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Expand Your Knowledge: Top 10 reasons why you should buy local produce

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I buy local foods whenever possible for a healthier family, community and planet. One of the wonderful things about living in southern California is year-round access to fresh, local produce. Here are the top 10 reasons to take a little extra time and get to your favorite farmers market or local merchant:

1. The first reason is purely selfish... fresh, local fruit tastes better.

Most fruit does not ripen off the tree. It may be gassed in the packing shed or warehouse to imitate ripeness, but the flavor just isn't there. Sadly, ripe fruit does not transport well. Most fruit you see in the grocery store, organic or not, was picked at least a week earlier, far before it was ripe. Buying fruit from a local source means buying riper, juicier and much more delicious fruit.

2. Local produce is healthier for you and your family.

Health issues exist for both organic and non-organic foods. Consider the recent news about arsenic in organic brown rice syrup; not from errors or contamination during processing, but because the plants absorbed arsenic from the soil in which they grew. You are much more likely to know about environmental health concerns in your backyard than 300 or 3,000 miles away.

3. A second health issue arises from the processing itself.

From spinach to mixed lettuce to bean sprouts, healthy food can become a source of disease either from employee error or poor industrial hygiene standards. The more processed a food item is, the more potential exposure to contamination exists. And the further it travels, the more potential threats can enter the food supply. The shorter the food chain is, the fewer opportunities for disease to enter the picture.

4. Food processors add preservatives for longer shelf life.

If you want to limit your consumption of chemicals, buying local and minimally processed produce is crucial.

5. Many people assume that organic is the same as local and sustainable.

Sadly, organic food is no longer produced primarily by small, local, family farms. International corporations farm thousands of acres in Mexico or China, wherever the labor costs and regulations are lowest, then import the produce or processed foods as “organic.” They may well be, but issues of sustainable agricultural practices, labor standards, and costs to the environment from long-distance transportation still exist.

6. Small, local farms are more likely to use sustainable agricultural methods.

Diversity of crops, in particular, is seldom practiced by agribusiness. For more information on sustainable agriculture, see www.sustainableagriculture.net.

7. Buying food from local farms supports the local economy.

Many studies have shown that local businesses of all kinds tend to keep their profits in their local communities, while the profits of global businesses are returned to the corporate headquarters.

8. The demands of large corporations are best met by other large corporations.

A recent article from a small, organic, sustainable farm in Connecticut describes the issues that arise between a chain store and a local farmer, even when both parties would like to do business together. Read it at <http://bit.ly/Awy9r0>.

9. Local food is healthier for the global environment.

On average, food consumed in America travels 3,000 miles from source to table. That’s a lot of jet and diesel fuels pumped into the atmosphere. One of the easiest, least costly ways to reduce your personal carbon footprint is to buy food produced locally.

10. A trip to the farmers market or independent grocer is also an opportunity to learn about specific fruits, get some cooking tips, and experience different cultures.

It’s also a fun family experience. If your children are reluctant to try new fruits or vegetables, take them along and let them ask questions and make their own selections, then help to prepare the meal. It’s a great learning experience as well as an antidote to picky eating habits.

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Shop for local food at the Carlsbad Village Farmers' Market, every Wednesday and Saturday from 1-5 p.m. at 2930 Roosevelt St. between Grand Avenue and Carlsbad Village Drive.