

Why Buy Local?

by Cindy Morrow

I recently stood in the produce section at our retail grocer amazed at the variety I have to choose from. So I need only to concern myself with two things: what do I want and how much will I pay for it — right?

Then, what was this feeling I had as I turned this perfectly colored, perfectly shaped tomato over in my hand? This feeling of ‘something just isn’t right’. Tomatoes are barely sprouting tomato thoughts, much less actual Big Boys, yet I could go my merry way with my Ecuadorian equivalent and make myself a BLT.

What makes me, as I respectfully replace this globetrotting tomato, willing to wait until Bobby’s wagon in Lebanon brims with baskets of the less-than-perfect but oh-so-tasty Florida relative of this fruit? Willing to wait even longer to see the sign in Woodstock’s Market on Main, telling me the Georgia cousins have arrived?

There’s something about looking into the eyes and shaking the hand of the person responsible for the food I’ll eat. Their mind and heart dreamed of working the land and meeting the people who would enjoy the yield they cultivated, tended, and harvested. They need me; that is plain. But do I need them? Only if I care where my food comes from. So, why do I buy local whenever I can?

Eating local means more for the local economy. A dollar spent locally generates twice as much income for the local economy. Only 18 cents of every dollar spent at a large supermarket goes to the grower.

Locally grown produce is fresher. While produce purchased in the supermarket has been in transit or stored for days or weeks, produce you purchase from local growers has often been picked within 24 hours of your purchase. This affects not only the taste of your food but the nutritional value.

Local food just plain tastes better. Ever tried a tomato that was picked within 24 hours? Then you’re ruined for life. Because local produce is handled less, it doesn’t have to

withstand the rigors of shipping. This means peaches so ripe they fall apart as you eat them and melons ripening until the last possible minute.

Eating local is better

for air quality than organic. The miles organic food travels to our plate creates environmental damage that outweighs the benefit of buying organic. To ship a strawberry from California to Georgia requires 435 gallons of fuel but provides only 5 calories nutrition, unless you buy local organic, that is.

Buying local keeps us in touch with the seasons. By eating with the seasons, food is at the peak of taste and nutrition, most abundant, and least expensive.

Buying locally grown food is fodder for a wonderful story. Maybe it’s the writer in me, but knowing part of the story of my food is a powerful part of enjoying a meal. Whether it’s the farmer who brings local apples to market or the vendor selling local eggs, I feel a connection.

Eating local protects us from bio-terrorism. Food with less distance to travel from farm to plate has less susceptibility to harmful contamination. And I can pop in at the Yoder Farm in Canton most any time and Bill will answer any question I have. That transparency doesn’t exist with, say, spinach bagged at a distant agribusiness. I help keep Bill in business, and he helps keep me fed — the elegance and sustainability of that exchange make more sense to me than trusting faceless producers thousands of miles from home.

It’s a radically new way of thinking about eating because it’s so very old. We can borrow the wisdom of the past and buy locally grown food whenever possible. By doing so we’ll provide the best for our families, help preserve the environment, and we’ll strengthen our community by investing our food dollar close to home.

