

Local Foods: A Fad or a Trend?

Appendix 1

**Food Secure Canada:
What is behind the trend of Local Food?**

Food Secure Canada: What is Behind the *Trend* of Local Food?

By Jennifer Reynolds

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To meet the growing demand for more local food on institutional menus it's important to start with understanding what's behind the trend – why do people seek out local food?

1. Reduce “food miles”

The further food is transported, the higher the food miles and thus a negative impact on the environment. For many people, local food equates to a lighter environmental footprint.

2. Fresher, more flavourful food

Local food is often harvested a few hours before its sold. Think of the farm stand corn you buy in August versus the frozen corn you eat in January. That fresh cob always tastes better. Buying local also leads to greater variety, because short supply chains enable producers to grow varieties that focus on flavour (not surviving long distance transportation).



3. Celebrate eating more seasonally

Seasonal eating is a cornerstone of the locavore diet. This means eating in step with the agricultural harvest calendar and celebrating when fruits and vegetables are at peak flavour and ripeness. (You can still eat local during the winter as ingredients such as grains, meats, dairy products and root crops are available.)

4. Supporting local economies and connecting with producers

In the past decade, there has been a huge growth in ways that consumers can buy directly from food producers: farmers markets, CSA produce box programs and U-picks, to name a few. The benefits to direct purchasing relationships flow in two directions: it allows producers to retain good profit margins (keeping their businesses viable) and

consumers learn first-hand about how their food is grown.

5. Transparency

Knowing more about where food comes from, how it's produced, and what its impact is on the environment and regional economies is perhaps the key driver of the local food trend. Consumers want to know what they're buying.

Research conducted in 2016 by the Canadian Centre for Food Integrity with three key groups of consumers - Moms, Millennials, and Foodies - found that 60% wanted to know more about farming practices. Survey respondents reported that they were personally concerned about: the use of hormones in farm animals (48%); pesticides in crop production (46%); drug residues in meat, milk and eggs (45%); and eating food that comes from genetic engineered crops (41%).



Ways to start buying more local food now

Begin learning about local food in your region

Visit a farmers market or look online for a food hub in your area. Both can be a great place to start a conversation about what your interests are in local foods and what your purchasing needs are.

Tap into provincial “Buy Local” initiatives

Most provinces have buy local initiatives with directories of local suppliers. Logos and promotional materials may be available to help promote local foods featured in menus to patients, staff and visitors.

Provincial Buy Local initiatives include: Buy BC; Buy Manitoba; Foodland Ontario; Aliments du Québec; Buy New Brunswick; PEI Flavours; Select Nova Scotia; Yukon Grown.

Try adding some seasonality to your menu

Seasonal ingredients are a great way to get started with local food – as a side to a main dish or as a featured ingredient. Lots of quantity recipes featuring local ingredients are available like Strive for Five at School and Burlodge ReFresh.

Start a conversation with your existing suppliers

Your distributor wants to meet your needs. If you want to buy more local products it's important to let them know. Learn about what local food products they already have, and if they don't already, ask them how they can identify local foods on order lists.

Develop a local food pilot project

Once you've learned more about what local foods are in your area, identify a specific product you'd like to source. Ask your distributor about whether they know of a supplier or can find one, or you can develop a new relationship. You could also talk with other CSNM members since they might be interested in purchasing the same product too, the pooled demand may help make it feasible.

And when you use local ingredients make sure to tell everyone about it! Ask staff and eaters to give you their feedback and share your successes with your team, management and the wider community and you'll be well on your way in the exciting journey of local food.

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Appendix 2

**Maclean's Magazine:
Is local food bad for the economy?**

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By Tamsin McMahon

July 9, 2012

The North American farm is experiencing a cultural renaissance, or so say the stories of urban twentysomethings swapping the comforts of the city for overalls and buckets of manure, of municipal bylaw officials debating the merits of backyard chicken coops, to say nothing of the explosion of farmers' markets, community gardens, high-end restaurants specializing in local food, and the home-delivery services of fresh produce from nearby farms.

The push for sustainable agriculture and local food trumpeted by everyone from Michelle Obama to the Canadian authors of *The 100-Mile Diet* seems innocuous enough as a way for us to end our dependence on a corn-based diet of junk food and soft drinks, as well as curb rising rates of childhood obesity by teaching us to appreciate how our food gets from the farm to the table.

