

The Place of Food in Our Lives



PHOTO: Doug Gosling

Since civilization began, food and farming have told a story of our society, our values, and our relationship to the Earth. Today, we are witnessing unprecedented impacts as a result of food being seen primarily as a commodity. In contrast, a local food system that values sustainability and balance has the potential to reconnect us to each other and to the land. This in turn helps shift our focus to understanding food as an integral part of community and family life. Let's start here to bring about a healthier future.

How should we relate to our food?

Food For Community:

Food is a basic human need and right. It keeps our bodies going and it is also the common thread that brings together families and friends and shapes our traditions and cultural identity.

Farming connects people to the land. It can provide meaningful work for many and is the foundation for many rural economies and communities.

Diversified family farms tend to be small enough that the farmer has an intimate knowledge of the land. Farms that produce a variety of crops provide

Food As Commodity:

Food is a commodity. It is typically produced in large-scale monocultures and processed and distributed by large food manufacturers. The food industry exists primarily to generate profit.

Farming that takes place on a large scale functions more like factory operations than like farms.

The annual toll of conventional farming includes \$12 billion in environmental and health costs from pesticides, fishery deterioration and aquatic



Food For Community:

benefits including improved farm profitability, water quality, fish health, and carbon sequestration, and decreased greenhouse gas emissions and soil erosion.^a

The market is where people purchase food, learn about its origin, interact with community members and meet the farmers who grow their food.

In the ten years leading up to 2004, the number of farmers' markets in the U.S. more than doubled, adding almost 2,000 new markets.^c

Labor in a local food system can be meaningful and fulfilling. There are strong relationships between producers and consumers and a greater proportion of people running their own businesses. Young people are eager to work on sustainable farms, at farmers' markets, and in local food businesses.

"Working at the farmers' market is a blast – I wouldn't do anything else. I love answering questions about the produce and seeing the satisfaction on peoples' faces when they learn about my farm."

– Farm intern, Vacaville, CA

In the local food system, the **average meal** travels 45 miles.^f

Eating is an act of communion with the Earth. Preparing and eating food rejuvenates our spirits and nourishes our bodies.

Communities participate in making decisions about their food supply.

Food As Commodity:

"dead zones" caused by chemical fertilizers and manure, and \$45 billion for environmental and human health care caused by soil erosion.^b

The market is a means through which food is sold, traded, and distributed in large supermarkets.

In the United States, the 5 biggest supermarket companies are responsible for almost half of all retail food sales.^d

Labor in an industrial food system often means laboring on an assembly line. Jobs in industrial food production and processing can be dangerous and are often considered to be work that Americans aren't willing to do.

Industrial farmworkers suffer a range of work-related health problems, such as pesticide-related illnesses, reproductive health impacts, eye and ear problems and musculo-skeletal disorders.^e

In the conventional food system, the **average meal** travels 1,500 miles.^g

"The industrial eater is, in fact, one who does not know that eating is an agricultural act, who no longer knows or imagines the connections between eating and the land, and who is therefore necessarily passive and uncritical... We still (sometimes) remember that we cannot be free if our minds and voices are controlled by someone else. But we have neglected to understand that we cannot be free if our food and its sources are controlled by someone else. The condition of the passive consumer of food is not a democratic condition. One reason to eat responsibly is to live free."

Wendell Berry



PHOTO: USDA AMS

Eating is largely an unconscious act aimed at refueling our bodies. It must be quick and convenient, sometimes at the expense of nutrition and flavor.

Large corporations control the food supply at the expense of communities.