



Buckle Up, Buttercup!

Mandolin Bright, OFC Operations Director

Although we're still eight weeks out from the end of our founding term of the Oconee Food Council, it's fascinating to look back at the beginning and see how far we've come. This journey began in October with a council of nine members that were mostly new to the concept of working collaboratively to improve the food system, and yet, over the last six months fell so easily into the role that we had to revisit our initial plans for the term to facilitate the new initiatives that were emerging. It's been an incredible thing to witness and gives me renewed hope for what we can accomplish in the weeks, months, and years ahead.

In April we completed the last of our Spring 2022 community food gatherings, which gave us qualitative data from local residents that will be preserved in our county food assessment (CFA). An unexpected but very positive outcome of these events has been a sharp increase of interest in the food council and the potential for community-level organizing to address local food system issues. As a result, the OFC and the community liaisons have decided to move ahead on plans to **launch the Oconee Food Alliance (OFA)** network, which will provide all residents and organizations in our county with the opportunity to participate in the variety of work happening with the food council. Check out the announcement on the OFA launch below for more information on this development!

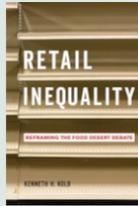
The plan is to formally launch the Oconee Food Alliance around this year's **Oconee Food Sovereignty Convening on Wednesday, June 8th**, during which our food council members, CFA team, key stakeholders, and food movement leaders will identify objectives for the food council and finalize the council's committee structure that will work on meeting those objectives. This will serve as the start of our strategic planning process for the OFC, which, if all goes according to plan will be completed in **early December with a 2022 Oconee Food Summit**. The exciting thing about the current Convening plan is that our proposed food council model includes having the committee chairs as members of the council, so we'll actually begin identifying our new OFC members that will be serving a full term starting in August at the event in June as we finalize that committee structure and begin committee assignments. It's coming up quickly, but our planning team recently nailed down the location and other key details so invitations can go out in the coming week. Keep an eye out if you plan to be there!

(Note: If you have not been involved with the work of the OFC but are interested in attending the 2022 Oconee Food Sovereignty Convening, please reach out to me directly at the number or email address below.)

It wasn't easy getting here, but we're on track to finish out this season of food council work well-positioned to return and hit the ground hard when we resume in mid-August. There's still a lot to do between now and that finish line at the end of June, so don't hang up the gloves and work boots yet if you've been in the trenches with us! Your investments of time, energy, and skill are all highly valued in the foundation we are laying for a formidable food council to serve the people of Oconee County. We greatly appreciate your contributions and look forward to sharing the results of this work with you at the Convening next month.

In service,

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Thinking Outside the Food Desert

Erin Ramos
Secretary, OFC

I had the pleasure of joining some of our food council members and locally-elected officials at Clemson University for a presentation by Kenneth Kolb, Professor and Chair of Sociology at Furman University, and author of *Retail Inequality: Reframing the Food Desert Debate*. The event was hosted by Clemson Food Collective, a student-run organization focused on creating positive, lasting change in their local food system.

Kolb's research and writing explore the root cause of food deserts and the core barriers to true food equity. Our OFC Operations Director, Mandolin Bright, had a chance to meet with Kolb back in October to talk about his work. We were excited to get to hear more about his research and learn about opportunities to utilize his concepts in thinking about how to approach food equity in our county.

During his presentation, Kolb shed new light on the term "food desert" — explaining not only the origins of the term but also its direct correlation with urban policy, as well as debunking some long-held beliefs about retail habits of those who live within these areas. Kolb explained that proposed solutions to "fix" food deserts often fall flat, neglecting to consider a full assessment of how those proposed solutions will work in individual communities. Kolb also noted that "price and proximity do not determine diet", elaborating on the idea that simply because healthy food is available and accessible does not necessarily mean people will purchase or use it. This sentiment aligns with something brought up by attendees at our Seneca Community Food Gathering — there is a serious lack of food education in our county. Residents are concerned that there is very little educational opportunity readily available to learn how to properly cook and prepare a diverse selection of nutritious food. The availability of food-related educational offerings in Oconee County is being investigated as part of our County Food Assessment.

Attendees engaged in a group activity in which we discussed various initiatives meant to increase food access and equity, and were able to get direct feedback from Kolb about the potential pitfalls and benefits of each. I, for one, appreciated how willing Kolb was to discuss any and all options, and his candid demeanor in which he shared the information and insight he had gathered throughout his research.

Kolb cautioned that many "solutions" have been catered to the wants and needs of those concerned about food security, not necessarily those dealing with it firsthand. It is a welcome reminder that we are on the right track with our community-focused and community-led work. As always, we encourage you to reach out to your Community Liaisons for information about how to get involved with the food council or to offer feedback about your community's needs. Make your community voice heard!



Left to right: Seneca City Councilwoman Lekesha Benson, Furman Professor and Chair of Sociology Kenneth Kolb, Walhalla City Councilwoman Sarai Melendez

Small Farms Struggle with Lack of Processing Facilities

Amanda Callahan, Callywood Farms

If you haven't heard, there are animal processing issues across the nation. Some might even call it a crisis. In our small, agricultural region, this issue feels big — especially with so many smaller family farms in our area. Let's take a quick dive into the issue to understand how it became a crisis, how it's affecting local farms, and what we're going to do moving forward.