Know your farmer, proponents of local food say, and you'll make better choices about what you put in your mouth, support the local economy and save the environment in the process. As Michael Pollan, the *New York Times* writer and champion of the local food movement, is fond of saying, "Pay more, eat less."

Enter two previously little-known Canadian academics with a controversial new book that argues that, far from making our communities healthier and more self-sufficient, the local food movement will destroy our economies, ruin our environment and probably lead to more wars, famine and incidences of food poisoning.

The Locavore's Dilemma—the title is a play on Pollan's bestselling *The Omnivore's Dilemma*—by University of Toronto geography professor Pierre Desrochers and his wife, Hiroko Shimizu, who has a master's in international public policy, argues that much of the gains the world has made in food security and standards of living have come from the evolution of our food system from small-scale subsistence agriculture to international trade among large and specialized producers, the corporate-driven agribusiness that so many food activists despise.

To Desrochers and Shimizu, corporations that control huge swaths of the North American food supply—the McDonald's and Wal-Mart's of the world—have made food safer and cheaper by creating economies of scale that can help support technological advancements such as more sophisticated automated farm equipment, safer pesticides and fertilizers, genetically modified seeds that produce higher yields, and more advanced food-safety practices that have cut the rate of outbreaks of food-borne illness by a hundredfold in the past century.

Food activists, they contend, would rather turn back the clock on those modern developments, close the doors to trade and return to a world where families toiled the land, pesticide- and fertilizer-free, and then squeaked by on what they could

earn from selling their goods at the local farmers' market. It's a recipe, the authors say, for economic and social disaster.

Today's locavores—the term for those who support local food—"don't ask the most obvious question, which is, if things were so great in our great-grandmothers' time, why did things change so much since then?" Desrochers says in an interview. "If it was only an educational movement, I wouldn't have any problem with it. But increasingly, it's becoming a way to stick it to the man. What are activists going to do when Wal-Mart offers fair trade coffee and organic food? They will have to find another way to get back at corporations."

Local food movements have a long history, as successive generations rediscover the romantic idealism of living off the land as their ancestors did, from Henry David Thoreau heading to the woods in *Walden*, to Depression-era policies to turn vacant city lots into urban potato patches, to wartime "Victory Gardens." These movements were all popular for a few years and usually floundered when government funding ran out or farmers found living off the land too difficult. Today's movement, which Desrochers traces back to the economic boom times of the 1990s, is all well and good, he says, until the tumultuous global economy eventually forces us to spend less on groceries. "The main message we want to send to idealistic young farmers is don't count on charity to build your business. The movement might be popular right now, but I'm not sure it will last down the road."

Desrochers's and Shimizu's argument is largely a treatise on the benefits of the free market and globalization, the belief that the only way to feed an ever-growing global population is to produce more food on less land with fewer resources, which means the family farm will continue to die a gradual death in favour of corporate agribusiness.

To understand just how far we've come, they argue, consider that in a "short" several thousand years we've gone from needing 1,000 hectares (nearly 2,500 acres) of land to feed a single person to just one-tenth of an acre in today's globalized food chain. In the past 60 years, the world's population has exploded from 2.5 billion to seven billion, and the percentage of the population going hungry on a daily basis has dropped from 40 per cent to less than 15 per cent. Desrochers and Shimizu argue that if we were still using 1950s technology to produce our food, we would need to plow an extra land mass the size of South America just to feed the world's population.

Take local food to its most extreme conclusion, Desrochers says—grow only food that's truly native to North America—and we'd all be eating a lot of blueberries, seeds, squash, and not much else. The most dramatic examples of economic and social destruction from policies to promote local food over international trade, he says, include the nationalist policies of Mussolini's Italy, Hitler's Germany, and Japan of the 1930s, when rice prices rose 60 per cent above the international rate as the country pursued agricultural self-sufficiency.

