

Michelle's Earth Foundation Guide to: **EATING LOCALLY!**

Introduction: Why Local Foods?

The movement towards eating locally-grown food is one of the fastest-growing environmental movements today. The oft-cited statistic that the average vegetable travels 1,500 miles to get to a dinner table is simply the jumping-off point for a larger debate about what and how we eat, and how it effects our planet. Organizations like Slow Food USA, Sustainable Table, and Local Harvest have begun preaching a doctrine of sustainable eating to increasingly larger audiences. As a Michelle's Earth Foundation activist, we encourage you to get involved in this movement. You can use this toolkit as a guide for what you can do, in your daily life, to make sure that you are eating locally.



But first, what does it mean to eat local foods, and why is it so important?

The generally accepted definition of what it means to 'eat locally' is to support your local community both socially and economically by eating only food that is grown or raised within 100 to 200 miles from where you live. An extremely important aspect of this practice is the related idea of 'seasonality': making an effort to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables as they are in season in your area, and doing without them when they are out of season. Seasonality is an important part of the eating local movement because although it is possible today to buy foods grown virtually anywhere in the world all year round, doing so is not at all sustainable.

The reasons for eating locally and seasonally are numerous.

1.) Economic reasons: According to a study by the New Economic Foundation in London, "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. That is, a pound (or dollar) spent locally generates twice as much income for the local economy. The farmer buys a drink at the local pub; the pub owner gets a car tune-up at the local mechanic; the mechanic brings a shirt to the local tailor; the tailor buys some bread at the local bakery; the baker buys wheat for bread and fruit for muffins from the local farmer. When these businesses are not owned locally, money leaves the community at every transaction."

Simply put, by purchasing local foods in-season, your money goes directly to the farmer and in turn to your local economy. This is a powerful economic incentive to eat locally: if a dollar spent locally generates twice as much money for the local economy as a dollar spent sent to a far-away farm or gobbled up by a global or national food-distributor, then we can double our buying-power by purchasing only locally-grown food. Therefore, eating locally can help us to harness our individual economic power to counter the extreme globalization of the food industry. Consider this statistic: \$70,000 of California pistachios are sent annually to New York, then travel by ship to

Italy, while California imports \$50,000 of pistachios from Italy annually. If more Californians were to make a conscious effort to buy only locally-grown pistachios, then much of this wasteful trade could be prevented.

2.) Environmental reasons: There are various environmental benefits to eating locally. First of all, you eliminate the environmental damage caused by pollution from transporting foods thousands of miles. Not only do ships, trucks, and airplanes burn fossil fuels, which emit carbon particles into the atmosphere and exacerbate global warming, but spills of fossil fuels from these transport vehicles also damage the environment. There is even some evidence that eating only local food helps improve air quality and limit pollution even more than eating only organic (grown without pesticides) food. While pesticides and herbicides sprayed on non-organic food are very harmful pollutants it was found that the miles that organic food often travels to our plate creates environmental damage that outweighs the benefit of buying it (Food Policy journal, March 2005).

Secondly, locally grown food most often comes from small farms, whose business practices are far better for the environment than those of the enormous “agri-businesss” or “factory farms” where most supermarket goods are grown. On unsustainable factory farms, thousands of animals excrete millions of gallons of waste every week, much of which is held untreated in open-air pools that pollute the surrounding air, land and water. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, hog, chicken and cattle waste polluted 35,000 miles of rivers in 22 states and contaminated groundwater in 17 states during the 1990's. Raising animals on factory farms also uses up a very large amount of oil – to grow and harvest the crops that feed the animals, to fuel the ventilation systems and electricity in the barns in which they're held, and to fuel the transport vehicles which move the animals the long distances they travel. Even huge agri-business farms that do not raise animals, but only grow plants, are bad for the environment. Most of them spray crops with chemicals that act as pesticides and herbicides, but can also pollute the air and seep into the water supply, sickening humans and animals. Small farms, by contrast, are much more likely to be organic or produce 'light-spray' crops; and are more likely to manage their animals in a more environmentally friendly manner.

Thirdly, supporting local providers supports responsible land development, because when you buy local, you give those with local open space - farms and pastures - an economic reason to stay open and undeveloped. Although farmland is cultivated, it is still a much better environment for wildlife than housing subdivisions or strip-malls.



3.) Social reasons: One of the most compelling social reasons to eat locally is that it supports small, sustainable family farms which are an integral part of rural communities, and where money made on the farm is filtered back into local businesses. When huge factory farms move in, consolidating land holdings and replacing human workers with machines, it can tear apart rural communities both economically and socially. Workers on factory farms are more likely to face dangerous conditions on the job, and are often immigrants who are paid minimum wage

without benefits and have little or no rights or say in their job. Employees on small farms are much more likely to be paid a fair wage and are treated with respect. Stats show that small farms are rapidly disappearing all over the United States. By buying locally, even if you live in the city, you are strengthening the rural community closest to you, and supporting an institution that is a big part of our cultural heritage – the small, independent family farmer.