It really all started with the pandemic. Before the shutdown, there was already a shortage of processing facilities, and things were so tight that "when one or more large meatpacking site(s) is forced to shut down, it has ripple effects across the entire country, interrupting supplies and often raising prices," as this [article](#) highlights. Whether it was COVID-19 infections or the reduction in staffing due to safety protocols, the reality is that one small blip had a massive effect across the nation. But it hit especially hard in rural areas where the commute to a facility was already far, and the density of farms needing a processing date was already on the rise.

There are very few options here in Upstate, SC. Almost all farmers drive to GA or NC, sending business out of state. As one of the top producing beef and poultry counties in the state, it is interesting that we don't have better access to meat processing facilities. While there are processing facilities in Oconee County, they don't meet the needs of smaller farms hoping to market their animal offerings directly to a consumer for a variety of reasons. One of the main reasons is that in order to sell meat cuts directly to a consumer, the processing facility used must be able to provide USDA labeling of products. This service is not currently offered in our county and the increased cost is a barrier to processing facilities' ability and/or desire to offer it. It's a barrier for farms trying to sell meat cuts, and a barrier to a consumer who doesn't want to purchase a full/half/quarter share of an animal.

I'm really only touching the surface here as I am primarily discussing the issues for large animals: beef and pigs. Our local poultry farmers are able to fall under exemption (under a certain amount of birds) that grants access to on-farm processing, but the question still remains: what about a site that can process poultry? And I can't forget to bring up the really terrible position of my small ruminant farmers (lamb and goats) who saw their ability to get processing dates for their animals literally disappear as facilities stopped servicing these animals. They are really in a difficult spot.

The other intersecting issue is that demand for local meat is on the rise. Which is a great problem to have as a local animal farmer — except when you can't get your animals processed and packaged according to market standards. When the pandemic hit, most local farms sold out of their freezers quickly as consumers were worried about the impact on supply chain issues on our food chain. Chest freezers were hard to come by and processing dates were nearly impossible to get, with some processing facilities booking dates over two years out.

The icing on the cake is that feed prices are soaring right now. So while we have farms with animals ready to be processed, literally standing in the fields, they are continuing to feed their animals as they watch the numbers climb on feed bills. The impacts are yet to be seen, but it's a tough time to be a small animal farmer right now.

So, what are we going to do? There's no real, big solution — unless someone reading this would like to fund a new animal processing facility here in Oconee County. Not kidding. But on a lighter note, being a part of the Oconee Food Council and reading this article is the first step towards a solution. Talking about it, understanding the issue, and sharing it with others will create a ripple effect and then, maybe, you'll find us that needle in the haystack... someone who can build us a state of the art facility right here in Oconee that can meet our diverse needs as a county — a county that prides itself on the agricultural dream of feeding ourselves with the food grown right here in the backyards of our neighbors.

PS - Asking for a friend: please make sure it has a hog scald.

For further, much more intellectual reading on the issue: [Here](#), [Here](#), and [Here](#)



Amanda Callahan and her beloved pig, Mama Sage

GAP Workshop Opportunity

FREE!

PAL is co-hosting a GAP workshop for farmers that will take place in Spartanburg on May 19th. GAP certification is often required when farmers want to sell to schools, hospitals, or other institutions. The training is free and lunch will also be provided.

For more information and to register, [CLICK HERE!](#)



Farm Plat Book & Business Guide: Oconee SC

Jennifer Moss, Assistant Curator/Education Specialist
Oconee History Museum

One great resource that Oconee History Museum has available to the public is the 1953 Farm Plat Book & Business Guide: Oconee, SC. The Rockford Map Company produced these plat books for communities around the United States. The Plat Book divides the county into sections and in each section all of the farmers, community sites, and roads are identified. The Plat Book also contains advertisements from local businesses that served the farming community as well as some agricultural statistics from the area.

As you peruse the pages of the plat book, you notice that farms were plentiful in Oconee County in the 1950s. Most were small family farms producing for themselves and their local community. This book is a valuable resource to the historic community as it is one of the few documents that indicate who was farming and where their farms were located.

Visit [OHM](#) to view the plat book and other great research resources for Oconee County.

Rockford Map Publishers has generously given Oconee History Museum the rights to reproduce and use the Farm Plat Book & Business Guide: Oconee, SC for research purposes only. Please DO NOT reproduce any part of this book without permission from Oconee History Museum or Rockford Map Publishers.

OFA Launch - June 2022!

We are launching the Oconee Food Alliance (OFA) at the end of our founding council term in June. The OFA will exist as a network people can join to engage with the work of the food council and to be directly involved in the community-level organizing that's taking place. Among other benefits, membership with the OFA grants voting power to elect OFC members and community liaisons.

We will be reaching out to folks during the last weeks of June, conducting the

first wave of registration for the OFA, but will pause over the Summer break. When we return for our food council session in August, we will resume the registration process.

Oconee Food Council



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