Not surprisingly, an argument that compares locavores to Hitler has attracted its fair share of critics, who mostly accuse Desrochers and Shimizu of either being in the pockets of corporate agribusiness—Desrochers says the couple’s only remuneration came from their publisher—or of harbouring a personal vendetta. Shimizu was born and raised near Tokyo and the couple wrote *The Locavore’s Dilemma* after they took issue with a Toronto speech by a visiting professor from the University of British Columbia, in which he said Japan was one of the world’s most “parasitic” countries because it imported so much of its food. Desrochers grew up in a farming community in Quebec’s St. Lawrence Valley and worked for a time at the Quebec Farmers’ Union ferrying new immigrants from Montreal out to the countryside to pick berries. Among his biggest supporters, he says, have been people who grew up on a farm and later left it. Two of his biggest detractors have been his brother, François Desrochers, a former Quebec MLA for the Action démocratique du Québec, who represented the rural riding of Mirabel, and his father, whom he describes as a “typical Quebec nationalist who wants Quebec to be self-sufficient.”

Local food supporters say the authors have painted an unfair picture of the locavore movement by focusing on its most extreme elements. “The book is very, very manipulative,” says Debbie Field, executive director of FoodShare, a Toronto community food program that sells about 4,000 local food boxes and feeds about 141,000 children in a school nutrition program. “It does not bring us light, it is throwing oil on the fire. It’s just making things more complicated.” Field says critics of the local movement too often assume that local food always has to cost more and that all locavores are against using modern technology on the farm. “I know a lot of young farmers in Ontario and they’re some of the most technically sophisticated people in the world,” she says. “They’re not about going back to some mythical slavery past. It’s about creating new, environmentally sustainable food.”

Most local food supporters take a more balanced approach between promoting local and imported fair trade food, she says. For instance, FoodShare, which is supported by private donations and government funding, bought \$1.5 million worth of produce last year, with \$500,000 of it from local producers. Only about half of the food in FoodShare boxes and 30 per cent of the food sent to schools is local. This year, FoodShare included imported strawberries and apples because unseasonably warm and wet weather wreaked havoc with local crops. “I don’t want a child eating potato chips from southern California instead of strawberries and apples from southern California if our strawberry and apple crops are destroyed,” Field says. “We’re not saying, ‘Don’t eat the mango,’ but they’re saying, ‘I’m not going to eat that local strawberry, even if it’s the same price.’”

Among the most popular and controversial aspects of today’s local food movement is the concept of “food miles,” the distance food travels from the farm to the table, which serves as a rallying cry for environmentalists concerned over greenhouse gas emissions and climate change. Desrochers calls the food-miles argument a “misleading distraction” in the debate over food policy. Research from the U.K. comparing

local tomatoes with those imported from Spain showed the U.K. tomatoes, which had to be grown in heated greenhouses, emitted nearly 2,400 kg of carbon dioxide per ton, compared to 640 kg for the Spanish tomatoes, which could grow in unheated greenhouses.

Other studies have found that food miles represent just four per cent of total emissions related to food, with most of the emissions coming from producing food and from consumers driving to the grocery store to buy it. Air transportation accounts for just one per cent of food miles, with much food transported in the cargo holds of passenger jets, while marine container ships are one of the most fuel efficient ways to transport large shipments of food, Desrochers says.

Studies on food miles need to be taken with a grain of salt since many are industry-funded, says Don Mills, president of Local Food Plus, which certifies local organic and sustainable farms in Ontario. Those studies also assume that produce shipped to Canada in the winter hasn’t been kept in cold storage elsewhere, he says. Critics willing to dismiss the food-miles argument also ignore the tax dollars spent building the infrastructure to ship food long distances. “An awful lot of public infrastructure and public policy goes into food no matter how you shake it out, and that’s why you see huge money being spent lobbying by large agricultural producers to get some policy outcome,” he says.

A better measure than food miles or even food prices, he says, is the amount of energy, in fuel, put into growing food compared to the energy, in calories, that people get from eating it. By that standard, Mills says, research shows large, highly automated farms use more fossil fuel energy than small farms that use manual labour. “Small subsistence fallow farming is incredibly productive from a [fuel] calorie perspective,” he says. “There’s lots of ways to measure the world, and we may have to balance the predominance of economic measurement with a notion of energy balance.”

Like it or not, Mills says, the debate around food policy is here to stay, mostly because food represents a core part of society’s value system that eclipses the traditional economic arguments of industries such as manufacturing. “I would argue that food is different. It has a more important place in humanity and in culture than widgets,” he says. “If we can figure out issues around food transportation, around energy, around how we treat our produce with pesticides, around how we treat our [farm] labour, we’ll be well on our way to sorting through a number of other spheres as well. If we get food right, we’ll get a lot of other things right.”

