



# How & Why to Buy Local

*A consumer's guide.*

Much of our county's food system is anything but local. The Buy Local movement has been gathering great momentum recently as we better understand the shortcomings of non-local food systems and the many benefits of looking much closer to home for foods that are healthier for us, our environment, and our communities. Here are several great reasons to go local and some tips on how to get started.

## WHY BUY LOCAL?

### **Reduce food miles, energy use, and pollution.**

Sourcing your food more locally results in less long-distance shipping. Less shipping leads to lower energy costs embedded in our food, less air pollution, and fewer greenhouse gasses causing climate change. These savings are preserved as long as we don't waste energy within our local communities with unnecessary or inefficient methods of local transporting, processing, and storing of our food.

**Get fresh, healthy food.** Choosing local food means we have access to the freshest, highest quality, most nutritious foods at the peak of ripeness and seasonality. Food direct from producers is usually whole and



unprocessed. Eating fresh, whole foods reduces diet-related illness and restores the vitality of a community. Food direct from producers is usually whole and not processed.

**Know where your food comes from.** Buying locally restores trust in our food system by creating the opportunity to buy safe, responsibly grown food from the people we know, not industrial

### **THE NON-LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM**

- Most produce in the US is grown in California, Florida, and Washington.
- Much of it spends 7-14 days in transit before getting to your grocery store, losing freshness and nutrients.
- Most supermarket fruit and vegetable varieties are designed for extended travel and storage, not for taste or nutrition.

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## WHY BUY LOCAL?

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producers and large national retailers. When we buy local, we can shake the hand of the person producing our food, ask them about their growing practices, or even visit the source of our food.

**Connect with and protect the land.** Eating local food produced by the land stewards who surround us enhances our own relationship to the land and the natural processes that make our food and our lives possible. Building long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with sustainable food producers can help support biodiversity and the environment that sustains us all.



**Protect open space and natural landscapes.** Buying local can help preserve open spaces as working landscapes and encourage supportive policies. Agricultural fields can even help create town boundaries that discourage urban sprawl, create wildlife corridors, and protect our natural landscape and quality of life.

**Make our food supply more secure.** Relying on local foods can reduce impacts on our climate and make us less vulnerable in the face of rising energy costs, an uncertain economy, a vulnerable transportation system, and a changing climate.

**Invest in culture and tradition.** Eating local foods preserves the traditions, history, and culture of a region by connecting us to and supporting the land and local producers. Teaching youth about food production and preparation builds inter-generational connectedness around community issues and food traditions.

**Contribute to the local economy.** Putting food dollars directly into the hands of local farmers and ranchers stimulates the local economy. Studies have shown that every dollar spent with a local food business generates significant additional local economic activity and brings more economic stability to rural communities. In the industrial food system, producers typically receive less than 10 cents of the food dollar and the rest goes to the packers, distributors, and brokers of that food, many of which are located out-of-state or out-of-country. In a local food system, more of the money spent on production—and even on processing and marketing—can stay in the local community.



## WHERE TO FIND LOCAL FOOD



**Farmers Markets\***—These days, most towns have a farmers market. According to the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, as of mid-2009, there were more than 6,000 farmers markets operating throughout the U.S. Farmers markets are the easiest way to connect with a variety of agricultural producers in your area. From meat to cheese, vegetables to fiber, vendors are able to sell their wares and answer questions about their products in these venues.

**Restaurants and Grocery Stores**—Many local stores and restaurants highlight local food. Ask the manager or chef of your favorite store or restaurant how much locally grown food they carry, and encourage them to source more food locally. People can do the same at their local supermarket, school cafeteria, soup kitchen, or other charitable food program.

**Community Supported Agriculture Farms\***—Also known as CSAs, some farms allow people to purchase a share in their harvest. This typically happens sometime in winter prior to the growing season, when a customer pays the farmer for a season's worth of food. The farmer uses this investment to cover their up-front costs and in turn supplies the individual or family a variety

of their weekly harvest throughout the growing season. Shares may include anything the farm produces, such as vegetables, fruit, eggs, meat, or cheese.

**Farm Stands\***—Look for farm stands scattered throughout your region. Many will have signs announcing what they have available and where they are located.

**U-Pick Farms\***—Some farms open up their businesses to people who would like to pick their own food. This is a great way to experience first-hand how food is grown, and to appreciate the labor that goes into its harvest. Often this food is offered at a discount because of the time the farmer saves in labor.

**Your Own Backyard**—Utilizing even a small space to grow food is a rewarding, healthy way to eat local. Buying from local businesses that sell seeds, soil, compost, and other garden supplies is another way to support the local food economy when growing your own.

**Community and School Gardens**—A new popular venue to grow local food is at the community level. Many schools are breaking ground on gardens that are used not only to grow food for school cafeterias, but also to teach math, science, and art. Getting involved with these types of gardens encourages more local production and builds community by bringing people together to produce and share food.



*\*You can find these markets in local producer directories. See our online resources for some local directories if you don't know of one already.*

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## DO YOUR PART

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Because we ALL eat, at least three times a day we each have the opportunity to contribute to the health and well being of our food system by choosing local, responsibly produced food.

Here's how...

**Pledge to spend \$10 per week or more on locally produced food.** Most of our food dollars leave our communities and state. Spending just \$10 a week on local food can have a significant impact on our local economy and help support family farmers and ranchers in our region.

**Shop at a local farmers market.** Meet the producers and ask about their growing practices; know where your food comes from!

**Eat in Season.** Learn what foods are in season at which times of year and learn how to build a diet around them.

**Celebrate seasonal local foods.** Host a dinner or gathering that features and celebrates locally available, traditional, and in-season foods.

**Learn to store and preserve local foods and enjoy them all year long.** Store, dry, can, freeze, or otherwise make food available throughout the winter.

**Plant a garden and grow as much food as possible.** Container gardens, raised beds, and intensive gardening methods all make use of small spaces that can be used to raise food and increase your self-reliance.

**Use your voice.** Increase access to and availability of local foods—ask stores and restaurants to carry local foods. Talk to your friends about the benefits of local food and advocate Farm to School in your local school district. Learn about and discuss the issues—including local, state, and federal policies—that affect local food and agriculture.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Find online resources for this tool, as well as additional tool booklets on other community food topics, under “Food System Tools” at [www.healthycommunityfoodsystems.org](http://www.healthycommunityfoodsystems.org) or [www.HCFS.org](http://www.HCFS.org)



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