vendors and fresh food access **and** an exciting partnership with the Oconee History Museum and Bart Garrison Ag Museum of SC to assess changes in our food system over time (Would-be historians — see the article by Jennifer Moss below for a unique volunteer opportunity!). We've also had at least two dozen community members mobilized in planning for the upcoming community food gatherings (CFGs) starting this month, for which we've included updates in this edition of the newsletter. Our Oconee Food Council (OFC) website should FINALLY be launched next week and the hope is to have council-specific social media up and running by the end of the month (fingers crossed!).

One of the significant food council developments in February was a stakeholder meeting hosted by the council last Friday, February 25th, to learn more about FoodShare SC and the prospect of establishing a county hub as part of their discounted produce box program. The program, which you can read more about here ( <https://foodsharesc.org/fresh-food-box/> ), would work through an existing organization in the county to increase access to affordable fruits and vegetables for our residents and provide an opportunity to support local producers with purchases for items to go in the boxes. At the meeting, a FoodShare community outreach coordinator shared a presentation to the group of roughly 20 attendees, including OFC members, elected officials, and representatives of local health and community nonprofits. Following a discussion about the requirements and benefits of developing a county FoodShare hub, the majority agreed that the OFC should move ahead with identifying prospective sites towards developing a hub. This process can take anywhere from six months to two years depending on the readiness of the organization that would take on the program, but we have made first steps and look forward to working with the FoodShare SC team. Thankfully, in the meantime we'll have FoodShare SC boxes available at the Blue Ridge Community Center in Seneca as an extension of the FoodShare Pickens hub beginning March 9th. For more information on that call (864)412-4720.

The other big announcement is that an important decision has been made in regards to the 2022 Oconee Food Summit (OFS). While the original plan was to hold the 2022 OFS as part of our food council development process before June 2022, we've determined that a preliminary event will be needed for the food council and "worker bees" of the food movement to review the results of the county food assessment and work towards developing a strategic plan for our local food system work. As a result, we've decided to hold another Oconee Food Sovereignty Convening this year in mid-June and currently have a team organizing to plan this event. We do still plan to hold an official Oconee Food Summit conference similar to our February 2020 event sometime this year, but

it will likely be in Fall or early Winter 2022. In the meantime, all those currently engaged somehow in the local food movement work should expect an invitation to the convening in the coming weeks.

Getting back to work now, but thanks for checking out our newsletter and we'll have more updates for you soon!

Mandolin Bright  
*Operations Director*  
**Oconee Food Council**



## “Organic” — Explained

*Christian Thormose*  
*OFC Member; Nature's Link*

What does the word “organic” really mean?

‘Or-gan’ic,’ adj. 1. Pertaining to or suggesting organisms. 2. Pertaining to bodily organs, 3. Containing carbon.

So everything living is organic, but what does it mean when our food is labeled *organic*? It is easy to forget that before the early 1920s, when synthetic chemicals were first developed, all agriculture was strictly organic. It wasn't until after World War II that farming techniques changed, becoming more industrialized. The use of synthetic fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides increased dramatically.

Today, thousands of small organic farms have emerged, and many call for a return to responsible farming methods, pointing to the heavy use of herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizers and their damage to our ecology.

There has been much controversy over what, exactly, organic food is. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, it is any food raised, grown, handled, and processed without growth hormones, antibiotics, synthetic fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, fungicides, or any other additives. Additionally, animals must have access to the outdoors and never be fed animal byproducts.

Organic farmers must be certified and work with a strict set of standards that legally comply with all regulations. Therefore, and organic farm often has higher costs due to lower yields and higher labor costs, leading to higher consumer prices. However, all organic farming has the same goal: to improve and build the soil, which is the foundation of our food system and our lives.

As with anything, there are lots of arguments for and against organic food, and not only about cost. One side is of the opinion that without using all farming techniques available today, we will simply not be able to feed the world's population. On the other side, it's believed that using synthetic chemicals is slowly killing the earth, and us.

According to USDA, organic products are labeled according to the percentage of organic ingredients.

- 100% Organic: USDA organic seal allowed, 100% certified organic ingredients and processing aids, no GMO's, all ingredients comply, National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances, Certification required.
- Organic: USDA organic seal allowed, 95% certified organic ingredients, no GMO's, Non-organic ingredients comply with National List, Certification required.
- Made with Organic: USDA organic seal NOT allowed, must specify which ingredients are organic, at least 70% certified organic ingredients, no GMO's, Non-organic ingredients comply with National List, Certification required.

- Organic Ingredients: Organic seal NOT allowed; Product can't be described as 'organic,' No specific % certified, may contain GMO's, Compliance with National List not required, Certification NOT required.

Overall, organic food has grown in popularity, as farmers aim to produce high-quality food using methods that benefit our whole food system. Consumers have increasingly sought and purchased foods that they perceive as healthier and grown in ways that benefit the environment — from people to plant health and animal welfare.



## Did You Miss Last Week's Meal Planning with Amanda?

Here's what you missed:

Amanda Callahan showed us the easiest way to butcher a whole chicken, and gave us lots of tips on how to make use of every last bit of that bird. Meal prepping for the week saves time, and money, when we cook smarter — not harder.

