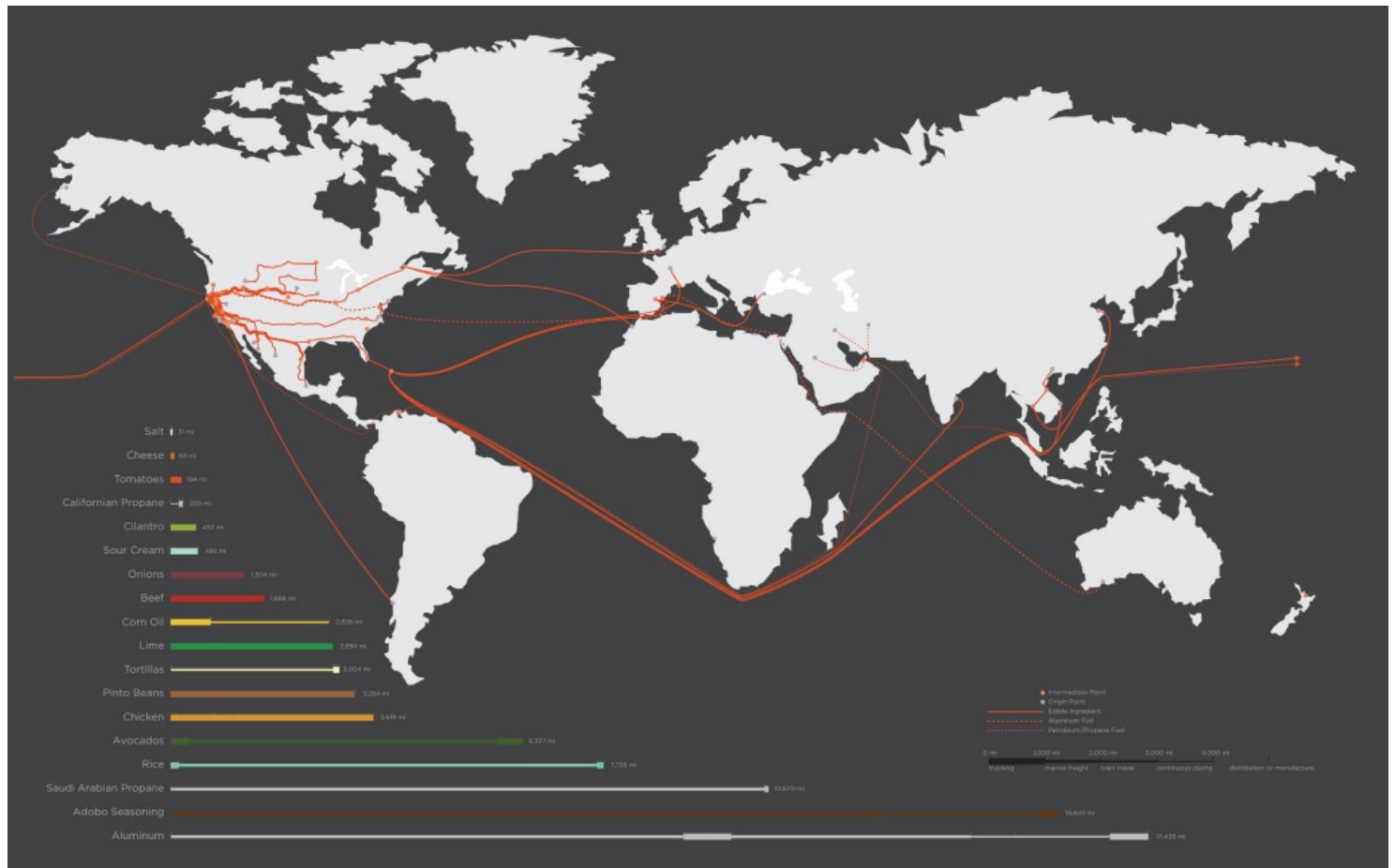


Local Food

By: System Administrator on: Sat 01 of May, 2010 01:02 CDT (2819 Reads)



Above is a map of where all of the ingredients of one taco came from. This is definitely not local food. Is this a good thing?

