

Eating for the Environment

“Your World” Submission for 6-25-2007

Did you know that your food purchasing choices can affect global warming? “Food miles” are the distance food travels to get from the farm to the consumer. In the US, produce travels an average of 1300-2000 “food miles” to get to our plate, emitting carbon dioxide into the atmosphere along the way. Through minimizing the food miles of your produce and other food items, you can minimize your contribution to global warming!

There is also a multitude of other risks associated with food traveling across the country, or in some cases across the world, to get to us. In addition to the excess amounts of fuel needed to ship the food, food transportation also requires the use of refrigerant chemicals, which are harmful to the environment. Importing produce increases the risk of transporting foreign pests and microorganisms. Alarmingly, the growth of large industrialized farms is directly linked to the disappearance of over 800,000 local farms since 1969, since it is difficult for smaller farms to compete with these large corporations. Finally, approximately 80% of the energy used in large, industrial farms goes toward processing, packaging, transporting, storing & preparing food. This wasted energy can easily be conserved through purchasing local produce, where, only naturally, the largest energy expenditure is actually growing the food.

Supporting your local farmers has several other perks. First, locals are much more inclined to put care into their land, and to use more sustainable farming practices. Smaller farms tend to use less and smaller equipment, burning less fossil fuels. Smaller land plots also attract fewer pests, and thus result in lower pesticide use. Local farmers are known for producing fresher, better tasting and more nutritious food. Finally, more food dollars stay within local communities, boosting the local economy.

Right now, Washtenaw County is in full harvest and it is easier than ever to purchase produce locally. There are farmers’ markets, opportunities to participate in community-supported agriculture (CSA) farms, U-pick farms and more! Next time you’re at the store, be sure to keep your eyes peeled for locally grown produce.

There is an excellent online resource, <http://www.localharvest.org/>, that allows users to simply type in their area code, and it searches for nearby farms, CSA farms and farmers’ markets. It also lists restaurants and grocery stores that sell locally produced foods. The State of Michigan also has a useful website that allows users to search for local farms by county: <http://www.mda.state.mi.us/market/u-pick/index.asp>.

For more information about buying food locally, please call 734-222-6874.

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