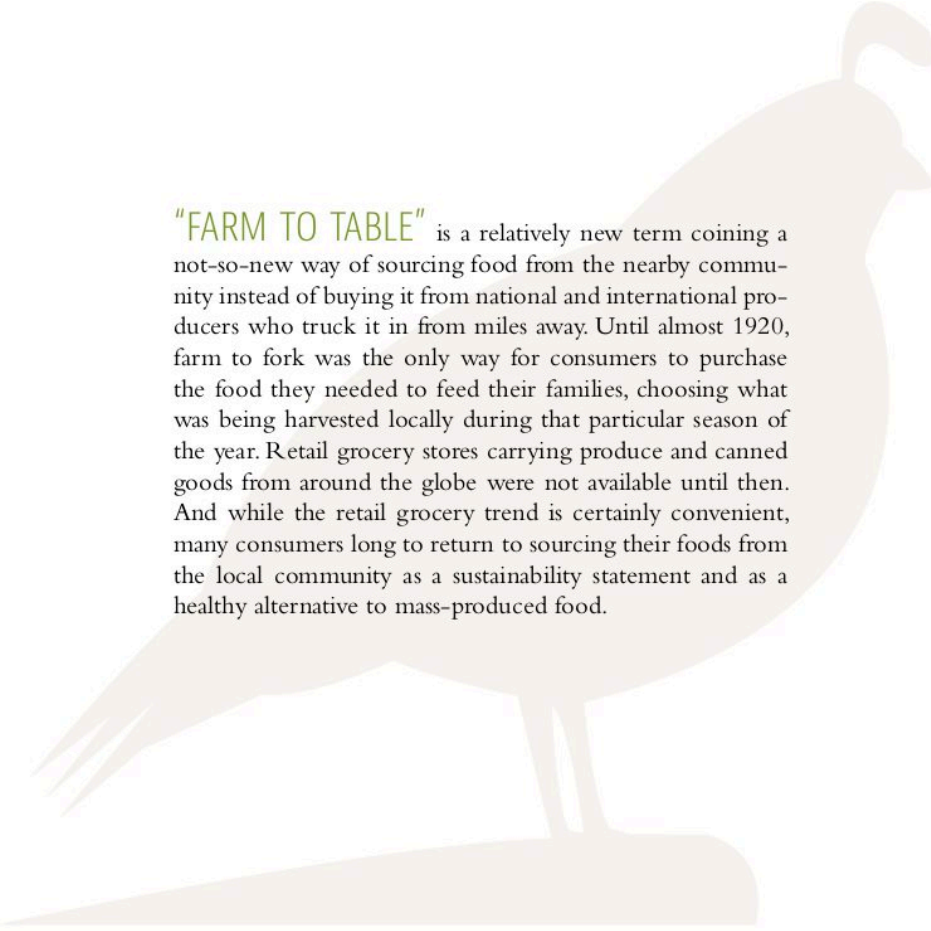




Britney Miller carries on the family tradition of running Manchester Farms.

FARM FRESH QUAIL

By Dana W. Todd
Photography ©2016 Brian Dressler / dresslerphoto.com



"FARM TO TABLE" is a relatively new term coining a not-so-new way of sourcing food from the nearby community instead of buying it from national and international producers who truck it in from miles away. Until almost 1920, farm to fork was the only way for consumers to purchase the food they needed to feed their families, choosing what was being harvested locally during that particular season of the year. Retail grocery stores carrying produce and canned goods from around the globe were not available until then. And while the retail grocery trend is certainly convenient, many consumers long to return to sourcing their foods from the local community as a sustainability statement and as a healthy alternative to mass-produced food.

Sustainable farm-to-table practices have been the backbone of Manchester Farms since inception. Brittney Miller, current owner of Manchester Farms in Hopkins, is a second generation farmer who runs the quail farm outside Columbia that her father started in 1974. Since then, Manchester Farms' owners have farmed quail as sustainably as possible, never giving their birds antibiotics or added hormones and selling directly to consumers as well as to food wholesalers.

"We always try to do the best and do it the right way," Miller says. The farm has followed the same husbandry practices since opening and is mainly concerned about giving the hatched birds – 100,000 per week – a good quality of life in one of its 400-foot long barns located in communities surrounding Columbia. Pharaoh quail chicks are allowed to roam free in the barns, and the structures help protect them from their many predators.