Local food (also regional food or food patriotism) or the local food movement is a "collaborative effort to build more locally based, self-reliant food economies - one in which sustainable food production, processing, distribution, and consumption is integrated to enhance the economic, environmental and social health of a particular place"

Local food systems are an alternative to the global corporate models where producers and consumers are separated through a chain of processors/manufacturers, shippers and retailers.

-of course these are the corporate owned food producers that operate commercial farms, industrial farms and factory farms

Local food systems on the other hand

-help to link together local farmers that produce food and then come together to sell it at a farmers market
-increasingly they use the internet to come together and pool resources thereby lowering costs

Defining a movement

During the early 20th century, the demise of the family farm and the growth of corporate farms was experienced through much of the United States. In the late 1960s and early '70s with the growth of the back to the land movement there were increasing numbers of small farms selling a variety of products to local communities. Since the 1970s the increase of multinational food companies has increased the size of not only farms but also the overall food system. During this same time period, a slow and steady movement of farmers and consumers building relationships and changing purchasing habits occurred and is still occurring.

The concept is often related to the slogan "Think globally, act locally", common in green politics. Those supporting development of a local food economy consider that since food is needed by everyone, everywhere, every day, a small change in the way it is produced and marketed will have a great effect on individual's health, the ecosystem and preservation of cultural diversity. Activists in the movement claim that shopping decisions favoring local food consumption directly affects the well-being of people, improve local economies and may be more ecologically sound.

-Local food networks include community gardens, food co-ops, and farmers' markets.

Definitions of "local"

The definition of "local" or "regional" has for a long time been flexible and defined differently depending on the person in question. Neither the USDA nor any legal authority has adopted a definition.

Some local business with specific retail and production focuses, such as cheese, may take a larger view of what is 'local' while a local farm may see the area with in a day's driving as local because it is a reasonable distance to transport goods and services—in fact, 400 miles is essentially a DGD (day-goods-distance). Some see "local" as being a very small area (typically, the size of a city and its surroundings), others suggest the ecoregion or bioregion size, while others refer to the borders of their nation or state. The concept of "locally-processed" however has recently been introduced by the produce industry including organic produce wholesalers and retailers. This is potentially a dubious concept as it appears to be an excuse to ship across country and re-package in order to retain the "local" definition. This would enable huge processors to retain a local edge theoretically anywhere on the planet.

The concept of "local" is also seen in terms of ecology, where food production is considered from the perspective of a basic ecological unit defined by its climate, soil, watershed, species and local agrisystems, a unit also called an ecoregion or a foodshed. The concept of the foodshed is similar to that of a watershed; it is an area where food is grown and eaten. The size of the foodshed varies depending on the availability of year round foods and the variety of foods grown and processed. In a way, replacing the term 'water' with 'food' reconnects food with nature. "The term "foodshed" thus becomes a unifying and organizing metaphor for conceptual

development that starts from a premise of the unity of place and people, of nature and society."

Labelling Local versus Corporate

Local food is, by definition, food produced locally. Whether the seed - an integral part of the "food" - was grown or procured locally as well is usually left out of this definition, leading to even greater ambiguity as to its meaning. Many local food proponents tend to equate it with food produced by local independent farmers, while equating non-local food with food produced and transformed by large agribusiness. They may support resisting globalization of food by pressing for policy changes and choosing to buy local food. They may also follow the practice of the boycott or buycott.

Non-local food is often seen as a result of corporate management policies, globalization, heavy subsidies, urban sprawl, poor animal welfare, lack of care for the environment, and poor working conditions. This limited interpretation is likely due to the fact that the organic movement is largely responsible for renewed public interest in local and regional markets. Those subscribing to this interpretation often insist on buying food directly from local family farms, through direct channels such as farmers' markets, food cooperatives and community-supported agriculture plans. For many, local food is interpreted as unprocessed food, to be transformed by the consumer or local shop rather than by the food industry. As such, local food (as opposed to global food) reduces or eliminates the costs of transport, processing, packaging, and advertising.