Another important benefit of eating locally is that it builds and strengthens your community, even if it is in the middle of a large city. By talking to farmers at your local market, working alongside your neighbors at a food co-op, or swapping seasonal recipes with your friends, you are building community and forming integral social bonds which can enrich your life and the lives of others.

4.) Health reasons: Another important group of reasons to eat locally is so that you and your family can enjoy the health benefits of eating fresh, unprocessed fruits and vegetables. Buying food from farms close to you cuts down on the length of time between when the food is harvested or processed and when you eat it. After being harvested, food begins to lose nutrients, so the less time between the farm and your dinner plate, the more nutritious the food is for you. While produce that is purchased in the supermarket or a big-box store has been in transit or cold-stored for days or weeks, produce that you purchase at your local farmer's market has often been picked within 24 hours of your purchase. Eating local also protects you from getting sick, since food with less distance to travel from farm to plate has less susceptibility to harmful contamination.

Beyond fruits and vegetables, health benefits have also been found from eating sustainable, local meat. If you are a meat-eater, you have an additional reason to buy from small-farms. While factory-farmed animals are often crammed together in cruel and disgusting conditions, where they get very sick, sustainably-raised animals are treated humanely and are apt to be more healthy before they are processed into meat.

There are many more hidden benefits to eating locally grown food. Many people claim that local food simply tastes better. This might be because locally grown fruits and vegetables do not have to be "rugged" to stand up to the rigors of shipping, and so they are allowed more time to ripen and hence, become deliciously flavorful. There are also holistic benefits to eating local food. By doing so, we not only build community with our fellow human beings, but we grow closer with nature by respecting and keeping track of her nature cycles, the seasons.

By now you hopefully understand that by taking just a few small actions – making the effort to recognize, get, and prepare local food -- we can make a lifestyle change which has innumerable benefits. One of the primary goals of Michelle's Earth Foundation is to embody the idea that small actions by individuals can equal a big change for the health of the planet overall. We hope that you will look through the rest of this toolkit to find out how you can make small changes in the way you eat, and in doing so, help make a big difference for the environment, the community, and yourself.



How to Recognize Local Foods:

Seasonal foods

The first step to eating local is to know which foods are in season, when, in your local area. Seasonal eating calls for the complete opposite kind of meal planning than what most people do. Instead of picking a recipe you like, and then going shopping for the ingredients, you should buy what's in season and then look for recipes to match what you have. It is ok to purchase foods a few weeks before and after their prime availability (when they are harvested), but be aware that they will taste the absolute best during the peak season.

You can go to this website to click on your state and find what products are in season in your area: <http://www.sustainabletable.org/shop/eatseasonal/>

Here is an example of the seasonal availability of foods in an area:

CALENDAR OF MARYLAND / VIRGINIA / D.C. HARVESTS

Feb. 7-21	maple sap (sugar, syrup)	July 10-Nov. 1	broccoli
April 25-June 15	asparagus	July 15-Aug. 30	okra
May	spinach	July 15-Sept. 15	cantaloupes, plums
May 15-June 20	strawberries	July 20-Aug. 30	peas (black-eyed)
June 1-July 1	peas (green)	July 20-Sept. 1	beans (lima)
June 1-Sept. 15	cabbage	July 21-Sept. 20	cider
June 10-July 10	cherries (sweet)	July 25-Aug. 25	nectarines
June 10-Sept. 15	beans (snap)	July 25-Sept. 10	eggplant
June 15-July 10	raspberries (black & red)	July 25-Sept. 15	peppers
June 15-July 15	cherries (sour)	July 25-Oct. 1	watermelons
June 20-Aug. 1	blueberries	Aug. 1-Sept. 10	blackberries (thornless)
June 25-Aug. 30	beans (pole)	Aug. 1-Sept. 30	squash (winter)
June 25-Sept. 1	squash (summer)	Aug. 15-Sept. 20	grapes (table & wine)
June 25-Sept. 15	corn (yellow & white)	Aug. 15-Oct. 15	pears
July 1-Aug. 1	cucumbers (pickles)	Aug. 15-Nov. 1	turnips
July 1-Sept. 1	cucumbers	Aug. 15-Nov. 5	apples
July 1-Sept. 30	potatoes	Aug. 31-Sept. 25	raspberries (red)
July 1-Oct. 30	honey	Sept.-Oct.	gourds
July 4-Sept. 1	beets	Sept. 5-Dec. 15	sweet potatoes
July 4-Sept. 15	tomatoes	Sept. 10-Nov. 30	pumpkins
July 5-Aug. 1	blackberries	Oct.-Nov.	corn (ornamental)
July 5-Sept. 20	peaches	December	Christmas trees
July 10-Sept. 15	carrots		

There are many other great resources out there with lists of foods that are good for you. Here are a few:

Organic food listing (interactive map):

<http://www.localharvest.org/>

List of Foods with/without Genetically Engineered (GE) Ingredients:

http://www.truefoodnow.org/shoppersguide/guide_printable.html

How to Get Local Foods:

Farmers Markets

A farmers market is a market where growers/producers from a given region gather to sell their goods to residents of the local community. Most farmers markets are outdoor and seasonal (usually in the spring, summer, and fall), but some are inside and year-round. Many farmers markets sell more than just fruits and vegetables, including meats, cheeses, flowers, herbs, baked goods, canned goods, wines, wool, and hand-crafted goods. Many vendors at farmers markets will offer free samples so that you can taste the goods before purchasing them. In general, vendors at farmers markets take only cash, so be sure to bring small bills.

