

A Local Harvest

Ah the joys of late August harvest in Ohio – sweet corn, peppers, home-grown tomatoes, cantaloupe and...peaches? Until lately, I had no idea you could actually grow peaches in Ohio. But lately, through the encouragement of good friends and good books, I've been exploring local food options as I have been learning just how much CO₂ is released to feed our family. Here's a way to do something about global warming three times a day, plus snacks!

Local and organic food is getting a lot of press lately. I think this is due to the convergence of two emerging areas of concern. The first has to do with environmental health issues, as we come to better understand the impacts of chemicals on humans and other occupants of the planet. The second has to do with energy use and climate change. We are living at a time in which we expect a great variety of food to be available at all times of year, in and out of season. To make this happen, fresh produce is being shipped from summer in the southern hemisphere, to winter in the northern hemisphere, or from the tropics to the frosty areas. Certainly this has served to make us well-fed and happy – but at what cost to our planet's future?

A recent exhibit at the Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh brought it home for me. The exhibit was titled "Food, Carbon & the Commons," and included a menu which listed miles traveled, and CO₂ lbs./week expended for each menu item, based on weight, distance, and mode of transport (and assuming the food would be offered at a restaurant weekly). As an example, grapes from Erie County, PA traveled 120 miles to Pittsburgh, and caused about 9 lbs./week of CO₂ to be released in their travels, as compared with grapes from Chile, which traveled 3,800 miles, and caused 327 lbs./week of CO₂ to be released.

Hmmm. So grapes from Chile cause about 30 times as much CO₂ to be released, in addition to being sprayed with fungicide for transport and typically having more pesticide residue than U.S. grapes. Coffee from central America is a third of the carbon cost of that from southeast Asia. Blueberries are dramatic: berries from a local farm created .32 lbs/week of CO₂, whereas those from Florida released 328 lbs/week. *That's a thousand times more CO₂* for that winter basket of berries. Seasonal local produce is looking pretty good.

So what local, seasonal foods does the Midwest have to offer? Alliance is blessed with multiple farm markets that carry local produce, and some lovely varieties that you won't see in the mainline stores. Recently I found purple peppers, and regional nectarines and blueberries at local markets. I know that at least one large grocery store in town has a small display of "locally grown produce," as well. I haven't looked in other stores – but you could. Just check those labels (or get your kids to find the least-traveled fruits and veggies – a great geography lesson!). Of course, there's also the local U-pick option. For those who like to can or freeze, this is a great way to eat locally through the winter as well.

But what about organics? To help solve the local *and* organic problem, we've dug up some lawn and planted a few vegetables in the back yard – our own "Victory over global warming" garden. I am here to tell you that my kids prefer "yard-beans" to store-beans hands-down. Of course, we are far from surviving on those few square feet of garden (the kids are voting for expanding next

year). One possible solution for us is to get more involved with a friend's farm – she's offered produce for "serfdom" (weeding), in a sort of small "community supported farm." Another friend recently gave me info on a website called localharvest.org, which lists farms within a radius of one's zip code, with info on what they produce, and when, and what farming techniques they use ("natural," certified organic, conventional, etc.). I'm happy to say that there's a long list of possibilities within 30 miles of home.

...but wouldn't it be great to be able to get local, organic produce without leaving Alliance?

Many cities are turning to community gardens, farming cooperatives, and farmers markets to increase the amount of locally grown organic produce available to their citizens. Community gardens allow everyone a chance to grow their own food, regardless of their living situation. Schools are beginning to teach kids the basics of food production on their school grounds with "pizza gardens." Hospitals in parts of the U.S. are sponsoring farmers' markets on their grounds to provide healthful alternatives. A Saturday farmers' market could help to pull our community together, and provide another way for small local farms and our citizens to connect, supporting local farmers, the environment, and our health. Why not here?

Next Mayor's Green Task Force meeting: Sept. 20, at 6:30 pm, at the Hoover Price Student Center on the Mount Union Campus. Please join us if you are interested - a subcommittee is exploring developing community gardens and a farmers market in Alliance.

Check it Out:

[Animal, Vegetable, Miracle](#), by Barbara Kingsolver

[Harvest for Hope: a guide to mindful eating](#), by Jane Goodall

USDA's Community Supported Agriculture page:
<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csa.shtml>

Local Harvest – a local food locator tool: <http://www.localharvest.org/csa/>

Info on organic food from Consumers Union: <http://www.consumersunion.org/food.html>