



Buying Foods Close to Home Helping to Save Energy at the Same Time

by Julie McDonnell

When shopping for groceries, do you consider how far the food travels, who grows it, and who picks it? Most foods come hundreds of miles to reach your plate. This brings up the important issues of transporting, packaging, and storing--much of which uses petroleum products.

Especially these days, it is important to think about buying locally grown foods: less transport means less pollution; local shopping supports the local economy, and fresh food is often more nutritious and tasty.

According to *Resettling Duluth, a Book by and for the Arrowhead Region* (1986), the Duluth area was self-sufficient and a food exporter from the 1920's through the 1950's. Duluth sent a train carload of raspberries to Chicago each week during these years. Nearly every town in the region had a dairy to collect raw milk products from area farmers and make dairy products. Askov was celebrated as the rutabaga capital of the world. In 1911, G. G. Hartley planted thirteen acres of lettuce and netted \$3,000 per acre by selling in Duluth and Chicago.

Then, during the cheap oil era of the 1950's, California emerged as the vegetable-producing state. Retailers needed a reliable supply of fresh food products to be competitive, especially as the supermarket era was beginning. Southern state producers had a more controlled growing climate than the Northland, where whims of local weather challenged local farmers. New varieties of fresh fruits and vegetables were trucked across the interstate system, farmed and transported with cheap oil.

Shopping "Cooperatively"

Plow into the 21st Century, to 2008. Today, steadily-rising oil prices have increased costs for everything from soup to nuts. Fortunately, our local food production ability has also been increasing in wonderful ways in the last thirty years.

I have memories of the late 1970's going to work a member shift with Mom on Saturdays at the Duluth Whole Foods Co-Op. Back then the Co-Op was housed in a little building on East Eighth Street.

I helped weigh bulk items for customers. They brought their own containers and bags and bought everything in bulk. The store wasn't slick and colorful like today's grocery stores but most everyone there was a member and worked together. Even there, in the middle of the city, it felt like we were participating in some of the work required to get food into our homes.

Over the years, the Duluth Whole Foods Co-Op has been instrumental in bringing local farmers together, giving them a local venue to sell their goods, and also working with the Duluth Farmer's Market to have a selling outlet for farmers. The Co-Op has since relocated to a larger, modernized space at 610 E. 4th Street, expanded their product selection, and even added a deli.

Local Greenhouses and Farmers' Markets

Now local greenhouses provide fruits and vegetables in early and late growing seasons. Farmers succeed year round with methods such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), where community members purchase shares from a farm and are ensured a box of food weekly until the growing season ends. People can also purchase canning shares, poultry shares, egg shares, and flower shares. Throughout the summer and fall, boxes of food can be picked up at various city locations.

Other farmers have found that producing honey, jam, holiday wreaths, popcorn, fresh and dried flowers, and maple syrup are also ways to make a living at farming in the region. And if you've ever been to the Farmer's Market in the summer and chosen fresh sugar peas, raspberries, carrots, tomatoes, chickens, basil, and much more, you know locally grown food is much fresher and tastier than food coming from far away.

If you haven't yet tried it, you will likely find a wonderful sense of connection to the earth and each other among a community of hopeful and supportive folks. You will feel great about supporting local farmers and knowing what garden your food comes from.

Source: *the Woman today*, June/July 2008, pp. 88-89

