

Think Globally, Eat Locally

Reduce your contributions to greenhouse gas emissions...deliciously.



average of 101 kilometres to markets, versus 5,364 kilometres for imported items. The latter also created 100 times more greenhouse gas emissions.

Marc Xuereb, a public health planner for the Region of Wa-

terloo in Ontario, led a study that examined 58 commonly eaten foods imported into the region. He cites tomatoes as a dramatic example of the benefits of local foods. "On average, imports come more than 5,000 kilometres, yet

ORGANIC VS. LOCAL

Organic food uses fewer chemicals, while local food uses fewer fossil fuels. Overall, which is better for the environment?

"Whatever environmental benefits you can gain from organic methods may indeed be cancelled out when you truck them from California to Toronto," says Ontario public health planner Marc Xuereb. In fact, there's little research on the subject, although one report found that local food can actually be "greener" than imported organic products. For now, it's up to consumers to decide what is more important to them.

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Calculate your own food miles with help from the Victoria-based LifeCycles Project, a website that uses government data to reveal the food miles of imports to British Columbia and compares the greenhouse gas emissions they create with those created by the same product from within the province. Even if you don't live in B.C., you'll get an idea how you can help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by buying locally. Visit www.lifecyclesproject.ca; click on the Initiatives tab, then select Food Miles from the column on the left.

we are very close to one of the biggest tomato-growing areas in the world, Leamington." Replacing fresh tomato imports with local ones outside the growing season isn't sustainable, but switching to local canned tomatoes over imported ones is easy.

Buying locally also helps support your community and puts fresher, better-tasting food on your table. Become a regular at the farmers' market, where you can buy straight from the grower. Pick your own produce where you can. Buy as much meat as your freezer can handle at the farm gate or local abattoir.

"For people who are busy, look into food boxes in your area," suggests Marla MacLeod, a volunteer with the Halifax-based Ecology Action Centre. "There are a couple of community-supported local agriculture programs in Nova Scotia that do weekly food box deliveries to Halifax."

Enjoy the food that's best at each time of the year. And if the winter seems too barren to bear, preserve the summer by pickling, drying, canning or freezing. There are plenty of recipe books to guide you, and nothing equals the satisfaction of a freezer and shelves full with an extended harvest.

Ingredients for processed goods may travel around the country, from factory to factory, for cleaning, processing and packaging before arriving in stores. Look for foods that require little or no packaging, such as whole fruits, vegetables and bulk dry goods.

Read labels to check foods' origin as well as how they are produced. For example, some fresh produce grown in the off-season in greenhouses may use as much energy as is needed to import something similar from the south.

Reducing your food miles requires a new way of thinking. "Take it small steps at a time because the reality is that most of our food is very energy intensive and comes from a long distance," says Xuereb. He suggests one simple change: Swap your morning glass of orange juice for local apple juice.

Chain grocery stores often centralize their buying, meaning most carry just a few local items. And our national agricultural policies focus on productivity in the name of cheap food. "Part of the problem is we pay too little for our food, so we need to find ways that we can make local food available at relatively affordable prices," says Xuereb.

Consumers can vote for local food with their dollars, and do good for their community and planet in the process. Demand for locally produced food is growing all over the country, meaning even the big chains will eventually have to react by carrying fewer imports

THE VERDICT

Even if we live in southern Canada, much of the food we buy has travelled thousands of kilometres to reach us. If you're concerned about climate change, read labels and visit a farmers' market. Buying as many as possible of your groceries from local producers will cut your personal greenhouse gas emissions.

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and more field-fresh produce. No matter how small, the choice of what to eat has an impact on our climate, for better or for worse. ♻️

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CWF's new magazine, *Checkerspot*, has lots of suggestions for reducing your personal contribution to climate change, including tips on eating locally in your part of the country. Look for it in this issue of *Canadian Wildlife* or visit www.CheckerspotMagazine.ca.

checkerspot
climate change is in your hands