As large corporations and supermarket distribution increasingly dominate the organic food market, the concept of local food, and sometimes 'sustainable food', is increasingly being used by independent farmers, food activists, and aware consumers to refine the definition of organic food and organic agriculture. By this measure, food that is certified organic but not grown locally is viewed as possibly "less organic" or not of the same overall quality or benefit, as locally grown organic products. Some consumers see the general advantages of "organic" as also invested in "locally grown", therefore local food not grown "organically" may trump generically "organic" in purchase decisions. Also, because local food tends to be fresh (or minimally processed, such as cheese and milk), as opposed to processed food, the bias against processed food is often at least implicit in the local food argument. The marketing phrase, fresh, local, organic, summarizes these arguments.



Impacts of local food systems

Food quality

Another effect is the increase in food quality. Locally grown fresh food is consumed usually right after harvest, so it is sold fresher and usually riper (e.g. picked at peak maturity, as it would be from a home garden). Also, the need for chemical preservatives and irradiation to artificially extend shelf-life is reduced or eliminated.

Polyculture and sustainable farming

A major impact of local food systems is to encourage multiple cropping, i.e. growing multiple species and a wide variety of crops at the same time and same place, as opposed to the prevalent commercial practice of large-scale, single-crop monoculture.

With a higher demand for a variety of agricultural products, farmers are more likely to diversify their production, thereby making it easier to farm in a sustainable way. For example, winter intercropping (e.g. coverage of leguminous crops during winter) and crop rotation reduces pest pressure, and also the use of pesticides. Also, in an animal/crop multiculture system, the on-farm byproducts like manure and crop residues are used to replace chemical fertilizers, while on-farm produced silage and leguminous crops feed the cattle instead of imported soya. Manure and residues being considered as by-products rather than waste, will have reduced effects on the environment, and reduction in soya import is likely to be economically interesting for the farmer, as well as more secure (because of a decrease of market dependence on outside inputs).

In a polycultural agroecosystem, there is usually a more efficient use of labour as each crop has a different cycle of culture, hence different time of intensive care, minimization of risk (lesser effect of extreme weather as one crop can compensate for another), reduction of insect and disease incidence (diseases are usually crop specific), maximization of results with low levels of technology (intensive monoculture cropping often involves very high-technology material and sometimes the use of genetically modified seeds). Multiculture also seeks to preserve indigenous biodiversity.

Cost to consumer

Critics of the movement often say that local food tends to be more expensive to the consumer than food bought without regard to provenance and could never provide the variety currently available (such as having summer vegetables available in winter, or having kinds of food available which can not be locally produced due to soil, climate or labor conditions).

Effect on exporting countries

Some critics argue that by convincing consumers in developed nations not to buy food produced in the third world, the local food movement damages the economy of third world nations, which often rely heavily on food exports and cash crops.

Environmental impact

A study by Lincoln University in New Zealand challenges claims about food miles by comparing total energy used in food production in Europe and New Zealand, taking into account energy used to ship the food to Europe for consumers[

New Zealand has greater production efficiency in many food commodities compared to the UK. For example New Zealand agriculture tends to apply less fertilizers (which require large amounts of energy to produce and cause significant CO2 emissions) and animals are able to graze year round outside eating grass instead of large quantities of brought-in feed such as concentrates. In the case of dairy and sheep meat production NZ is by far more energy efficient even including the transport cost than the UK, twice as efficient in the case of dairy, and four times as efficient in case of sheep meat. In the case of apples NZ is more energy efficient even though the energy embodied in capital items and other inputs data was not available for the UK.

An August 6, 2007 article in The New York Times gave examples of how eating locally grown food sometimes causes an increase, instead of a decrease, in the carbon footprint. As one example, the article stated, "... lamb raised on New Zealand's clover-choked pastures and shipped 11,000 miles (18,000 km) by boat to Britain produced 1,520 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions per ton while British lamb produced 6,280 pounds of carbon dioxide per ton, in part because poorer British pastures force farmers to use feed. In other words, it is four times more energy-efficient for Londoners to buy lamb imported from the other side of the world than to buy it from a producer in their backyard."

According to a study by engineers Christopher Weber and H. Scott Matthews of Carnegie Mellon University, of all the greenhouse gases emitted by the food industry, only 4% comes from transporting the food from producers to retailers. The study also concluded that adopting a vegetarian diet, even if the vegetarian food is transported over very long distances, does far more to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, than does eating a locally grown diet.

Local food (because it is local) would be more likely to be seasonal