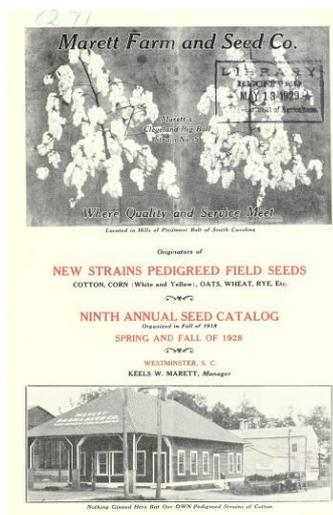
And don't worry — you can catch the next show Sunday, March 6th! I wonder what new food wisdom our local family farmer will share? We'll be tuning in to find out!

Learn More & Sign Up for Weekly Meal Planning with Amanda



## The Marett Farm & Seed Company

Jennifer Moss  
Assistant Curator, OHM



The Marett Company began when Elijah C. Marett chartered the Westminster Oil and Fertilizer Company in February 1903. This company was responsible for ginning cotton, buying and crushing cotton seed, and manufacturing it into oil and cottonseed meal. The Company buildings were located on a large tract of land on East Main Street in Westminster (where Dollar Tree is currently located). The tracts of land for seed development were located along where Seed Farm Road is modernly located. In 1918 the company launched a subsidiary called Marett Farm and

Later the company expanded to create other varieties of seeds including Marett Seed Corn. Keels Marett was integral in the growth and development of seed varieties, especially that of cotton.

The Marett Seed Company would host Field Days to invite local farmers and community members to learn about what they were doing to produce better seeds and to learn how to grow those products. Women were also invited to the educational programming and tours so that they could also gain this knowledge of seed production.

The Marett Company was a consistent business in Westminster, providing for the needs of local farmers until 1964. The increase of industrial farming, as well as the decrease in cotton production in the area, caused the shuttering of this integral business in Oconee County.

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### **Seeking volunteers!**

Seeking volunteers to examine historical documents for a county food assessment project.

Must be available to be trained in handling historic objects. Volunteer must have willingness to learn, interest in food and local history, and be delicate in handling artifacts.

Please contact **Jennifer Moss** at [moss@oconeehistorymuseum.org](mailto:moss@oconeehistorymuseum.org) for more information and to sign up for training.

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## Upcoming Community Food Gatherings

Thanks to the hard work of all involved, Oconee County's first community food gatherings will soon be underway! We currently have these dates/locations confirmed:

- Mountain Rest / Long Creek: March 20th @ Whetstone Place - 1PM-3PM
- Walhalla: March 26th @ Wallhalla Fire Station - 11AM-1PM
- Seneca: April 9th @ Blue Ridge Community Center - 11:30AM-1:30PM
- Tamassee / Salem: March 29th @ The Community Center - 5PM-7PM
- Westminster: April 23rd @ The Depot - 5:30PM-7:30PM
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These are limited-seating events. For more information, please contact your local representative:

Lorilei Swanson (CFGs Subcommittee Chair): [lorileiswanson@gmail.com](mailto:lorileiswanson@gmail.com)

Casey Certain (Tamassee/Salem): [oconeecultivationproject@gmail.com](mailto:oconeecultivationproject@gmail.com) or (864)873-8924

Christa Caperton (Mt Rest / Long Creek): [christacaperton@gmail.com](mailto:christacaperton@gmail.com)

Caleb Heavner (Seneca): (864)376-7998

Sarai Melendez (Walhalla):



## Volunteer Opportunities

The Oconee Cultivation Project has upcoming opportunities for you to get involved in culinary and agricultural education!

[Get Involved Here!](#)

- **Re-Fresh** : *Westminster Community Garden Spring Turnover | March 18, 5-7 PM*

Join us at 20 W Abbey St to do garden bed maintenance, plant spring crops, learn about what plants do well in Zone 8 and companion planting. Interested in claiming a raised bed? Just email [oconeecultivationproject@gmail.com](mailto:oconeecultivationproject@gmail.com)

- **CultivaTeen 2022** | *June 6-11, 9 AM - 2 PM*

The Oconee Cultivation Project's new CultivaTeen summer program will be week-long daily immersion experience offered to youth and their families at no cost. Through mentorship and education, teens develop skills in sustainable agriculture, culinary practices, and local food production. Once accepted into CultivaTeen, participants are known as crew members, as they are responsible for jobs around the gardens and in the kitchen that teach them how to work as a team to achieve a common goal. Crew members who return to our CultivaTeen 2.0 program have the option of becoming crew leader assistants, meaning they work alongside the adult crew leader to assign tasks and take on more responsibility as leaders in their groups.

During our summer program, a vibrant team of talented crew leaders and workshop volunteers work with local youth to encourage lifelong learning and engagement in our community. As teen crew members achieve goals in the garden and kitchen, they experience the collective sense of accomplishment and learn more about all that our area has to offer. Through this program and our collaboration with various organizations, we strive to create a community that celebrates local food, agricultural traditions, and sustainable living practices.

If you are interested in learning more about this program and how to sign your child up for future opportunities, complete an application here:

<https://www.oconeecultivationproject.com/our-workshops>

Applicants should be between the ages of 12-15 to participate. Transportation is provided, and spaces are limited, so don't hesitate to reach out!

Oconee Food Council  
Serving Oconee County, South Carolina  
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