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# How to eat like a locavore

## Eating like a locavore is easier than you may think...

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When “locavore”—the word used to describe the practice of eating locally grown food—entered the Oxford American Dictionary in 2007, it defined the latest food trend. Coined by four women in San Francisco in 2005, “locavore” takes the concepts of eating and ecology to a new level. While the word has jump-started a major food trend, two books by best-selling writer and food guru Michael Pollan—*The Omnivore’s Dilemma* and *In Defense of Food*—also set many of us thinking about where our food comes from. “Organic” may have captured our attention in the past,

but our recent concerns about food safety and quality, global warming and gas prices have shifted our focus to a whole new way of eating.

When Pollan writes, in *In Defense of Food*, “Get out of the supermarket whenever possible,” he’s directing people to their local farmers. Many supermarkets create a disconnect between us and our food by offering convenience foods and imported foods instead of locally grown food. When we rely on local farmers, we ensure our food is fresh and seasonal, we can pinpoint where it comes from and how it is grown, all while supporting those who feed us.

The benefits of eating like a locavore are plentiful. Eating locally grown food reduces the fuel required to deliver it; most food in this country travels, on average, 1,500 miles. Locavore eating supports local farm families and keeps your food dollars in the community. Eating locally also ensures that the farmland and open space we value so much sticks around.

To get to the supermarket, food is picked before it’s ripe, never reaching its full flavor and nutritional potential. How fresh can something be when it has traveled more than a thousand miles? **John Silveria**, director of **Pacific Coast Farmers’ Market Association**, a nonprofit that manages more than 40 Bay Area farmers markets, says locally grown food is tastier and more nutritious. “By purchasing at the farmers market, people are helping to reduce the miles a product travels,” he says. “The farmer is able to leave a peach on the tree longer and pick it at its peak. We’re getting a fresher product.”

Coming face to face with local farmers also closes the gap between the farm and our table. “People are able to talk to the farmer or others who work on the farm,” says Silveria. “If we have questions about how a cherry is grown or the pest management practices used by the farm, we can ask.” He says that farmers don’t farm to get rich; they’re in it for the personal connections they get with their customers. “Farmers are not just growing a peach. They’re growing a peach for you.”

When we choose to buy food locally—whether at the farmers market or direct from the farm—we’re helping farmers stay in business while making sure our food dollars stay in the community. Silveria says our region has the luxury of having agricultural land that produces our food, which puts the brakes on development. “I call this a luxury for us because we don’t pay for it. The farmers are paying. Open space is very important to people in Northern California. If we don’t support the farmers, those spaces will disappear.”



**Cecilio Miramontes of the Cecchini & Cecchini Farm in Brentwood is one of the many farmers who make their way to the Friday farmers market at Kaiser Permanente in Vallejo.**

**Gail Feenstra**, food systems analyst for the **UC Davis Agricultural Sustainability Institute**, says “organic” and “locavore” are just different sides of the same coin. “They’re two aspects of a sustainable food system. Organic is about the production practices while the locavore emphasis is about place and sustainability. It’s understanding that food impacts our health, our communities and the Earth. Knowing where your food comes from helps you assess a number of things: environmental qualities, nutritional qualities and community qualities. They’re all important.” She says we shouldn’t think of local versus organic as an either/or debate. “We want people to care about the way food is grown. Those food choices can impact the political choices people make about saving farmland, water resources and energy.”

Becoming a locavore is easier than you might think. Start by reading food labels when you shop to see where your food is produced. Consider planting a vegetable garden because that’s the most local food you can eat. If you don’t have space for that, visit [localharvest.org](http://localharvest.org), enter your ZIP code, and you’ll find nearby farmers markets, farm stands and CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture farms, where local farmers deliver their harvest to your home or neighborhood weekly).

**Erin Barnett**, the website’s director, says LocalHarvest’s database includes more than 1,900 CSAs and 3,650 farmers markets around the U.S. “Our directory is a great place to find what’s going on in the local food scene all across the country. By going to farmers markets, you see what is harvested every season of the year. That’s knowledge our grandparents had and some of us are losing.” She adds that farmers markets aren’t just about produce anymore. “It’s cheese and meat and honey.” Besides the array of fruits and vegetables you’d expect, these days you’ll also find bread, rice, nuts, eggs, butter, olive oil, wine, fish and seafood, beef and lamb, and more.

Barnett says you have to be brave and talk to the farmers. “Ask questions. What should I look for in a good pepper? How do I store this or cook that? You’re learning about food while you’re building relationships with the people who grew it.” Michael Pollan calls it, “Shaking the hand that feeds you.”

Subscribing to a CSA takes another route to eating like a locavore. When looking for a CSA that will fit into your life, consider how you want to receive your delivery. For example, **Farm Fresh To You** in the Capay Valley delivers to your front door. The delivery fee is part of the box price, so it costs a little more than **Riverdog Farm’s** box—another Capay Valley farm—that you pick up from a set location in your neighborhood.



**Fresh chard from Farm Fresh to You**

Also think about how much you cook. Most CSAs offer boxes in various sizes, and some provide the option of veggie- or fruit-only boxes. You can subscribe weekly, or some CSAs offer deliveries every two, three or four weeks. If you don't cook often, opt for a small box or split a regular size with a friend.

One of the best things about buying from CSAs is that every box is different. Most boxes come with a newsletter explaining that week's harvest, the produce included in the box and recipes for each item. Having a continuous supply of fresh, seasonal produce encourages healthy eating; after all, you'll want to cook everything that comes in the box so it doesn't go to waste. LocalHarvest's Barnett recommends a little self-reflection on how you cook. "What are your own produce habits and your willingness to try new vegetables? With a CSA, you're going to get things that you haven't cooked before. For some people, the farmers market is a better fit than a CSA box."

Also check out small grocers and food co-ops. Lorenzo's Town & Country Market in Winters, [Vallerga's Market in Napa](#), [Sunshine Foods in St. Helena](#) and the [Davis Food Co-op](#) have relationships with local farmers. Small produce stands such as the [Yolo Fruit Stand in Davis](#) or [Larry's Produce in Suisun Valley](#) also offer the best of the season's harvest. Or visit "u-pick" farms, such as [99 Cherry Orchard in Suisun](#) and [Impossible Acres in Davis](#), where you can take the kids for a real eye-opening, mouthwatering, hands-on adventure, and then go home and cook together.

Finally, think about having a locavore potluck this summer. Invite friends to bring something made exclusively from locally grown products and talk about being a locavore while you eat. Feenstra says, "Other people are trying to eat locally just like you, and it makes a difference when we talk about it." Barnett agrees. "If we talk to each other about this idea of eating locally, it doesn't become so overwhelming."