Farmers markets are a wonderful way for people living in cities to buy inexpensive, regionally-grown produce and also to make the larger food system sustainable. When you buy fresh, local food from farmers markets, you also help small family farms stay in business, which in turn protects land from development. Thus, farmers markets provide a direct link between the farmer and the consumer, building community.



In the spirit of this community, it's a good idea to ask questions of the growers at a farmers market. Not all goods sold at farmers markets are organic, so it's best to ask the sellers about their growing methods - what chemicals they use, and how much of them they use - before purchasing. Feel free to also ask when the crops were harvested, the methods of raising the animals, (if you are buying meat), and even suggestions for recipes and ways to cook the food you are buying. If you'd like to conduct research ahead of time, many farms now have comprehensive websites with everything from foodie philosophy to photos of the living conditions of farm animals.

Some tips for a successful trip to the farmers market, from 100milediet.org, include:

~ Come early to get the best quality food - farmers markets can get very crowded, especially on weekend. Mid-week markets are quieter, but weekenders often have the best selection.

~ To be sustainable, try to bike, walk, or take public transportation to the farmers market, and bring your own sturdy cloth bags, a backpack, cooler, or basket to carry food home in.

~ In order to save money, walk up-and-down the entire market to check prices before you buy anything. Also, look for foods at their peak of seasonal abundance, or see if you can make arrangements with market farmers to buy bulk at a discount. Finally, be aware that the size and quality of farmers market food is not always equivalent to supermarket food: a head of farmers' market lettuce can appear higher priced than at the megamart, but may also be much larger, and/or more flavorful.

To find a farmers market near you, go to the USDA Farmer's Market listing interactive map, at: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/map.htm>

Community Supported Agriculture collectives:

A CSA, (for Community Supported Agriculture) is like a subscription for a group of eaters (usually a family) to a farm. By making a financial contribution to a farm, people become "members" (or "shareholders," or "subscribers") of the CSA, and in return for their investment they receive a weekly basket of fresh produce, flowers, fruits, eggs, milk, coffee, or any sort of different farm products, throughout the growing season.

CSAs thus create mutually-supportive relationships between local growers and community: while members are assured high-quality, fresh produce, often at below retail prices, growers also benefit from being guaranteed a reliable market for a diverse selection of their crops. This system makes a CSA a very comprehensive solution to problem of eating environment-friendly: by joining, not only are you able to eat local on a day-to-day basis, but you are also helping to create economic stability for a small farm operation.

A CSA season typically runs from late spring through early fall. The number of CSAs in the United States was estimated at 50 in 1990, and has since grown to over 1000, (according to Local Harvest).

Most CSA farmers prefer that members pay for the season up-front, but some farmers will accept weekly or monthly payments. Some CSAs also require that members work a small number of hours on the farm during the growing season.

According to *the Community Supported Agriculture of North America at University of Massachusetts Extension*, the way it works is this:

A farmer or grower must first draw up a "yearly operating budget" which reflects the production costs for the year. This includes all labor costs, distribution costs, and costs for seeds, fertilizer, land payments, water, equipment maintenance, etc. The budget is then divided by the number of people for which the farm will provide, and this determines the cost of each share of the harvest. One share is usually designed to provide the weekly vegetable needs for a family of four. Flowers, fruit, meat, honey, eggs and dairy products can also be made part of a CSA agreement.



Next, community members sign up and purchase their shares, thereby making a commitment to support the farm throughout the season, and assuming the costs, risks and bounty of growing food along with the farmer or grower. The payment can be made either in one lump sum before the seeds are sown in early spring, or in several installments throughout the growing season.

Then, once crops start coming in, the food is harvested either the morning of pick up or the day before, ensuring fresh, great-tasting produce. The grower arranges to have bags of crops delivered to CSA members, typically once a week from late spring through early fall, and occasionally to members' doorsteps, to a few pre-determined spots in the city, or in some instances, members pick up the share from the farm directly. Crops are planted in succession in order to provide a continuous weekly supply of mixed vegetables. As crops rotate throughout the season, weekly shares vary by size and types of produce, reflecting local growing seasons and conditions.