Such arguments are one of the biggest dangers of the local food movement, counters University of Manitoba agricultural professor Ryan Cardwell. It’s one thing for food activists to want to spend more on groceries at their local farmers’ markets. It’s another when they push governments to use tax dollars to support local agricultural production, either through direct subsidies or through programs that require public institutions such as schools, prisons and military bases to buy and serve only local food. “My concern is when advocates of local food try and influence policy and government money and

regulations to address a policy objective,” he says. “If you want to address an issue like urban poverty or greenhouse gas emissions, then you should pick the policy that best addresses them, and local food really doesn’t answer any of them.”

Another argument of the local food movement that Desrochers disputes is that local farming is inherently healthier and safer than the mass-produced counterpart, since farmers tend to use fewer pesticides and they have a duty to their local community. In contrast, he says, large corporations have brands to protect and budgets to devote to scrupulous food safety practices, compared to small farms, which usually aren’t worth suing if they cause outbreaks of food-borne illnesses like E.coli or salmonella. He cites Jensen Farms, the family farm in Colorado whose pesticide-free cantaloupes were linked to an outbreak of listeria last year that killed at least 30 people.

Large farms and food processing plants are also susceptible to outbreaks of food-borne illness—Maple Leaf Farms paid \$25 million to settle claims from a 2008 listeria outbreak—but Desrochers argues they’re easier to trace and correct than illnesses caused by small farms since they generate more media coverage and government oversight.

“You see young organic farms grow their stuff in manure and bring it to the barn where all the doors are open and wash everything with a hose, all the various vegetables together,” he says. “As [Loblaws executive chairman] Galen Weston said, farmers’ markets are beautiful places, but eventually they will kill people.” Getting to know your farmer is a noble aim, but most visitors to farmers’ markets have very little understanding that the food they buy from local growers is often not produced under the same conditions as those they can find at the grocery store, says Mary Shelman, director of Harvard University’s agribusiness program. “Most people assume you can take it home and eat it out of the bag before they wash it,” she says. “That’s actually frightening to me because people don’t respect that it actually came out of a field full of rabbits and deer and birds who aren’t too discriminating about where they take a bathroom break.” Larger commercial farms tend to have fewer problems of animal contamination because they’re required to fence off animal pathways.

One of the advantages of the decline of the family farm has been to move agriculture away from the large population centres, where diseases can easily spread back and forth between humans and animals, Shelman says. “If everyone had chickens in their backyard and there was an outbreak of bird flu, that would take care of every chicken.”

Neither, says Desrochers, is local food inherently more secure than that from commercial farms or foreign exports, as many food activists argue. Historically, societies that relied solely on their own agriculture were more susceptible to famine than those who opened their doors to international trade, mainly because if one country had a poor harvest it could always import food from a country that had a good season. Advancements in transportation—first the railway and later the airplane—have only helped eradicate food shortages and famines in developed countries by ensuring that fresh food can always be readily shipped anywhere.

Rather than closing borders or encouraging more local agriculture, Desrochers and others argue, food security requires encouraging economic development, so consumers can spend less of their incomes on food. Already the amount of disposable income spent on food has dropped from 23 per cent in 1930s America to 9.4 per cent today. By promoting less productive, small-scale agriculture, Desrochers says, locavores are encouraging a type of farming that will require huge tracts of wilderness to be destroyed to create farms in order to accommodate an anticipated doubling in the global food supply needed to feed the world’s population by 2050. As it stands, he says, each year more agricultural land is reverting to wilderness than is consumed by urban sprawl.

True North American food security, says Shelman, would mean converting large parcels of urban land to agriculture use. “If you look at all the land that is devoted to huge houses and driveways and pools in the backyard and beautiful landscaping, you can make the argument that ultimately for food security we have to be willing to give up other parts of the way we live,” she says.

Ultimately, though, Shelman says the local food movement is driven less by nationalism and more by consumers’ need to connect with their food and have confidence in how it’s produced, whether locally or abroad. That will keep the movement a potent force for years to come. “Local could mean it has to be in my backyard, or it could be local in the same sense that I have confidence in my food even if I’m eating artisan cheese that’s been produced in Ireland and Italy,” she says. “As long as I know the story, that is local. That’s really what people are looking for, somebody to put a face on agriculture and farming. We’re more confident in people than we are in faceless institutions.”