

QUESTION: WHAT EXACTLY IS A LOCAVORE???

ANSWER: *A person whose diet consists only or principally of locally grown or produced food.*

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One common definition of “local” food is food grown within 100 miles of its point of sale or consumption. “Local” is how you yourself define it – it may mean food grown and/or produced in the state, or by farmers you can know and talk to, or it may be values-based, as in small scale or community-based farming.

I grew up on a farm in Nebraska. I have fond memories of sitting around the kitchen table with Grandma Kudera and looking at seed catalogues every winter. Important decisions about what seeds to order had to be made then, in order to assure the large garden “out in the corn field” my Grandma grew every year.

Back in that day, we who grew up on farms were “locavores” and we didn’t know it! We ate only what was produced in that garden and grown in the livestock pastures (cattle and hogs). Two exceptions that I recall – Grandma purchased peaches by the box for canning, and a burlap gunnysack of cabbage from which she made the family sauerkraut.

I recently read Barbara Kingsolver’s book *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* about her family’s year of commitment to locavore eating which meant eating only food “from so close to home, they would know who grew it.” Many times, that meant themselves as they grew their own food as the seasons dictated. Reading that book kindled many fond memories of Grandma’s garden and helping her tend it was a big part of my growing up years. On the farm we ate what was growing in the garden and the excess was preserved through canning or freezing so we could eat it year-round.

At some point the world decided we need to have strawberries from Japan in December. Over the decades we have come to expect having every food option from everywhere available 24/7. Variety is great, but it comes at a high cost when consideration is given to the carbon footprint incurred with transporting such foods great distances, not to mention the loss of flavor and nutrients.

The following is combined information from several sources: the Michigan State University Extension and the Food Network Revolution*. Some of the benefits of eating local foods include:

- **Locally grown food is full of flavor.** When grown locally, the crops are picked at their peak of ripeness versus being harvested early in order to be shipped and distributed to your local retail store. Many times produce at local markets has been picked within 24 hours of your purchase.
- **Eating local food is eating seasonally.** Even though we wish strawberries were grown year-round, the best time to eat them is when they can be purchased directly from a

local grower. They are full of flavor and taste better than the ones available in the winter that have traveled thousands of miles and were picked before they were ripe.

- **Local food has more nutrients.** Local food has a shorter time between harvest and your table, and it is less likely that the nutrient value has decreased. Food imported from far-away states and countries is often older, has traveled and sits in distribution centers before it gets to your store.
- **Local food supports the local economy.** The money that is spent with local farmers and growers all stays close to home and is reinvested with businesses and services in your community.
- **Local food benefits the environment.** By purchasing locally grown foods you help maintain farmland and green and/or open space in your community.
- **Eating more local food reduces CO2 emissions by reducing food miles** – the distance food travels from farm to consumer. The average piece of produce in the U.S. travels 1,500 miles, while local food may only travel 100 miles (or less), according to researcher Rich Pirog at the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University.
- **Local foods promote a safer food supply.** The more steps there are between you and your food's source the more chances there are for contamination. Food grown in distant locations has the potential for food safety issues at harvesting, washing, shipping and distribution. When foods are imported and out of season, fruits like tomatoes, bananas, and pears are often picked unripe and are then artificially "ripened" with ethylene gas.
- **Local growers can tell you how the food was grown.** You can ask what practices they use to raise and harvest the crops. When you know where your food comes from and who grew it, you know a lot more about that food. Small farmers tend to use fewer chemicals than large, industrialized farms (it is good to ask).

*<https://foodrevolution.org/blog/why-buy-local-food/>

*https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/7_benefits_of_eating_local_foods

Options for sourcing food locally:

The VUU Community Garden! Communicate with Ken St. John if you wish to "dig in" and plant your own produce. If you wish to reduce methane production in landfills, consider bringing your organic food scraps/waste to the VUU composting barrels at the northwest end of the VUU parking lot.

For Farmer's Markets:

<https://arizonacommunityfarmersmarkets.com/> This website contains much information about many options – be sure to look at the "More" banner at the top of the page. Farmer's Markets are likely more expensive than purchases made at grocery stores. However, fresher food is likely to not deteriorate as quickly as some "store-bought" produce, and in the long run can be as cost effective.

For Community Supported Agriculture:

Community supported agriculture (CSA) works in the following manner: members pay up front for the whole season or week to week and the farmers do their best to provide an abundant box of produce each week.

There is an important concept woven into the CSA model that takes the arrangement beyond the usual commercial transaction. That is the notion of shared risk: If things are slim, members are not typically reimbursed via their box of food. The result is a feeling of "we're in this together". Many times, the idea of shared risk is part of what creates a sense of community among members, and between members and the farmers. If a hailstorm takes out all the peppers, everyone is disappointed together, and together cheer on the winter squash and broccoli. Most CSA farmers feel a great sense of responsibility to their members, and when certain crops are scarce, they make sure the CSA gets served first.

<https://www.localharvest.org/csa/>

<https://www.localharvest.org/search.jsp?jmp&scale=8&lat=33.446503&lon=-111.7685&ty=6>

<https://www.borderlandsproducerescue.org/produce-on-wheels/>

<https://www.crookedskyfarms.com/>

And how about some more inspiration...

What's Good For You is Good for the Planet – Dr. Dean Ornish

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QYmInK5xo6g> (20 minutes)