To find an existing CSA near you, go to The CSA Center listing, at:

<http://www.wilson.edu/csasearch/search.asp>

Co-Ops



A co-op is a group of people or organizations that come together voluntarily for each person or group's mutual benefit. Co-ops are like businesses, except that they are owned by the members themselves and are not-for-profit, so that any extra money that is earned is shared among the member/owners. Co-ops are democratic, meaning that each member gets one vote on matters of how to run the organization. There are many types of co-ops, including babysitting co-ops, health care co-ops, and, for our purposes, local food co-ops.

Food co-operatives, often simply called co-ops, are usually formed by members of a given community with the goal of providing low cost, healthy food primarily to members of the co-op, though some also sell to the public. Most food from co-ops is organic, though some is "natural" -- produced with a minimum of processing with little or no additives or preservatives. All food coops are committed to consumer education, product quality, and member control, and most, with some exceptions, are committed to supporting their local communities by selling only locally-grown food.

There are generally two types of food cooperatives: co-operative grocery (retail) stores and buying clubs.

Co-op retail stores are usually similar to regular grocery stores, in that they are enclosed structures with a large variety of different foods available at one time. If there is a co-op retail store in your local community, simply walk in and ask how you can become a member. The rules of each are different: some co-ops have new members play a flat fee to join, while others ask for flat payments in monthly or weekly installments, or else individual payments based on the amount and types of foods you take away. Again, before joining it is wise to make sure that most or all of the food sold at the co-op is locally grown.

Food buying clubs, or co-ops, are a bit more informal. A food buying club is simply an association of people who get together in order to purchase food in bulk. Most are groups of people who already know each other – groups of friends, members of church groups, neighborhood groups, etc. As a group, people's purchasing power increases and allows them to access the cheaper wholesale marketplace, which is usually prohibited to individuals.

The food buying club coordinates to place pre-orders with wholesale food distributors for its members' own consumption. Food is generally ordered from a natural foods regional distributor, a food co-op warehouse, or a local farm. Each distributor has its own unique policy and terms: some require vendor permits or other official documentation, while others only require that you fill in an application in order to start an account. The food-buying club is responsible for working out the details of delivery of the bulk order, as well as the division of the food into individual household orders and delivery or pick-up by members.

If you can't find a food buying club already existing in your community, you may want to consider forming a club yourself.

First, simply round up enough people who are willing to volunteer their time and energy in order to purchase high quality, healthful foods at affordable wholesale prices. Seven-ten households, or 25-75 people, is usually the right amount. Talk up the idea with family, friends neighbors, and

co-workers. It's a good idea for at least one person in the group to have some organizing experience, such as with another buying club.

The next step is to hold a meeting! Invite all of those people who are interested in the buying club idea. This gathering is an opportunity to emphasize the cooperative nature of a buying club. Members must be committed to working and making decisions together, each taking on a role, and ensuring that their tasks are completed.

Choose a name for your club. Then, as a group, or if you so choose, within a smaller organizational committee, discuss and divide up the following aspects of administration of the club: overall coordination, price guide and sales flyer distribution, price negotiation with distributors, ordering, money collection from members, supplies and equipment, bookkeeping, new member requirements and orientation, and unloading, sorting, and cleanup at the delivery/distribution site(s).

When identifying a location for deliveries and distribution, possibilities can include local churches, town halls, public buildings, fire houses or county fairgrounds. The site needs include accessibility for tractor trailer trucks, enough space for the order to be sorted out, and flexible hours of availability. Optional, but nice to have, is a sink for washing and clean up, a refrigerator, a freezer, and a phone.

To find a co-op in your area, go to Sustainable Tables listing at:

<http://www.coopdirectory.org/directory.htm> , or Local Harvest's interactive map at: **<http://www.localharvest.org/food-coops/>**

Farms

More and more farms, especially small, family-owned ones, are starting to grow organic, that is, without spraying their crops with pesticides, herbicides, or any other chemicals. "Organic" usually means that the farms do not use genetically modified plants, but not always, so it's best to ask to be sure. Organic farms can be another great way to get access to healthy local foods. If you live in a rural area, or close enough to one that it would be fuel-efficient to drive, you may want to try to purchase your local foods right from the source.

There are several different ways to do this. First, there are "pick your own" farms. Some farmers, berry and orchard growers in particular, allow consumers to pick their own produce. Usually for a set price by the bushel or pint, you can go into the farmer's fields and pick your own crops. This is good for individuals interested in freezing or canning.

Second, some growers set up farm stands, usually in the summer months, in rural or exurban areas, which they sell their crops from. Some farm stands are tiny operations, just a bench with zucchinis alongside a road, while others, especially those belonging to large farms, are enclosed structures that are more like stores, and sell many types of produce, meats and even baked and processed foods. These large farm stands do not always sell local goods – be sure to check the labels or ask if you aren't sure.



Gardens

Gardening is almost essential for would-be local eaters. Although many of us will claim that we don't have the gift of a "green-thumb", gardening is really the easiest and most economic way to get access to local foods, so if you have access to any plot of ground, it's really silly not to use it to plant a garden.

There are two primary types of gardens: individual and community.

