

## Healthy Food, Healthy Communities

At a time when food travels farther than ever before, eating local is one of the most encouraging and significant changes we can make in our diet today. It gives us a reason to be curious about our food—not just the number of calories or carbs it contains, but where it comes from and how it is raised. An interest in eating local can help shine a light on many of the more problematic aspects of the food system, from animal welfare and labor abuses to environmental neglect.

The good news is that the local foods movement has exploded in recent years, whether in the number of farmers markets, the range of supermarkets featuring food raised nearby, or the growing appeal of groups like Slow Food. Local ingredients are showing up everywhere from school cafeterias to restaurant menus.

The appeal of eating local is obvious: tastier and fresher fare, the chance to support our neighbors and keep cash in the local economy, and reduced vulnerability to oil shortages, transportation problems, and large-scale food contamination. In many developing nations, greater food self-reliance can also help retain precious foreign exchange and avoid the whims of international markets.



### DID YOU KNOW...?

- \* Food transportation is among the biggest and fastest-growing sources of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide. A basic diet—some meat, grain, fruits, and vegetables—composed of imported ingredients can easily require four times the energy and emissions of an equivalent diet with ingredients from domestic sources.
- \* A study by the New Economics Foundation in London found that every £10 spent at a local food business is worth £25 for the local area, compared with just £14 when the same amount is spent in a supermarket.
- \* A “transcontinental” head of lettuce, grown in California and shipped nearly 5,000 kilometers to Washington, DC, requires about 36 times as much fossil fuel energy in transport as it provides in food energy when it arrives. By the time it gets to London, the energy consumption-to-calorie ratio jumps to 127.
- \* The average food item in America now travels at least 2,400 kilometers from farm to plate.
- \* Today, some 817 million tons of food are shipped around the planet each year, up fourfold from 200 million tons in 1961.

### SIMPLE THINGS YOU CAN DO:

- ✓ Learn what foods are in season in your area and try to build your diet around them, shopping at a nearby farmers market or supermarket that sells local foods.
- ✓ Ask the manager or chef of your favorite restaurant how much of the food on the menu is locally grown, and encourage him or her to source more food locally.
- ✓ Encourage your local politicians to form a food policy council to promote farmers markets, to develop a local food directory, and to get fresh foods into schools and other cafeterias.
- ✓ Take a trip with your family or friends to a local farm to learn what it produces.

## SUCCESS STORIES

- ❖ The number of farmers markets in the U.S. has grown from nearly 300 in the mid-1970s to more than 3,700 in 2004. The number of community supported agriculture programs (CSAs)—where members pay the farmer for regular deliveries of fruits and vegetables—has grown from one in 1985 to over 1,200 today.
- ❖ Norway’s National Touring Association, one of the nation’s largest lobbying groups, recently joined with a celebrity chef to develop a line of foods made from native ingredients to stock its network of camping huts. A hiker staying the night might now feast on cured reindeer heart, sour cream porridge, and potatoes grown only in nearby mountain valleys.
- ❖ Burgerville, a chain of 39 fast food restaurants in the U.S. Pacific Northwest, features a menu nearly identical to that of McDonald’s, but buys the bulk of its ingredients from farmers in Oregon and Washington.
- ❖ Egypt’s largest organic foods producer, Sekem, has developed a line of breads, dried fruits, herbs, sauces, and other items made entirely from domestic ingredients. The brand is recognized by 70 percent of Egyptians, and sales have doubled each of the last five years.
- ❖ In fall 2004, the New York City school district, the largest in the U.S., began to “reprocess” fourteen of its top cafeteria recipes to make them healthier, tastier, and fresher by including more ingredients grown in the Northeast.



## CHALLENGE YOURSELF AND OTHERS:

Next time you go shopping, buy extra quantities of your favorite local fruit or vegetable when it is in season and experiment with drying, canning, jamming, or otherwise preserving it for a later date. Share with others by hosting a harvest party at your home or in your community that features locally available and in-season foods.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- ☛ **Slow Food International ([www.slowfood.com](http://www.slowfood.com))** is an international organization that promotes food and wine culture and aims to protect the pleasures of the table from the homogenization of modern fast food and life.
- ☛ **Local Harvest ([www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org))** provides a comprehensive directory of farmers’ markets, farm stands, U-Pick Farms, and Community Supported Agriculture programs in the U.S.
- ☛ **Navdanya, Seeds of Freedom ([www.navdanya.org](http://www.navdanya.org))**, based in India, saves seeds, promotes organic agriculture, creates awareness of the hazards of genetic engineering, and defends people’s food sovereignty in the face of globalization.
- ☛ **Food Routes ([www.foodroutes.org](http://www.foodroutes.org))** is a U.S. non-profit dedicated to reintroducing Americans to their food—the seeds it grows from, the farmers who produce it, and the routes that carry it from the fields to their tables.