

BUY LOCAL

Most of us recognize that when we spend \$9.95 for a shirt at a "big box store," we can't possibly be providing those who made the shirt and then got it to us with a decent wage, nor any real safeguards to our environment. As consumers, we get what we pay for, and sub-standard prices can only mean lower wages and other cost-cutting measures. Although it's hard to overlook the convenience, selection, and savings some chain stores offer, the negative impact of these retail giants on our local economy and environment also cannot be ignored.

Three independent studies confirm that ***money spent at a locally owned business stays in the local economy***, benefiting residents and area merchants through higher wages and the purchase of local goods and services. Locally owned businesses create more jobs, pay their employees more, and have a lower environmental impact on surrounding ecosystems (less sprawl, congestion and habitat loss) than large retailers located at a strip mall or stand-alone establishment.

For every \$100 spent at a locally owned business, \$45 remains in the local economy; for every \$100 spent at a big-box store, only \$14 stays in the local economy. Neighborhood businesses are invested in their communities. They bank locally, advertise locally, purchase their inventory from local manufacturers, and hire local accountants and repair people. In contrast, products, advertising brochures, and supplies used by large retailers are generally purchased externally and trucked to many stores.

Local merchants also spend more of their profits in the local economy and give to area charities at a much higher rate than the chain retailers. This, too reflects the investment and connectedness local businesses have to the community. These businesses also add to the distinctive character and culture of the region, benefiting tourism.

By choosing local products when you can, you will be "voting with your wallet" for a better environment, economy, and community.

So why buy local? There are several reasons – but the most is the taste. Food grown in your own community was probably picked within the past day or two. It's crisp, sweet, and loaded with flavor. Several studies have shown that the average distance food travels from farm to plate is 1,500 miles. In a week-long (or more) delay from harvest to dinner table, sugars turn to starches, plant cells shrink, and produce loses its vitality. Taste is always something that consumers demand; think about that first Ontario strawberry you have once the season begins. There is a taste that can't be copied by California berries found year-round.

Along with taste is the health benefits derived from eating fresh produce. Nutrients are more abundant in fresh fruits and vegetables immediately after harvesting than those sitting for a week or more in storage before getting out onto the shelves of grocery stores. It has been demonstrated that even frozen or canned products have more nutritional value –because they are often prepared shortly after the food was picked

A healthy diet, composed of locally-grown, locally-harvested fresh fruits and vegetables is the perfect way to provide balance, nutrition, and energy throughout your busy schedule. Snacking on locally-grown produce also provides economic value to the province, its farmers, and ensures that access to local, fresh, healthy, and wholesome products is available to you today, tomorrow – and well into the future.

Farmers throughout Ontario are doing their part to ensure they are part of the solution, rather than part of the problem, when it comes to environmental issues. This isn't about organic versus conventional. That argument is fading with the buy local movement. Rather, today's farmers are contributing to maintaining the environment by participating in everything from environmental farm plans, designed to reduce the carbon footprint of today's farmer, to water management, food safety programs, and cutting-edge, waste-eliminating best farming practices, today's farmers continue to do more, with less, than any other generation before them. They are proud to be providing a healthy future for all.

Buying local means supporting farmers at a time when their voice is being diminished as the industry ages and more and more farmers are selling their properties because their children are no longer interested in working in an industry that, for too long, has seen little reason for celebration. Farmers are a vanishing breed – mostly due to historic record lows on various commodity prices and little opportunity to expand domestic market share at a retail sector being able to import at far less than even our farmer's own cost of production. Today's farmer often gets less than 10 cents of the retail food dollar. Local farmers who sell direct to consumers cut out the middleman and get full retail price for their food – which means farm families can afford to stay on the farm, doing the work they love.

Buying local, as I said earlier, is about knowing where your food comes from, how it was grown, and limiting the environmental impact of eating. Eating organic asparagus in November, grown in Thailand and flown air freight to British Columbia, to be off-loaded and put into stores after being trucked to 5,000 kilometers, defeats the entire purpose of firstly buying organic product – and secondly, saving the environment.

Buying local has caught on around the country and the world. Good for people, good for communities, good for health, good for farmers, good for ag land preservation, good for air, land, water, climate and the list goes on.

BENEFITS OF SHOPPING AT A FARMERS' MARKET

Taste real flavours: The fruits and vegetables you buy at the farmers' market are the freshest and tastiest available. Fruits are allowed to ripen in the field and brought directly to you – no long-distance shipping, no gassing to simulate the ripening process, no sitting for weeks in storage. This food is as real as it gets – food fresh from the farm.

Enjoy the Season: The food you buy at the farmers' market is seasonal. It is fresh and delicious and reflects the truest flavours. Shopping and cooking from the farmers market helps you to reconnect with the cycles of nature in our region. As you look forward to asparagus in spring, savour sweet corn in summer, or bake pumpkins in autumn, you reconnect with the earth, the weather, and the turning of the year.

Support Family Farmers: Family farmers are becoming increasingly rare as large agribusiness farms steadily take over food production in Canada. Small family farmers have a hard time competing in the food marketplace. Buying directly from farmers gives them a better return for their produce and gives them a fighting chance in today's globalized economy.

Protect the Environment: Food travels an average of 2500 kms to get to your plate. All this shipping uses large amounts of natural resources (especially fossil fuels), contributes greatly to pollution and creates excess trash with extra packaging. Food at the farmers' market is transported shorter distances and grown using methods that minimize the impact on the earth.

Nourish Yourself: Much food found in grocery stores is highly processed. The fresh produce you do find is often grown using pesticides, hormones, antibiotics, and genetic modification. In many cases it has been irradiated, waxed or gassed in transit. All of these practices have potentially damaging effects on the health of those who eat these foods. In contrast, most food found at the farmers' market is minimally processed, and many of our farmers go to great lengths to grow the most nutritious produce possible by building their soil's fertility and giving their crops the nutrients they need to flourish in the ground and nourish those who eat them.

Discover the Spice of Life – Variety: At the Farmers' Market you find an amazing array of produce that you don't see in your supermarket; red carrots, a rainbow of heirloom tomatoes, green garlic, watermelon radishes and much, much more. It is a wonderful opportunity to experience first hand the diversity (and biodiversity) of our planet, both cultivated and wild!

Know Where Your Food Comes From: A regular trip to a farmers' market is one of the best ways to reconnect with where your food comes from. Farmers themselves sell their produce at the farm stands. Meeting and talking to farmers

is a great opportunity to learn more about how food is grown, where it is grown, when it is grown and why!

Learn Cooking Tips, Recipes and Meal Ideas: Few grocery store cashiers or produce stockers will give you tips on how to cook the ingredients you buy, but farmers and vendors at the farmers' market are often passionate cooks with plenty of free advice about how to cook the foods they are selling. They'll give you ideas for what to have for supper, hand out recipes, and troubleshoot your culinary conundrums.

Connect with your Community: Wouldn't you rather stroll amidst outdoor stalls of fresh produce on a sunny day than roll your cart around a grocery store with artificial lights and piped in music? Coming to the Farmers' Market makes shopping a pleasure rather than a chore. The Farmers' Market is a community gathering place – a place to meet up with friends, bring your children or just get a taste of small-town life often in the midst of a City. Come to the farmers' market and hear the buzz in the air!