Buying Locally Grown Produce Saves Money, the Environment and the Farm Family

You’ve probably been told a million and one times that you should buy locally grown. And, you’ve also probably seen local farmers markets sprout up around your neighborhood everywhere. But why should you buy local? What’s the benefit to you, your community and the environment?

- Local food tastes better, by buying local, you are receiving the freshest possible produce, picked just hours before delivery to your local store. Produce that travels long distances is days older. Sugars turn to starches, plant cells shrink, and produce loses its vitality and flavor.

- Local food is more nutritious. Once harvested, produce quickly loses nutrients. Since local produce is sold right after it’s picked, it retains more nutrients.

- Local food uses less packaging. Buying produce from a farmers market or from a farm itself is a no-frills process that involves less packaging.

- Local food supports local farmers. The American family farmer is a vanishing breed - fewer than 1,000,000 people (less than 1%) of Americans claim farming as a primary occupation. It’s no wonder: it’s hard to make a living when you get less than 10 cents of every retail food dollar. By buying locally, the middleman disappears and the farmer gets full retail price, in turn helping farmers continue to farm.

- Local food builds community. By getting to know the farmers who grow your food, you build understanding, trust and a connection to your neighbors & your environment. The weather, the seasons and the science of growing food offer great lessons in nature and agriculture. Visiting local farms with your friends and your family brings that education and appreciation to the next generation.

- Local food preserves open space. Do you enjoy visiting the countryside where you see lush fields of crops, meadows of wildflowers, picturesque barns and rolling pastures? Well, this should also serve as a reminder that our treasured agricultural landscape survives only when farms are financially viable. By spending your money on locally grown food, you’re increasing the value of the land to the farmer and making development less likely.

- Local food keeps taxes in check. For every $1 in revenue raised by residential development, governments spend $1.17 on services, which increases taxes. For every $1 in revenue raised by a farm, a forest or open space, governments spend $0.34 cents on services. You do the math.

- Local food supports the environment and benefits wildlife. Family farmers tend to be good stewards of the land – they respect and value fertile soil and clean water. And their farms provide the fields, meadows, forests, ponds and buildings that are the habitat for many beloved and important species of wildlife. In addition, buying local also reduces the use of fossil fuels and helps to protect the environment from harmful exhaust fumes.
• Local food is about the future. Supporting local farms today helps keep those farms in your community, ensuring that your children and grandchildren have access to nourishing, flavorful and abundant food. When you choose to buy locally, and make your choices known, you raise the consciousness of your family, friends and neighbors.

Hopefully this gives you some food for thought when you consider buying fruits and vegetables in the coming summer months. Let’s support our local farmers.

For more information on Food Preservation and Preparation:
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Cell Phone: 205-410-3696 or contact your local County Extension Agent and they can get in contact with her for you.

Sources: LocalHarvest.org, Community Alliance with Family Farmers, & SustainableTable