Individual gardens are the ones that families or households grow on their own land. They are very easy to start, even if you don't have the aforementioned "green thumb". Here is an easy guide to "How to Grow an Organic Garden" from MEF member Alison Bell:

The first step is to pick a location for your garden. Start small, since small gardens are easy to manage, and by starting on a small scale you'll quickly learn gardening basics such as weed control, pest and disease control, watering requirements, and so on without being overwhelmed. For the best success, a vegetable garden should be well planned out in advance. A spot near the house in full sunlight is normally the most convenient spot; however, drainage, soil quality, and shade from buildings or trees may mean the garden must be located in an area farther from the house. A good vegetable garden must have at least six hours of full sun each day in order for your food crops to mature properly. No amount of fertilizer, water, or care can replace needed sunshine.

In planning your garden, consider what and how much you will plant. It is better to have a well maintained, small garden than a large one neglected and full of weeds. Usually, the garden should be surrounded by a sufficiently high fence with close mesh to keep out dogs, rabbits, and other animals. A fence also can serve as a trellis for beans, peas, tomatoes, and other crops that need support. Fertile, well-drained soil is also necessary for a successful garden. Good soil is well drained, well supplied with organic matter, reasonably free of stones, and moisture retentive. The subsoil also is very important. Hard shale, rock ledges, gravel beds, deep sand under the surface may make the development of garden soil extremely difficult or impossible. Moreover, soils should not be plowed or worked while it is very wet.

Different types of vegetables require varying degrees of soil acidity. The acidity or alkalinity of the soil is measured by pH. You can buy an inexpensive pH test kit at most nurseries, and many good garden centers will gladly test a soil sample for you. Once you have determined the pH you can amend the soil as needed.

The next step is planting your garden. If you are planning to grow vining plants, create mounds on which you will put them for example, cucumbers, pumpkins and melons. Also, establish pathway in your garden early so that you won't be walking across areas which will be planted. Be sure to water your garden thoroughly the day before you intend to plant.

Then sow your seeds, and to put in your vegetable bedding plants. Planting depths and spacing are critical, so don't crowd too many plants into the allotted space or you may end up with spindly plants and no food. Be sure to place a tag or marker on each row or area so that you will know what to expect will sprout there and when! Set the depth to the recommended requirements on the seed packet; again this will vary according to what you intend to plant. Open the seed package off and as you move down the row, carefully distribute the seeds evenly. Larger type seeds may be placed individually in the row.

Cover the seeds with fine soil (no clods or rocks) and firm the soil over the seeds to insure good moisture contact, and to help retain the moisture in the soil. Water thoroughly using a gentle spray so you don't disturb or uncover the seeds: seeds need moisture to germinate, so it is important to keep the soil moist until the seedlings are up. It is best to thin while the seedlings are still small, so that you aren't disturbing the roots of the plants which will remain.

The last step is to maintain your garden as it grows:

- During dry periods, vegetable gardens need extra watering. Most vegetables benefit from an inch or more water each week, especially when they are fruiting.
- Mulching between the rows will help to control weeds, conserve moisture in the soil, and provide you with pathways to access your plants. Black plastic may be used, or you can utilize grass clippings, straw, wood chips, or garden debris.
- Throughout the growing season be vigilante against Discovering a bug problem early will make it much easier to take appropriate action.
- Weeds rob your vegetables of water, light and root space. Keep them pulled out regularly (try to get the entire root). If they are allowed to go to seed, you may be dealing with thousands of weeds instead of a just a few.
- Once you have harvested your crop, put the spent plant and other vegetable matter into your compost pile so that it can be recycled into your garden again, next spring.



If you don't have the space for an individual garden, you may want to consider a community garden as a source of locally grown foods instead. Community gardens are plots of land that are usually but not always in urban areas that are cultivated for gardening by a group of people. Some community garden grow flowers, vegetables, or other crops. Some are organized as one big community plot, some are divided into many individual plots. Some can also be a series of plots dedicated to "urban agriculture," where produce is grown for a market. Community gardens can be located on abandoned city lots, on public lands such as parks, or on the land of hospitals, schools, or community centers, and many other places as well.

Besides being a wonderful local way to get local foods, the American Community Gardening Association (ACGA) lists the following benefits that community gardens provide:

- Improves the quality of life for people in the garden
- Provides a catalyst for neighborhood and community development
- Stimulates Social Interaction
- Encourages Self-Reliance
- Beautifies Neighborhoods
- Produces Nutritious Food
- Reduces Family Food Budgets
- Conserves Resources
- Creates opportunity for recreation, exercise, therapy, and education
- Preserves Green Space
- Reduces Crime
- Creates income opportunities and economic development
- Reduces city heat from streets and parking lots
- Provides opportunities for intergenerational and cross-cultural connections

To find a Community Garden in your area, go to the ACGA's listing:

<http://acga.localharvest.org/>

Restaurants and Supermarkets

Believe it or not, even some restaurants and mainstream supermarkets are realizing that consumers want to eat local, sustainable, and organic food, and are starting to offer more of it. There's really no one good web resource or guide to identifying these sources, so it's best just to ask many questions when you see "local food" advertised at a restaurant or grocery store. Ask to talk to the manager, and don't be afraid to grill them about how far away the farms are that grow the food: if it's more than 200 miles away, that shouldn't really count. In general, it's a good idea to talk to the managers at chain groceries to let them know that you're more likely to purchase food at their store if it was local.