Miller's father started the company in his backyard, which sprung from his love of quail hunting, and slowly grew it over the years. Miller remembers walking the barns, then located in Sumter, each night

"We always try to do the best and do it the right way," Miller says.



and on the weekends with her father. Although she left the family business to go her own way for a few years, working in pharmaceuticals and managing a fine dining restaurant in other parts of the country, she returned to Columbia with her husband, Matt, and their two children to purchase Manchester Farms from her retiring parents in 2005.

Although the company has grown, it is still considered a small business, with 100 year-round full-time employees and an additional 40 seasonal employees who produce specialty products in the off-season. These specialties include pork chop patties for Bojangles' biscuits and custom appetizers such as bacon-wrapped shrimp for Costco. Operations are housed in several buildings. There are two farms north of Camden; another farm in Gadsden; the hatchery, offices and retail sales in Hopkins; and offices and retail sales on Garners Ferry Road in Columbia.



Executive Chef Todd Woods of The Oak Table serves up quail dishes.



Clockwise, Brittney Miller has a handful of baby quail; production employees pack quail eggs and Todd Woods demonstrates preparation of quail.





Manchester Farms is considered the nation's oldest quail producer. In addition to quail and specialty products, the company sells quail eggs, a delicacy in some parts of the world due to their novelty and increased nutritional density as compared to chicken eggs.

In the spirit of always striving to be the best, Manchester Farms is the only quail farm in the U.S. certified under Safe Quality Food (SQF) Level 2, a third-party global food safety initiative. This certification is attractive to large customers like The Walt Disney Company.

"We are a small company, but we are eye to eye with large corporations like Tyson in terms of quality," Miller says.

Locally, many restaurants serve Manchester Farms' quail on their menus.

"Here at Motor Supply, we've been heavily focused on providing local, sustainable products to our guests for the past 10 years. However, we have been doing business with Manchester Farms since we opened 27 years ago in 1989! The quail has always been consistently

*"We are a small company,
but we are eye to eye with
large corporations like
Tyson in terms of quality."*

delicious. Manchester Farms was farm-to-table before farm-to-table was cool," says Eddie Wales, owner of Motor Supply Co. Bistro.

Executive Chef Todd Woods of The Oak Table has been purchasing quail for use in his restaurants since before he moved to Columbia.

"Manchester Farms definitely produces the best quail in the country," Woods says. Currently making an appearance on The Oak Table's menu is a smoked peach barbequed quail dish. Woods also is using quail eggs as a condiment served atop beef tartare.

"Quail will continue to make an off and on appearance on our menu," he says.

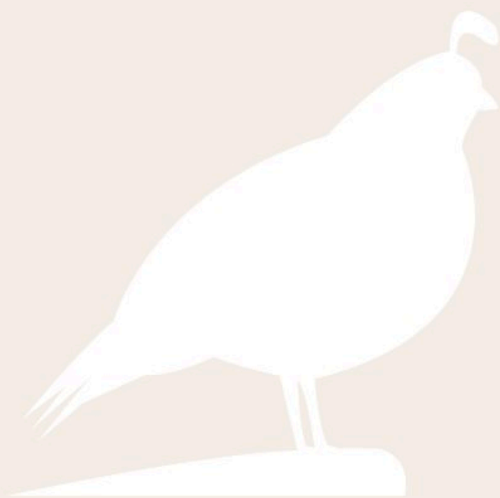
Manchester Farms is close to meeting recognized organic quality standards. The only piece of the puzzle missing for attaining organic status, according to Miller, is a local source of organic feed for the quail. The feed mill is the only part of the process Manchester Farms does not own, but it has its own wastewater treatment facility, barns, processing plant, and hatchery.

This summer, the farm partnered with an organic farmer to produce its first crop of organic watermelons which were sold in two local grocery stores. Miller indicates an interest in expanding the organic farming component of the business in future years. Like any good business owner, she wishes to diversify for the "slow season" during the summer while sticking with her father's quality husbandry and business practices.

According to the company, remaining true to the family's original principles has rewarded Manchester Farms with decades of support from customers and chefs nationwide.

Want to try quail?

Several Columbia restaurants serve it on their menus, including:



- Terra
- Motor Supply Co.
- Bourbon
- Rosso
- The Oak Table
- Solstice
- Mr. Friendly's
- The War Mouth

If you want to prepare your own, Manchester quail is sold at Publix, Bi-Lo, and Piggly Wiggly stores in Columbia, or customers can buy it directly from Manchester Farms at its offices on Garners Ferry Road in Columbia or on Lower Richland Boulevard in Hopkins or at www.manchesterfarms.com.