

# Local Food Systems: Getting Involved



PHOTO: Cindy Kalamajka

**The broad movement** to decentralize food and agriculture into locally owned and operated enterprises is gaining momentum. Many individuals, businesses, and organizations are working to guarantee an accessible and affordable supply of healthy, fresh food from regional sources. Local control of food and agriculture helps farmers stay in business and strengthens local economies by keeping more money circulating locally. It also reduces the ecological impact of industrial-scale food production and distribution.

To strengthen the movement for local control, alternative policy frameworks and food system models are necessary. In addition to these positive structures, it is important to counter the many threats to local food systems, such as further industry consolidation and policies written to favor global agribusiness.

**Each of us can be a meaningful part of restoring and strengthening our local food systems through the many roles we play:**

## **As Citizens**

Let us re-empower ourselves as citizens in our communities! Strong local policies can address shortcomings in state and federal policies, which often do not take into account the unique conditions of local areas. Steps toward local participation include:

- working to elect people who champion sustainable local agriculture,
- getting to know our city council members and local county supervisors,
- encouraging the integration of local foods and their distribution into city planning, and
- starting local food policy councils.

## **As Consumers**

We can make a significant difference simply by purchasing food directly from local producers and processors instead of multinational companies. We can encourage restaurants and grocery stores to buy locally and directly from farmers by asking for local products, and help build direct links between farmers and the rest of the community through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and other buying club initiatives. (See for example [www.farmtocity.org](http://www.farmtocity.org)) For local food sources in your area, visit [www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org).

## **As Entrepreneurs**

There are many ways to help foster our local food economies. We could start a farmers' market, help a local farm establish a Community Supported

Agriculture (CSA) program, develop local processing facilities, start a community kitchen, or invest in our local food economy.

### As Community Organizers

Strong communities facilitate the local control of food. Help revitalize the web of community life by forming alliances and pooling of resources, reviving local community centers and granges, organizing neighborhood events such as local food meals, supplying educational slideshows or posters (see for example: [www.isec.org.uk/ustoolkit.html](http://www.isec.org.uk/ustoolkit.html)), or simply starting conversations about local food with friends and neighbors.



PHOTO: Sacramento Natural Foods Cooperative

### As Artists

Food is a central element of culture and can bring incredible joy to our lives. When we prepare a beautiful meal, it can inspire and heal our spirits as well as our bodies. A landscape of locally grown food also has an aesthetic dimension that conveys real beauty and vibrancy. Exploring the art of food is a great way to appeal to and engage people in their local food system.



PHOTO: Jim Coleman

### As Philosophers

Rethinking our own actions and how they fit into the bigger picture can help us live more in line with our values. Asking questions is effective in planting the seed of awareness. Asking store owners, restaurants, and grocery produce managers where their food comes from can build awareness of, and support for, local food in subtle and powerful ways.

### As a Matter of Fact:

- In January 2006, the coalition Missourians for Local Control successfully stopped state legislation that would have restricted local communities' ability to enact ordinances that prevent health impacts caused by industrial livestock operations.
- In 2006, the city council of Hercules, a town of 23,000 east of San Francisco, invoked eminent domain – a typically pro-business measure – to block Wal-Mart from building a 99,000 square foot (9,200 sq meter) store near the town's waterfront.
- In California, the cities of Point Arena and Arcata protected local foods from possible contamination by passing ordinances restricting the growing of genetically modified crops.
- The Business Alliance for Local Living Economies, a network of business people from across the continent interested in fostering strong local economies, grew 35% in the first half of 2006. The Alliance now includes 34 local groups totaling over 5,000 members.