

Food

We are what we eat and our food choices have an incredible impact on the world around us. Forests and wetlands have been replaced for food crops, pesticides are applied to ward off diseases, water is displaced for irrigation, genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and terminator genes are replacing heirloom varieties, fish are caught in nets, on long-lines and in traps, and mangroves are mowed down for shrimp farms. Furthermore, all of this food is processed, refrigerated and shipped thousands and thousands of kilometers before it gets served at a restaurant or in our homes.

In the early part of the 1900's, more than 50% of Canadians derived their living from farming but that number has fallen to less than 5% today. The family farm is all but extinct in Canada and most of the food we consume has traveled between 2400 and 4000 kilometres before it reaches our plate. All of these factors make our modern agri-food system the most destructive human activity on the planet. Fortunately there is a movement to ensure that our food is safe, local, humane, organic, and that it supports the farmers, small processors and local businesses.

There are many ways that you can make food choices that are healthier for you and your family, while also protecting the planet and supporting farmers. The best way to do this is to become a locavore! Consider your food choices and select them accordingly:

1. Backyard
2. Locally produced
3. Organically or Biodynamically Grown
4. From a family farm
5. From a local business
6. Fairly Traded (i.e. coffee, chocolate, bananas, tea, et cetera).

Did You Know

Industrial pesticide use has increased 50-fold since 1950. More than 2.3 million tonnes of industrial pesticides are now used annually and nearly 75% of all of these pesticides are used in developed countries.

- Miller, GT, *Living in the Environment*
(12th Ed.)

WHAT CAN CITY PEOPLE DO?

Here is a list, probably not definitive:

1. Participate in food production to the extent that you can. If you have a yard or even just a porch box or a pot in a sunny window, grow something to eat in it. Make a little compost of your kitchen scraps and use it for fertilizer. Only by growing some food for yourself can you become acquainted with the beautiful energy cycle that revolves from soil to seed to flower to fruit to food to offal to decay, and around again. You will be fully responsible for any food that you grow for yourself, and you will know all about it. You will appreciate it fully, having known it all its life.
2. Prepare your own food. This means reviving in your own mind and life the arts of kitchen and household. This should enable you to eat more cheaply, and it will give you a measure of "quality control": you will have some reliable knowledge of what has been added to the food you eat.
3. Learn the origins of the food you buy, and buy the food that is produced closest to your home. The idea that every locality should be, as much as possible, the source of its own food makes several kinds of sense. The locally produced food supply is the most secure, freshest, and the easiest for local consumers to know about and to influence.
4. Whenever possible, deal directly with a local farmer, gardener, or orchardist. All the reasons listed for the previous suggestion apply here. In addition, by such dealing you eliminate the whole pack of merchants,

transporters, processors, packagers, and advertisers who thrive at the expense of both producers and consumers.

5. Learn, in self-defense, as much as you can of the economy and technology of industrial food production. What is added to the food that is not food, and what do you pay for those additions?
6. Learn what is involved in the best farming and gardening.
7. Learn as much as you can, by direct observation and experience if possible, of the life histories of the food species.

Adapted from Wendell Berry's essay titled: *The Pleasures of Eating* (1989). To view the essay in its entirety visit <http://www.ecoliteracy.org/essays/pleasures-eating>.

TOP 10 REASONS WHY ORGANIC IS IMPORTANT

1. **Organic farming techniques improve the soil.** This is of vital importance because soil is at the heart of all food production. Whereas conventional, chemical-intensive methods deplete soil, organic principles add life to the soil and healthy soil produces healthy food.
2. **Organic foods are free of genetically modified organisms (GMOs).** The vast majority of prepared and processed conventional foods contain GMOs. Many consumers remain skeptical of this new technology, as the long term health and ecological implications are largely unknown.
3. **Organic foods are not irradiated.** Irradiation damages the quality of food and a diet high in irradiated foods has not been proven safe over the long term. Irradiation using radioactive materials is an environmental and health hazard.
4. **Biodiversity is improved.** Diverse systems are more resilient as they are less prone to disease and infestations.
5. **Organic farming does not use synthetic pesticides.** Synthetic pesticides are not only a danger to personal health, but are a threat to farm workers, local ecosystems, waterways and the surrounding communities.
6. **Waterways are not contaminated by chemical runoff, as is the case with conventional farms.** This includes pesticide runoff, as well as nutrient and pathogen runoff associated with the raising of livestock in an industrial manner.
7. **Reduced reliance on chemical and agribusiness corporations is better for farmers.** As agribusiness corporations concentrate and consolidate power at both the input and output ends, they have been able to amass huge fortunes at the expense of farmers. In 2004, Canada's farming community lost \$7.5 Billion, while the six largest agribusiness corporations profited more than \$10 Billion. Organic agriculture gives farmers and farm communities another option.
8. **Animal cruelty.** Organically raised animals are raised more ethically. While conventionally raised chickens are subjected to life in a battery cage, organic chickens have the ability to stand up, walk around and access sunlight. Pigs, turkeys and cows have access to pasture, fresh air and sunlight.
9. **Organically raised animals are not given antibiotics.** The overuse of antibiotics in factory farms has contributed to pollution problems and outbreaks of many deadly diseases, including Lysteriosis, E-Coli, antibiotic-resistant MRSA (methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus).
10. **We pay the cost one way or another.** Whereas organic farming internalizes the cost of growing food and treating animals well (this is why it costs a bit more at the checkout), conventional farming tends to externalize these costs. The air, soil and water pollution, the proliferation of disease from factory farms, the loss of soil and farm communities costs North American's between \$7 and \$20 Billion per year.

