

Think Local Tipsheet 50p



Centre for
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Publications

A fresh initiative for food – investigate your local producers and reap the benefits.

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Why now, why here?

How much of your last meal was produced in your local area? In the same county? The same country? Some of it may have travelled hundreds or thousands of miles to get to your table.

In our increasingly complex world, feeding ourselves has become a secondhand experience and made us dependent on huge numbers of people and systems. This can cause huge problems when those systems break down. Salmonella in eggs, BSE in cows, vCJD in people, and most recently the foot-and-mouth crisis, are the surest sign of all that we should be rethinking the way that our twenty-first century supply chains work.

Why food first?

Food and agriculture aren't the only areas in which corporate superpowers are creating the rules by which we are obliged to live, but are two of the easier ones to address. Small farmers countrywide are selling up, broken by years of nonsensical subsidy, overproduction and decreasing profits due to the monopoly buying power of transnational supermarket chains.

What are the alternatives?

It's quite simple – *think local*... Wherever possible buy local produce, grown and processed locally and from a shop that is as near as possible to your home.

Buy local produce from local shops

Each council in the UK has a Local Agenda 21 office – LA21 is a mechanism for developing a local strategy for achieving sustainability. One way to do this is to choose local produce when it is available and so cut down the waste of time and fuel moving it around. Keep an eye out for adverts in the local press for nearby Pick-Your-Own farms once summer comes and make use of farm shops near you.

Find out more:

Contact your LA 21 officer (see the County Council listings in your local telephone directory) and ask for a directory of local producers and farm shops who sell direct to the public, or see their website (try searching under LA21, local government or the name of the county council). Your local Chamber of Trade may also be able to help.

Get in touch with the Village Retail Services Association who help small communities without shop or Post Office facilities get them back. In Loughton in East Sussex the post office and shop closed in 1994. With the help of local grants and generous support from residents the shop was bought by the community and a management structure set up as a Shop Association. A tenant was found for the shop which opened again in early 1995.

- Virsa, The Quadrangle, Woodstock, Oxfordshire, OX20 1LH; tel: 01993 814 377; fax: 01993 810 849; www.virsa.org; email: virsa@plunkett.co.uk

Visit a local Farmers' Market

Markets have been around for centuries, but true Farmers' Markets allow only local producers to sell their own produce. The first Markets in the UK started in 1997. By 2004 there were over 450 up and running and spread right across Britain.

For producers:

- They cut out the middle men allowing increased financial returns through direct selling, price control, and a regular cash flow.

- Lower transport and packaging costs.

For consumers:

- Direct contact means you can be sure how your food is grown or produced.
- Access to fresh food means improved diet and nutrition.

The environment:

- Reducing food miles and hence vehicle pollution, noise and fossil fuel use.
- Reduce the need for packaging.
- Encourage organic and pesticide free cultivation and agriculture.

The community and local economy:

- Stimulate local economy by encouraging consumers to support local businesses and keeping money within the local community
- Attracts business to retailers in the vicinity of the market.

Find out more

For details of your nearest Farmers' Market or information on how to set up a Farmers' Market see their comprehensive website listings or contact:

- The National Association of Farmers' Markets, PO BOX 575, Southampton, SO15 7BZ; tel: 0845 45 88 420; www.farmersmarkets.net; email: nafm@farmersmarkets.net

Shop at a Country Market

They may have a fuddy-duddy image, but the WI have been out there encouraging local food initiatives both on the ground in our towns and cities and with the relevant government bodies. WI Markets were first registered as co-operatives in the 1930s, and a separate company called WI Country Markets was formed in 1995 to coordinate the network. Anyone with suitable produce to sell may apply to join their local co-operative, and in 2004 they dropped the WI prefix to avoid confusion. These markets bring home-made and fresh produce from kitchens and gardens to the local community, with the money going directly back to the producers. There are currently 500 such markets across England, Wales and the Channel Islands.

Find out more

- Country Markets Ltd, Dunston House, Sheepbridge, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S41 9QD; tel: 0845 108 3784 www.country-markets.co.uk; email: info@country-markets.co.uk

Join a vegetable (or fruit) box scheme

A vegetable box scheme is a box (bag, sack or net) containing freshly picked, organic, usually locally grown produce delivered weekly to your door or a local drop off point. Box scheme operators usually offer small, medium and family size boxes with prices ranging from £5 to £15. The vegetables in the box will vary from week to week depending on the season. They provide healthy, tasty vegetables just as you would grow them yourself but without the labour! The concept was developed by vegetable growers to shortcut the supply chain and enable them to sell their produce direct to local consumers.

Find out more

The LA 21 officer at your council should be able to tell you if a directory of locally produced food has been published for your area. Or you can contact the Soil Association who run a number of projects including Local Food Links and Food Futures and the Organic Farms Network – they should be able to help you. The

website library has sections on 'How to Set Up a Vegetable Box Scheme' and 'Organic Vegetable Box Schemes'.

- Local Food Links, Soil Association, Bristol House, 40-56 Victoria Street, Bristol, BS1 6BY; tel: 0117 914 2424; www.localfoodworks.org

Grow food in your own garden

There are hundreds of books in the shops to help you and a number of member's organisations to join. Food can be grown on any scale from an allotment to herbs on a windowsill and you can guarantee that it is as local as it's going to get!