On the web, The Eat Well Guide is a good search-engine for "wholesome, fresh, sustainable food in the US and Canada. Find food in your neighborhood and when you travel that is healthful, humane, better for the environment, and that supports family farmers":

<http://www.eatwellguide.org/index.cfm>



Also, according to Sustainable Table, these chain restaurants also serve sustainable, if not always local, food:

Chipotle: The fast-food, burrito chain restaurant serves Niman Ranch pork in its burritos, which meets AWI Animal Husbandry standards that require animals to be raised both humanely and sustainably.

Song: Delta's low-price airline, Song, includes meals that are made from organic ingredients, with some from small, family farms. (Food is not included with the price of a ticket.)

TGI Friday's: The huge American-food chain serves hamburgers from antibiotic-free, hormone-free source verified Angus cattle.

How to Prepare Local Foods:

Cooking

Here are few recipes that MEF members use to prepare seasonally available local food:

FROM THE KITCHEN OF DIANE GARDNER:

PESTO

1 & 1/2 cup of basil tightly packed

1/2 C. virgin olive oil

1/3 C. of pine nuts

2 cloves of garlic peeled

1/2 C. grated parmesan cheese

Whirl all ingredients in the blender until smooth. Serve over fresh pasta.

BROCHETTE

Toasted, sliced bread of choice

Finely dice tomatoes and basil leaves

Drizzle balsamic vinegar and olive oil on tomatoes and basil
Slice garlic and rub on bread
Spoon marinated tomato and basil mixture onto bread. Serve

MOZZARELLA AND TOMATO SALAD

Slice some tomatoes
Slice fresh mozzarella
Place one slice mozzarella on a slice of tomato
Garnish with mint or basil leaves

FRENCH POTATO SALAD

Boil cubed potatoes and eggs
Cut up some tomatoes
When potatoes and eggs are cooked, peel eggs, dice them & mix with the potatoes
Mix tomatoes into the mixture
Finely dice red onions and place into mixture
Pour olive oil into mixture until moist
Juice one lemon and pour into mixture and mix up well.
Seasoning to taste

SLICED EGGPLANT

Slice an eggplant, brush with olive oil and grill. Easy and delicious!

PEAR AND PARSNIP SOUP

3 ripe pears, peeling, cored & chopped
3 to 4 med. parsnips, peeled and chopped
Combine pears, parsnips in 2 & 1/2 cups of stock on med. heat. Bring to boil. Turn down heat to simmer and let cook, partially covered until the parsnip pieces are tender about 15 min. Drain, reserving the liquid and the solids separately. Puree the solids with little of reserved stock. Return pureed mixture and reserved stock to the soup pot. Add remaining stock. Season to taste and simmer 15 minutes.

FROM THE KITCHEN OF LAURA HUENNEKENS:

Spring: This is a season of pears, scallions, and the long-awaited asparagus!

SPRING VEGGIE MEDLEY

1 pound asparagus
1/2 pound green beans
4 stalks bok choy or celery
2 cloves garlic
1/4 pound fresh spinach
Salt, pepper, crushed pepper flakes, sesame seeds to taste
Wash and trim asparagus and slice into diagonal 2-3 inch pieces
Wash green beans and trim the ends, cut in half
Wash and trim bok choy stalks and discard the leafy portion. Cut into 1 inch diagonal pieces.
Wash spinach by soaking in cold water for 1/2 hour or more, then draining. Chop into good sized chunks.
Heat up 2 T. olive oil and sauté the minced garlic for one minute.
Add the beans and asparagus and sauté at medium heat for 4 minutes.
Add spinach and sauté 4 more minutes, stirring occasionally.
Sprinkle with salt, pepper, 2 shakes of pepper flakes and 1 T. toasted sesame seeds.
Heat on low 3 more minutes or until heated through.
Serves 4-6. Serve with new potatoes and a fruit salad with walnuts.

Summer: A bountiful season of peaches, berries, and later: green peppers and squash.

SUMMER GARDEN SOUP

2 t. olive oil

1 large onion, chopped

4 cups vegetable broth

2 medium zucchini or yellow squash, sliced thinly

1 red and/ or yellow pepper, minced

3 ripe tomatoes or

2 cloves garlic

Salt, pepper, fresh herbs such as thyme or oregano

In a large saucepan, heat oil over medium-high heat.

Sauté onion, cook 5 minutes or until soft. Add broth, zucchini, peppers, garlic, salt and pepper and heat to boiling. Reduce heat and cook for 1 hour or until veggies are soft.

Remove herbs with a slotted spoon. Puree 4 cups of the soup in a food processor, blender or with an immersion blender, doing 1-2 cups at a time.

