

Buying Local Food

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The “buy local food” movement is getting more attention these days, in the media and in the general public. Countless television chefs, magazines and restaurants now specifically address the various aspects of local food. In a March 2007 issue, Time magazine published a lengthy article on the subject.

While buying local has its roots in rural America, those on the urban-rural fringe as well as urban America are gaining understanding and appreciation for locally grown foods. Some of the reasons why people are buying local are:

Local Economy

When you purchase food from local farmers, you’re helping them stay in business.

Environmental Impact

Fresh food items purchased at the grocery store may have traveled hundreds of miles to reach your community. A study from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, based at Iowa State University, indicated that long-distance food transportation using semi trucks contributed four to eight times more carbon dioxide to the atmosphere than local transportation using light-duty trucks delivering the same amount of food.

Seasonal Food

When farmers sell their crops locally, they have the opportunity to harvest it at peak ripeness and offer it to consumers a short time later. This translates to fresh, flavorful food. And because local farmers can only offer what the growing season allows, customers may be tempted to expand their palates and try items they don’t normally eat.

Accountability

In these food security conscious times, many people want to know more about the items they eat. When you patronize local farmers, you have the opportunity to ask questions about how their wares are produced. Also, you have an opportunity to give them feedback about food you’ve purchased in the past.

Buying local food is easy. Find a farmer, farmers’ market, community-supported agriculture program, u-pick, or other local food outlet near you. Be sure to encourage your local grocers or restaurants to buy more products from local farms.

On Aug. 1-2, 2009, the first Florida Small Farms and Alternative Enterprises Conference will be held at Osceola Heritage Park in Kissimmee. The event will feature exhibitors, educational sessions and more. All Florida farmers are invited to attend. Visit the conference Web site at <http://smallfarms.ifas.ufl.edu/floridasmallfarmsconference/index.htm>. For information on conference sponsorship or being an exhibitor, contact Bob Hochmuth, 386-362-1725 or bobhoch@ufl.edu.