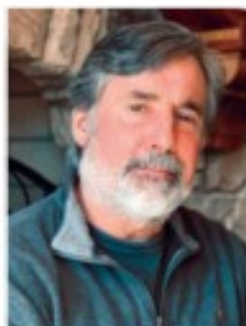


Eat Your View



By ROBERT TURNER

I've dedicated much of the past decade to my farm in Arden and the books and articles that I've written about the importance of local food systems. But I've never considered how food trucks fit into the "eat your view" local food movement. With more than 100

food trucks roaming the streets, parks and beer gardens of Asheville and Hendersonville, they're an important part of it.

In a newer trend, a food truck court—The Village Food Truck Park—will be coming soon to Fletcher in a smartly repurposed old car wash facility, bringing new life and purpose to an old dinosaur: the self-serve car wash.

The food truck park will be decked out with hanging lights and picnic tables, and will offer a nice variety of food from colorful trucks huddled together under the open sky. The truck park is wisely located on Old Airport Road in a commercial and industrial area that is essentially a food desert, with no restaurants for

hundreds of area workers to grab a quick bite for lunch.

The rebel inside me kept thinking, "It's food to the people, Man! It's awesome. It's anti-

establishment, anti-corporate food chains and pro-small business!" And in most cases, it's also very good-tasting food, in what might be seen as a more democratic system where the little guy gets a chance to fulfill his or her culinary dreams.

"They are terrific chefs who care a great deal about food," says the Henderson County Environmental Health Department's Garret Rapp, the man who inspects the many

food trucks that feed hungry people at corner gas stations, open lots and weekend events. "Many of these food truck operators simply can't afford to pay the high rent of a brick-and-mortar storefront." In a food truck, they've found a way to bring their dreams and passion for food to reality with a lot less risk and cost. Some



build a reputation and eventually move on to brick and mortar.

Banks are hesitant to lend money because restaurants are a notoriously risky business, and around 60 percent of new restaurants fail within the first year. Nearly 80 percent shutter before their fifth anniversary. A big reason for that is the high build-out cost and high rent for a brick-and-mortar restaurant. A decent used food truck can be purchased for around \$30,000, which is significantly lower than the millions it often costs to build a restaurant.

While some people have never eaten at a food truck, others eat at them several times a week. Some of the best steak tacos, gyros, pizza and



burgers that I have ever eaten have come from food trucks, believe it or not. And there is something fun about eating at a food truck, whether at a park, a music festival, a beer garden or even an inner-city street corner.

Some people track their favorite food trucks around town to various venues, often following the truck on Facebook to know where they're going for lunch today.

What food truck operators really need, I found out, is a commissary kitchen to prep the food before they hit the road, and refrigeration and dry goods storage to support their operations. This prep work can't be done in their homes, because of health code regulations, so they must find a kitchen facility that is inspected regularly by the health department.

A commissary kitchen is not easy to find for the hundred-plus food trucks in the Asheville and Hendersonville area, and open space and available times at existing facilities are limited. With a planned opening in mid-June, the new Village Food Truck Park will have a commissary kitchen, a much needed facility, just for food trucks.

Robert Turner is a farmer and author of Lewis Mumford and the Food Fighters: A Food Revolution in America. Learn more at EatYourView.com.

