

LOCAL FOODS

CREATE INCOME, IMPROVE HEALTH, FOOD SECURITY, AND SAVE ENERGY



www.homegrownprosperity.org

SUMMER 2008

The Good Food movement is at the center of some of the most important issues and debates that will define American society for years to come: issues like stewardship of our soil and water, local and democratic control of decision making and land use, health and nutrition and a thriving and sustainable food and farm economy needed to feed and fuel America. —Willie Nelson

Local Food Saves Energy

"The future ain't what it used to be."

—Yogi Berra

Energy is tightly woven into the food economy. Cheap fossil fuels have helped shape our current food system. The rapid increase in the price of a barrel of oil has profound implications for the industrial food system.

The term "food-miles" relates to the distance food travels from the location where it is grown to the location where it is consumed, or in other words, the distance food travels from farm to processor to plate. This distance has been steadily increasing over the last 50 years.

- Studies estimate that processed food in the United States travels over 1,300 miles, and fresh produce travels over 1,500 miles, before being consumed.
- In today's global food system, food changes hands about 33 times between the farm and the supermarket shelf.
- Shipping a strawberry from California to New York requires 435 calories of fossil fuel but provides the eater with only 5 calories of nutrition (Joan Dye Gussow, Columbia University nutritionist)
- The average American uses between

170 and 680 million BTUs of energy in personal transportation annually and roughly 400 million BTUs in food consumption. (Gidon Eshel and Pamela Martin, 2005, "Diet, Energy and Global Warming," University of Chicago Dept. of Geophysical Sciences")

- In Iowa, producing and transporting 10% more of the produce in-state would result in savings ranging from 280,000 to 346,000 gallons of fuel and a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 6.7 to 7.9 million pounds. (Rich Pirog, et al. in "Food, Fuel and Freeways: An Iowa Perspective on How Far Food Travels, Fuel Usage and Greenhouse Gas Emissions" Leopold Center for Sustainable Ag.)

Local Food Increases Rural Economic Well Being

Fifty years ago food production and processing provided income, jobs and local ownership across rural America.

- In 2003, Montana spent \$3 billion on food, of which just 15% is estimated to have been produced in Montana. In 1950, 70% of the food Montanans ate was grown in Montana (Missoula Community Food Assessment.)
- In Iowa, if consumers increased their fruit and vegetables purchased from local sources by 10%, total

net impact of these additional local purchases would be \$302.4 million in new industrial output, \$112.6 million in labor income, and 4,094 new jobs (See Rich Pirog, above).

- In Michigan, doubling or tripling the amount of fresh produce that farmers sell in fresh produce markets could generate up to 1,880 new jobs and \$187 million in new personal income. (Peggy Cantrell, et al., "Eat Fresh and Grow Jobs" Michigan Land Use Institute, 2006.)

Local Food Benefits Public Health

The US industrial food system provides plentiful, relatively inexpensive food, but much of it is unhealthy, and the system is not sustainable. Although most US food consumption occurs within this industrial system, healthier and more sustainable alternatives are increasingly available.

—American Public Health Association

Public health advocates are connecting the dots of many chronic health problems to the food system that has evolved in the last 50 years.

- More than 60% of Americans are either obese or overweight; nationally we spend \$117 billion annually on illnesses associated with obesity.
- In 2006, the US imported about \$10 billion more in food, feed, and

beverages than it exported. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) inspectors were able to physically examine only 1.3% of food imports. U.S. trade policy has aggressively pushed for the removal of trade barriers, paving the way for the global food trade.

- Food contamination incidents that began on one farm or processing plant have hit large parts of the country. E. coli tainted spinach from a California farm affected people coast to coast, killing three and sickening nearly 200.

Concentration in the Food System

Over the past 40 years, the industrialization and centralization of our food system has greatly magnified the potential for big outbreaks. Today only 13 slaughterhouses process the majority of the beef consumed by 300 million Americans. — Eric Schlosser “Has Politics Contaminated the Food Supply” 12/11/2006 New York Times

In early 2008 when school lunch programs across the West were forced to dump beef that had come from a company in California shown to be violating rules for handling and processing meat, Wyoming rancher Gary Packard wrote in local newspapers: “Packer greed has triggered the largest meat recall in the nation’s history. Here in Wyoming, we produce the finest, safest beef anywhere.” He noted that federal laws needed to be changed and state laws needed to be enforced to make it possible for ranchers to sell fresh, wholesome, regionally grown and processed beef to schools and other public institutions. (Note: In the just passed Farm Bill, some of these changes were made.)

- Half of the food items in a typical supermarket are produced by no more than 10 multinational food and beverage companies. (Brian Halweil, Food Democracy, 2002, “Home Grown: The Case for Local Food in a Global Market”.)
- Four packers slaughter 83.5% of the beef consumed by Americans: Tyson, Cargill, Swift & Co., and National Beef Packing Co. This is up from 72% in 1990 (Mary Hendrickson and William Heffernan, Dept. of Rural Sociology, University of Missouri, April 2007.)
- Four pork packers process 66% of the nation’s pork, up from 37% in 1987 (Hendrickson and Heffernan.)
- By 2006 the top five super market corporations dominated the business with 48% of retail sales, up from 24% in 1997. (Hendrickson and Heffernan.)

Get Involved, Take Action, and Buy Local Whenever You Can!

Reforming the food system is a grassroots movement. WORC groups are actively involved in campaigns, community outreach and education, and public policy advocacy to help bring about homegrown prosperity through local foods.

Contact your state or local chapter to get involved in bringing about these changes!



WORC is a regional network of seven grassroots community organizations, which includes 10,000 members and 44 local chapters. WORC helps its member groups succeed by providing trainings and coordinating regional issue campaigns.

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