

The Local Food Movement

What is local food?

“Eating local” or “local food” means seeking out food that has been raised and/or grown and harvested as close to where you live as possible. For example, apples grown in Maine would be considerably more “local” than apples grown in Washington State or New Zealand for a person living in New York City.

Ideally, local food means that you, the buyer, can meet the farmer or food maker if you wish to find out details about how the food was raised and/or grown and harvested. Eating locally has become a foodie movement and the term “Locavore”—a person who exclusively or primarily eats foods produced within a predetermined radius from his or her home—was voted *The New Oxford American Dictionary* word of the year in 2007!

While it’s not written in stone, try to stay within 150 miles of your hometown to keep it local.

Local Food vs Long Distance Food

	Local	Long Distance
Freshness	Due to the close proximity, food has likely been harvested within 24-48 hours.	It goes without saying that if food must travel far, it isn’t nearly as fresh as local food. Food that travels long distance can often be in transit for up to two weeks before reaching grocery store shelves.
Nutrient Level	Produce is picked at the peak of its ripeness so that it’s had ample time to absorb nutrients from the soil and the sun.	Once produce is picked, not only does it stop receiving nutrients, the nutrient density starts to decline. Produce is often picked prematurely to prevent decay and then artificially ripened.
Flavor	As the produce matures naturally, the flavor profile develops in its own time and peaks when the food is fully ripe. More flavor means more nutrients!	These crops are artificially ripened in order for them to make the long-distance journey to grocery stores. While it may look good, it lacks flavor and nutrients from being harvested prematurely.
Resources	Eating seasonally and locally can reduce the carbon footprint of your food by up to 10%.	Transporting food over long distances generates huge quantities of carbon dioxide and requires tons of energy for refrigeration and storage.

Top 5 Reasons for Eating Local

1. Eating local eliminates the middlemen

Buying food locally saves on transportation and energy and eliminates wasteful spending on unnecessary packaging and advertising, which together account for more than 20% of total food costs. Industrial producers don't pay for their full costs of production so eating local may not be cheaper for food buyers, but it certainly reduces the negative social and ecological consequences of our food choices.

2. Eating local improves food quality

Local foods can be fresher, more flavorful, and far more nutritious than foods shipped in from distant locations. In addition to the obvious advantage in freshness, growers who produce for local customers can select, grow, and harvest crops to ensure food-focused qualities like freshness, nutrition, and taste instead of focusing on qualities like packing, shipping, and shelf life. Eating local also encourages eating seasonally, in harmony with the natural energy of nature, which is becoming an important aspect of quality for those of the new food culture.

3. Eating local encourages the preservation of farmland

More than one million acres of U.S. farmland is lost each year to residential and commercial development. Eating local fuels a demand for caring farmers and the land they need in order to farm. Their neighbors make up their market as well as their community. Farms can be very desirable places to live on and around.

4. Eating local contributes to the local economy and an increased profit margin for farmers

American farmers, on average, receive only about 20 cents of each dollar spent on food. The rest goes to processing, transportation, packing, and other marketing costs. Farmers who sell food direct to local customers, on the other hand, receive the full retail value of their crops.

5. Eating local allows people to reconnect

Many people today have no meaningful understanding of where their food comes from. By eating local, people are able to reconnect with local farmers, and through local farmers, reconnect with the earth. Building a sustainable food system requires people to develop a deep understanding of their dependency upon each other and upon the earth.

How Can I Support Local Foods?

- Learn what foods are in season in your area and try to build your diet around them
- Shop at a local farmer's market
- Eat out at restaurants that make every effort to use local ingredients whenever possible
- Take a trip to a local farm to learn what it produces
- Host a harvest party at your home or in your community that features locally available and in-season foods
- Buy extra quantities of your favorite fruit or vegetable when it is in season and experiment with drying, canning, jamming, or otherwise preserving it for a later date
- Plant a garden and grow as much of your own food as possible
- Speak to your local representative about building a community garden or other local food initiatives that you can get involved with