

## **Tupelo Honey Café and Sunshot Organics bring eco-cuisine to the restaurant table**

*Environmentally friendly restaurant  
takes steps to become even greener*

ASHEVILLE – Tupelo Honey Café, a fixture in the downtown restaurant scene since 2000, is teaming up with Sunshot Organics to turn an environmentally friendly café into a model for sustainability.

Proprietor Stephen Frabitore and Executive Chef Brian Sonoskus have taken a giant leap beyond serving fresh, organic, hormone- and pesticide-free, locally produced food made from scratch: “Our goal is to actually provide as much food for the restaurant as possible, supplementing what we cannot grow ourselves with food from other local farms,” Frabitore explains.

To accomplish that goal, Sonoskus purchased a 12-acre farm that he dubbed “Sunshot Organics.” Over the last two years, he has been slowly, meticulously bringing it back to life.

“The farm had been let go,” he says, “and it has been quite the labor of love to make it productive again.”

With help from family members, nearby high school students and traveling farm hands, Sonoskus replaced the rocky dirt with organic soil. He tamed the four acres of berry patches that had become a jungle. And he built a 2,000-square-foot greenhouse to keep the restaurant supplied during winter months.

In addition to growing the blueberries, blackberries and black raspberries that go into the café’s signature jams and jellies, Sunshot Organics produces herbs, lettuce, greens, kale, chard and the edible flowers that garnish Sonoskus’ award-winning dishes. Currently, he’s growing pansies, marigolds, nasturtium, calendula, johnny-jump-ups and bachelor buttons.

About 10 percent of the food served in Tupelo Honey Café comes from Sonoskus’ farm, located in the Cane River community of Yancey County. Next year, he hopes to increase that to 15 percent to 20 percent by raising chickens for eggs and growing sweet potatoes.

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Sonoskus delivers the food, berries and flowers to the restaurant himself, returning to the farm every evening with the restaurant's egg shells, coffee rinds and vegetable scraps to compost them at the farm.

"It's an ecological approach to cuisine that is not that uncommon in Asheville but may be completely alien to restaurants in larger cities," Frabitore says. "When you dine at Tupelo, you're eating food that was actually grown by our executive chef. How many restaurants can make that claim?"

### **Becoming greener**

Since becoming proprietor of Tupelo Honey Café earlier this year, Frabitore has taken on the task of making the restaurant as environmentally friendly as possible. One example: He recently made the transition from bottled beers to local microbrews. "We're no longer filling up our recycling bins with Miller and Amstel bottles, but instead we're supporting the local breweries," he said.

During the conversion to beers on tap, Frabitore also installed a temperature-controlled wine dispenser. "Our wines are hand-selected to complement our food. The new system uses nitrogen gas to ensure there's no spoilage of product," he said.

### **About Tupelo Honey Café**

Tupelo Honey Café's mission is to create a charming atmosphere with innovative Southern cuisine, emphasizing quality, selection and excellent service. A locally owned café, it has quickly distinguished itself from other regional restaurants by presenting familiar, creative comfort fare, healthier options, fresh ingredients and large portions at a fair price.

Featuring the work of local artists, the restaurant's interior has been described by *The New York Times* as "an old-fashioned tea room." Tupelo Honey Café also has been featured in *Southern Living* and *Our State* and is consistently voted one of the "Best Restaurants" by *Mountain Xpress*.

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