Reheat soup and taste for salt and pepper.

Autumn: In the fall, we have an abundance of apples, yams, and all kinds of squash.

GRANDMA H'S RATATOUILLE:

2 medium onions, minced

2 cloves garlic, minced

2 small zucchini

3 tomatoes, peeled and diced

1 small eggplant, peeled and cut into cubes

1 large green pepper, cut into strips

¼ cup minced fresh parsley

1 ½ tsp. salt

½ tsp. basil

1/8 tsp pepper

2 T. olive oil

Heat oil in a heavy pot or Dutch oven. Sauté onion and garlic until soft but not brown.

Add other vegetables and spices. Cover and cook over medium heat for 15 minutes, then uncover and cook 10 more minutes.

Serves 8. Can be sprinkled with goat cheese or feta before serving;

Winter: It gets more challenging to eat "local" food during this season. But there is still well-preserved potatoes and hardy cauliflower.

COUSCOUS WITH WINTER VEGGIES:

1 ½ cups couscous, preferably whole grain

2 T. live oil

1 c. veggie broth

1 large onion, minced

2 carrots, peeled and chopped into small pieces

1 turnip, peeled and chopped

1 sweet potatoes, peeled and chopped finely

½ tsp. each cinnamon, turmeric, cumin, black ground pepper

2 tomatoes chopped if available

1 can garbanzo bean, drained

Heat oil, sauté onions for five minutes, and then add other veggies.

Reduce heat, and add broth, simmer for 30 minutes. Add couscous and cover until liquid is absorbed.

Alternative cooking method: Sauté veggies, add 2 cups broth and couscous, cook in crock pot for 5-6 hours.

There are also lots of fabulous resources for local food recipes on the web:

<http://www.animalvegetablemiracle.org/Recipes.html>

<http://www.sustainabletable.org/kitchen/recipes/>

<http://www.ferryplazafarmersmarket.com/seasonality/recipes/>

Local food cookbooks are also widely available. This website is a good resource for reviews of local food cookbooks: <http://www.sustainabletable.org/kitchen/cookbooks/>



Preserving

Another facet of preparing local foods is to find ways to preserve them during the wintertime. There are three basic methods of preserving food in its natural form - freezing food, drying or dehydrating it and canning foods.

According to Kanika Goswami in an excellent article on buzzle.com, in most foods the high content of water makes them vulnerable to spoilage because of the combination of the growth of microorganisms in it and the reactions of other food enzymes with oxygen. In some cases, the loss of moisture

also contributes to spoilage and decay. So the secret of good food preservation is to ensure that there is zero presence of bacteria and other microorganisms in the food.

If you are freezing meat, it is advisable to chill it immediately. Meats should be kept below a temperature of 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Even at this temperature, it is not a great idea to keep it refrigerated for long periods. Simply cut the meat into small pieces, put it into some type of airtight wrapping (plastic, aluminum, or a natural material), and freeze it. Frozen meat should be neatly packed in compact bags and kept with some space between the bags.

Freezing fruits and vegetables is a little less straightforward. Some should be blanched while others can be frozen raw. Fruits such as berries can be frozen as they are, packed in airtight bags. Other fruits can be preserved in syrup or their own juices. Apples, pears, peaches, and apricots discolor if frozen and thawed, unless some ascorbic acid is mixed in. Fruits such as cooking apples can be steamed before freezing, which kills the bacteria, but since this also softens the fruits, it is not a great option for fruits which will be consumed whole later on. Foods like tomatoes can be frozen raw or pureed or steamed, but raw cherry tomatoes, which can be frozen whole. Except for peppers, scallions and herbs, most other vegetables – peas, cauliflower, carrot – require blanching before they are frozen. Blanching is simple: the veggies are dipped in boiling water for a few seconds, then plunged in ice cold water to retain freshness, and then frozen. Always remember to cool down the vegetables before freezing them.

Another great way to preserve your fresh local food is by drying. The science behind this method is to remove moisture from the food, so the growth of bacteria can be completely controlled. This method seems to be better than any other because it is faster, requires minimum equipment and the food still tastes good and is as nutritious. It also requires little storage space. The process of drying drains out their excess fat.

But the trick is to make sure that the food is completely dried, or else spoilage may still occur. Drying can be done indoors or outdoors, in the sun. The fresh fruits and most veggies should be peeled, cut into quarters or halved, depending on the size, and then dried. In some cases, they may be blanched, cooked or dipped in salts before drying.

A final complex method of preserving food is canning. Canning works well at keeping veggies delicious throughout the winter, but it necessitates a little prior planning, and you will need to look up specific instructions on how to can different types of foods, since different foods require different preservative materials. In general, however, here are some basic instructions on how to can, from [preservefood.com](http://www.preservefood.com):



First, before you begin, make sure you have all the ingredients on hand before you begin. Also be sure you have sufficient lids and jars and wash them all thoroughly. In most cases, your jars will be sterilized in the canners with the food, however if this is not the case, be sure to sterilize them beforehand by boiling them for 15 minutes. Wash the fruits and vegetables.