Find out more

Try the following organisations depending on your level of experience and the facilities available to you (and see further reading):

- National Society of Allotment & Leisure Gardeners, O'Dell House, Hunters Road, Corby, Northants, NN17 5JE; tel: 01536 266576; fax: 01536 264509; www.nsalg.org.uk; email: natsoc@nsalg.org.uk;
- The Permaculture Association, London, WC1N 3XX; tel/fax: 0845 458 1805; www.permaculture.org.uk; email: office@permaculture.org.uk
- The Soil Association, Bristol House, 40-56 Victoria Street, Bristol, BS1 6BY; tel: 0117 314 5000; fax: 0117 314 5001; www.soilassociation.org; email: info@soilassociation.org
- Garden Organic (Henry Doubleday Research Association), Ryton Organic Gardens, Coventry, Warks CV8 3LG; tel: 024 7630 3517; fax: 024 7663 9229; www.gardenorganic.org.uk; email: enquiry@hdra.org.uk;
- Plants for a Future, The Field, St Veep, Lostwithiel, Cornwall PL22 0QJ; tel: 01208 873 554; www.pfaf.org

Join a LETS scheme

For those of you haven't come across it before, LETS stands for Local Exchange Trading – an organisation on the local level which trades without money, exchanging goods and services between people in the group. There are already 450 schemes in the UK with over 40,000 people taking part and more in the pipeline. LETS are a powerful tool for rebuilding the local economy, putting people in control of local resources and encouraging community-based businesses.

Find out more

For a LetsLink Introductory pack send your name, address and a cheque for £1.50 made out to LetsLink UK. For a list of local area groups and their websites see the LetsLink UK site listed below or telephone.

- LetsLink UK, 12 Southcote Rd. London, N19 5BJ ; Tel: 020 7607 7852; Fax 020 7609 7112 www.letslinkuk.org; admin@letslinkuk.net;

LETS:

'A marvellous, marvellous idea. It may sound strange. What is important is that it works...'

– Womans Own Magazine

Set up a Community Supported Agriculture scheme with a local farm

The principle behind Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is that the customer pays in advance for a share of a particular farmer's or group of farmers' produce. A farmer draws up his plans for the year and customers sign up and purchase a share of his yield in either a lump sum or in instalments. It brings the customer closer to the grower than even Farmers' Markets and ensures that the farmer knows at the beginning of the planting season that he has a guaranteed market for his produce. The system originated in Japan and is well-established in the USA – in the UK it is still in its infancy, but is beginning to grow.

Find out more

For more details of CSAs, including lists of local groups, check out the Soil Association's CSA project:

- Cultivating Communities, Bristol House, 40-56 Victoria Street, Bristol, BS1 6BY; tel: 0117 914 2425; www.cuco.org.uk; email: csa@cuco.org.uk

CSA Case Study

When Barbara Czoch, an agricultural postgraduate from Wye College in Kent, wanted to grow organic vegetables, she was deterred by high land prices and the difficulty of finding a market for her produce. She decided to set up a project funded by local households which would provide capital for leasing land and beginning to plant. About 70 consumers in east Kent agreed to put up £130 in the first year for which they would receive a box of organic vegetables every week

The Flaxland Farm scheme is one of 54 CSA's and vegetable box schemes in the UK supplying an estimated 20,000 customers and with a turnover of around £5 million.

Conclusion

There will always be some goods that you cannot source locally – from lightbulbs to coffee and tea. If this is the case, try to buy initially from your own area, then country, and if all else fails to buy fairly traded and organic goods. Local could mean in some circumstances your corner shop or nearest farm shop, in others a British made appliance rather than an American or Japanese import. If there really is no alternative to importing something halfway across the world, think about joining a campaign group to change this situation and encourage diversification and self-sufficiency at home.

Information and advice

- Bioregional Development Group; tel: 020 8404 4880; www.bioregional.com
- Common Ground; www.commonground.org.uk
- Community Composting Network; tel: 0114 258 0483; www.communitycompost.org
- F3 Foundation for Local Food Initiatives; tel: 0845 458 9525; www.localfood.org.uk
- Friends of the Earth; tel: 020 7490 1555; www.foe.co.uk
- International Society for Ecology and Culture (ISEC); tel: 01803 868650; www.isec.org.uk
- Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association; tel: +353 (0) 506 32563; www.irishorganic.ie
- Proper Job Co-Op; tel: 01647 432 985; www.properjob.ik.com
- Sheffield Organic Food Initiative; tel: 0114 268 6727.
- Sustain; tel: 020 7837 1228; www.sustainweb.org

Further reading

- *Local Food for Local People: a practical guide to developing sustainable local food economies*, Liam Egerton, 1998, Soil Association
- *Local Harvest: Delicious Ways to Save the Planet*, K. de Selincourt, 1997, Lawrence & Wishart
- *Bringing the Food Economy Home*, H. Norberg-Hodge, T. Merrifield and S. Gorelick, 1998, ISEC
- *A Battle in Store: a discussion of the social impact of the major UK supermarkets*, 2000, Sustain
- *Farms of Tomorrow: Community Supported Farms, Farm Supported Communities*, Groh TM & McFadden SH, 1990, *Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association*, Pennsylvania, USA
- *LETS Work: Rebuilding the Local Economy*, Peter Lang, 1994, Grover Books
- *Creative Sustainable Gardening*, Diana Anthony, 2000, CAT Publications
- *Window Box Allotment: A beginner's guide to container gardening*, Penelope Bennett, 2001, Ebury Press
- *The Organic Directory*, Ed. Clive Litchfield, Soil Association