

CONSUMER OPTIONS FOR GREENER PURCHASING



This diagram represents a particular meal, that can either be sustainable or environmentally detrimental depending on the sourcing and travel associated with the individual ingredients.

"Carbon emissions are a major negative byproduct of food sourcing. Our daily actions impact the planet...even if we are not directly taking airplanes everywhere, the food we eat does."

What's the issue?

Knowing where your meal is coming from, and purposefully shopping to ensure a local meal, is more sustainable and economically friendly.⁵ The graphic on the previous page demonstrates this by comparing the same meal (a hamburger) sourced two different ways. The right represents local sourcing, in which 464,650 g/ton of carbon are emitted into the atmosphere to transport the raw ingredients to the end destination. The left represents global sourcing which uses 18,989,000 g/ton of carbon. Carbon emissions contribute to air pollution, noise pollution through use of transportation vehicles, and global climate change. The drastic difference between these two numbers goes to show how much less of an impact locally sourced products have on the environment.

Carbon emissions are a major negative byproduct of food sourcing. In order to provide mangoes to Sweden, hundreds of miles must be traveled with thousands of tons of carbons burned. In Europe, 30% of all greenhouse gas emissions are a result of food consumption.¹ As mentioned above carbon emissions have a massive negative impact. The use of carbon to transport food relies on limited fossil fuels, requires a great amount of energy to burn, and contributes to the overall warming of the planet.¹

Why is this important?

Our daily actions impact the planet. Even if we are not directly taking airplanes everywhere, the food we eat does. By eating foods from all corners of the planet we are increasing greenhouse gas emissions significantly.² These greenhouse gases, in turn, are contributing to the heating of the planet and associated negative repercussions.³

What can be done?

As the infographic on the front page suggests, an easy way to combat this issue is to buy local. By making the decision to buy local, you may also be choosing to buy seasonally. As such the miles that your food travels will be significantly reduced along with the negative impacts of those miles.



What is buying local?

Much of the current research regarding shopping locally and sustainably notes that these terms are poorly defined and difficult to understand. We're here to clear up the confusion. Buying locally refers to food grown and processed in close proximity to the user.⁵ This means that the meat, dairy, fish, fruit, and vegetables that you buy should all be grown, processed, and sold in a reasonable distance to you, the consumer. For many consumers 'reasonable distance' refers to regionally and culturally available food rather than food within a specific political boundary.⁴

Key Arguments Against Buying Local

Some will argue that buying local is not the most sustainable option. This argument is based on the economics that growing greater amounts, to be delivered farther in larger quantities, ensures a lower price and a lower amount of carbon used per item delivered than local sourcing.² This point of view does not account for the waste created by excess unused production nor the total miles traveled for consumed foods.

What can you do as a consumer?

- Buy local when possible by being informed about the origin of the food you are purchasing
- Pay careful attention to where the food has been processed as this may be different than growing location and by effect not local
- When possible, learn about growing practices in order to inform your produce purchases.
- **Think globally, act locally.**



References

- 1) Rööös, E. (2013). Analysing the Carbon Footprint of Food [PDF]. Uppsala: Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences.
- 2) Blanke, M. & Burdick, B. *Env Sci Poll Res Int* (2005) 12: 125.
- 3) Bolin, B., & Doos, B.R. Greenhouse effect. United States.
- 4) Brown, C. (2003). Consumers' preferences for locally produced food: A study in southeast Missouri. *American Journal of Alternative Agriculture*, 18(4), 213-224. doi:10.1079/AJAA200353
- 5) Coelho, F., Coelho, E. & Egerer, M. (2018). Local food: benefits and failings due to modern agriculture. *Scientia Agricola*, 75(1), 84-94. doi: 10.1590/1678-992x-2015-0439