Then, place the food in jars. There are two methods for doing this. In the *hot pack method* you heat the food first in a separate pot. In the *raw pack method* the raw fruit is added directly to the jars. It is okay to prepare many foods using the raw pack method, but for some foods, the heat process will not be sufficient.

Next, pour boiling water, broth, juice or syrup over the food in the jar. When packing the food and adding water, be sure to allow for expansion by leaving some space in the neck of the jar. The amount of space to leave varies from a fraction of an inch for jams to slightly over an inch for low acid fruits and vegetables. Then use a paper towel to wipe off the sealing edges of the jars and place lids on top of them; remember to leave enough give to let air escape during the sterilization process.

Next comes the most crucial part of canning: heat sterilization. There are two methods for doing this, *boiling water canning* and *pressure canning*. You will need a small machine called a canner at this point, to help with the sterilization. While following the specific canner directions, you must wait for the required time period, which varies.

Once heat sterilization is complete, you remove the jars from the boiling water or pressure machine, and set them aside to cool for about 12 to 24 hours. Then you want to test your seals. The lid should be concave and not move when pressed. You can also try tapping them with a spoon. A clear ringing sound means that the seal has set properly. A dull thud may be bad news, but might also mean that food is touching the lid. Also turn jars on sides and roll to check for leakage. If within the seals have not set, you have can either refrigerate or freeze the food and use it before it spoils, or try to re-sterilize it.

When the jars have finished cooling, it is time to store the canned food. Ideally the best place to store canned food is a cool (not freezing) dark, dry place.

A great website with how-tos on preserving food is: <http://www.preservefood.com/>

Conclusion: How to Build a Local Food Movement

Once you've gotten the hang of it, it's easy to eat local! An additional piece of the puzzle, however, is how to share your new knowledge about why to, and how to, eat local, with others in your community. While Michelle's Earth Foundation believes that small actions = big changes, part of the translation of eating locally into a big change for the environment is the effort that we all can make to include our friends, family, coworkers, neighbors, and fellow human beings in the sustainable practices we have adopted. Our challenge is to not only make sure that we eat local, but ultimately, to see to it that others do as well.



One way to approach this challenge is to be an organizer: why not be the driving force in bringing the eat local movement directly to your community? Whether you organize your own regional food co-op, or simply a local food pot-luck dinner with a few of your friends, you are actively helping to bring the eat local movement into the lives of others.

There are many great events and activities that you can plan to educate others about local foods. Here are a few ideas:

- open community garden nights - open gardens up to the public. Arrange for one of the gardeners to give a short talk about the garden and their own participation in it, and provide visitors with entertainment, snacks, wine, or even, if there is a surplus of crops, allow them to pick some foods.
- local food pot-luck meals – plan a communal potluck meal at your school, house of worship, or other group, inviting people to bring dishes made from local ingredients. It's a great idea to encourage them to bring the recipes they used for swapping later on.
- local-only challenges – organize a “challenge” for a group of people to eat only local foods for a period of time – one or two weeks and give out prizes. See if you can get some creative prizes donated, like farmers market gift certificates.
- farm visits – get a group of people together to visit a local (or not so local, if you are in the city) farm. Make a day trip of it, and see if you can either visit a pick-your-own farm or at least one with a friendly farmer willing to give you a tour and explain his/her growing and animal rearing methods.
- “invite a farmer” dinners – arrange for a farmer to come to a local-food meal with a group of people and discuss the types of foods that are eaten, how and when they are grown, and where they come from originally.

If you plan one of these events or an even more creative one of your own, make sure that you let the news media know about it, so that your eat-local message can reach even more people. Call local TV networks and newspapers and ask for the newsdesks or editors, explaining that you are a local person planning a fun community event. Invite reporters to come and participate. AM talk-radio stations are also a good bet if you are a vocal spokesperson for the cause of eating local, so feel free to call them, tell them about the event, and offer yourself for an interview if they can't make it physically there. Be sure to tell MEF about your event by emailing us at info@michellesearthfound.org, and we'll be happy to help you in any way we can.

If organizing other people is not your style, there are many national initiatives, such as the Slow Food movement and the Eat Local Challenge, which you can get involved in as an individual. Check out the resources listed below for more links to these websites and others, which have a wealth of information on eating local. Happy munching!

Resources:

Sustainable Table:
<http://www.sustainabletable.com>

Slow Food USA:
<http://www.slowfoodusa.org/>

Local Harvest:
<http://www.localharvest.org/>

100-Mile Diet:
<http://www.100milediet.org>

Eat Well Guide:
<http://www.eatwellguide.org/index.cfm>

American Community Garden Association:
<http://www.communitygarden.org/learn/>

September 2007 Eat Local Challenge:
<http://www.eatlocalchallenge.com/2007/08/the-september-2.html>

Ethicurean blog:
<http://www.ethicurean.com/>