TOP 6 WAYS TO EAT ORGANIC ON A BUDGET

- 1. Eat simply and eat at home.** The last few years have seen Canadians preparing and eating fewer meals in the home, choosing, rather, to eat in restaurants and fast food outlets. This is not a path to good health and it certainly will not save you money.
- 2. Start an organic food buying cooperative.** All it takes is a group of 5 or more friends and a bit of organizing and you can get organic grains, flours and baking supplies at 15 – 50 per cent below retail. For more information please email Ashley Lubyk at ashley@greencalgary.org.
- 3. Buy in bulk at your local organic grocer.** Sunnyside Market, Community Natural Foods, Amaranth Whole Food Market and Planet Organic all offer 10 per cent off most products when purchased by the case. Bulk bins are also a great place to look for bargains and bulk spices are heaps cheaper than those prepackaged in little glass jars. Weigh 2 Go is a bulk food-only store that allows people to buy as little or as much as they need. Bring your own containers to fill and avoid having to take those pesky plastic bags. Also keep in mind that the prices for organic foods at many of the natural food markets are better than those found at some of the big box grocery stores.
- 4. Eat in season.** Whether you shop at the farmers' market or at the grocery store, peaches will be cheaper (and tastier) in August than in February, and apples will be cheaper in September than in June when the previous years crop is nearly done and most are coming in from Chile. This is the time to stock up and cook, dry, jam, preserve and prepare for the winter months when fresh food is hard to come by, less enjoyable to eat and expensive to buy.
- 5. Eat less meat.** If you are an omnivore, and eat meat, you might want to consider cutting back. Good, ethically raised meat is expensive and eating less of the stuff is better for your health and for the planet. Instead of filling up on meat, use it to add flavour to dishes. Indian recipes are great for this. When you do buy meat, consider bulk purchasing directly from a farmer. You can get friends or family together for this or if you have a large family consider stocking up the freezer. Several farmers at the Calgary Farmers' Market have bulk discounts for people interested in purchasing a quarter, half or whole bison, elk or cow.
- 6. Plant a veggie garden or join a community garden.** This will produce the best tasting, freshest food that will blow the 100 mile diet out of the water. The Community Garden Resource Network - <http://calhort.org/gardening/community.aspx> - has resources on existing community gardens in the city, as well as resources on getting one started. If you aren't an experienced gardener, don't be discouraged. Simply ask around. Talk to friends, family members or coworkers and you're bound to find someone that would love to help you get started. Workshops for first-time gardeners usually take place in the spring and Green Calgary always lists these events on its "Upcoming Events" section on the homepage – www.greencalgary.org.

Additional Resources

Alberta Farm Fresh Producers Association (www.albertafarmfresh.com): a guide highlighting local food producers in Alberta.

Calgary Horticulture Society (www.calhort.org): their 'gardening resources' section has a link to Calgary's community gardens.

Calgary Vegetarian Society (www.calgaryveg.com)

Eden Organic (www.edenfoods.com): Search 'who owns organic' to find out the companies behind your favorite organic labels.

Slow Food Calgary (www.slowfoodcalgary.ca): Calgary's slow food resource.

What the World Eats (<http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1626519,00.html>): a photo journal of what the average family eats in a month from 16 countries around the world.

Did You Know

Alberta imports \$170,000,00 in fresh veggies annually, while exporting only \$400,000. Many of the veggies imported are those that can be grown locally, with minimal transportation.

Calgary's Farmers' Markets

Blackfoot (www.blackfootfarmersmarket.com): 5600, 11th St SE (Access off Blackfoot Trail, 58th Avenue SE) (☎ 403-243-0065)

Calgary Farmers Market (www.calgaryfarmersmarket.com): H6, 4421 Quesnay Wood Drive SW (☎ 403-244-4548)

Calgary Grassroots Northland Farmers Market: open seasonally at Northland Village Mall, 5111 Northland Drive NW. (☎ 403-283-0554 - for more information).

Hillhurst-Sunnyside Farmers' Market: open seasonally at Hillhurst Sunnyside Community Centre, 1320 – 5th Ave NW. (☎ 403-283-0554 - for more information).

Millarville Farmers' Market: open seasonally at the Millarville Race Track (20 minutes South of Calgary). (☎ 403-931-2404 - for more information).

South Fish Creek Farmers' Market: open seasonally at South Fish Creek Recreation Association, 333 Shawville Blvd SE. (☎ 403-201-8652 - for more information).

Fact

At no other time in recent history have Canadians spent less of their total income on food than now. In 2005, Canadians spent just 9.3% of total household expenditures on food, compared to 19.1% in 1961. Folks in Italy and France, where food is central to life and culture, spend roughly 15% of household expenditures on food. Canadian spending on food is among the lowest in the developed world.

Calgary's Organic and Natural Food Stores

Amaranth Whole Foods Market (www.amaranthfoods.ca): 7 Arbour Lake Dr NW (☎ 403-547-6333)

Community Natural Foods (www.communitynaturalfoods.com): 10th Avenue Market & Café: 1304 - 10th Ave SW (☎ 403-229-2383) & Chinook Station Market: 202 - 61st Ave SW (☎ 403-541-0606)

Planet Organic (www.planetorganic.ca): 10233 Elbow Drive SW (☎ 403-252-2404) & 4625 Varsity Dr NW (☎ 403-288-6700)

Second to None Meats (www.stnm.ca): Montgomery Store: Bowness Road NW (☎ 403-247-4004) OR Mission Store: #3 - 2100, 4th St. SW (☎ 403-245-6662) OR Macleod Trail Store: 7400 Macleod Trail South (☎ 403-252-9924)

SPUD Calgary (www.spud.ca): Organic home delivery service.

Sunnyside Market (www.sunnysidemarket.ca): 302 10 St NW (☎ 403-270-7477)