

Buy Locally to Save Fossil Fuels



EAT SMART Newsletter by *Rebecca Morley, MA*

Volume XC August 4, 2008

adapted from : <http://www.budgetsavvymag.com/content/view/943/199/> & <http://www.sustainabletable.org/issues/energy/>

CURRENT FOOD TRENDS: In order to conserve fossil fuel, there is a concerted effort encouraging us to eat foods grown or raised within 100 miles of our homes. Oil, coal, and natural gas are collectively known as fossil fuels. Today, eighty-five percent of all energy produced in the United States comes from burning these fuels. That energy powers almost two-thirds of our electricity and virtually all of our transportation. There are a number of problems associated with fossil fuels, most of which stem from the by-products created when they are burned to create energy. Chief among those byproducts are carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide, greenhouse gases that are major contributors to [global warming](#). Largely because of coal and petroleum combustion, the amount of carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide in the air today are thirty-five percent and eighteen percent higher, respectively, than they were before the industrial era. Other byproducts of fossil fuel combustion include sulfur oxides and nitrogen oxides, both of which contribute to acid rain, and hydrocarbons, which can react with nitrogen oxides to form smog. The buy local concept can save millions of gallons of fossil fuel world wide. A 2002 study from the John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health estimated that, using our current system, three calories of energy are needed to create one calorie of edible food.

And that was on average. Some foods take far more, for instance grain-fed beef, which requires thirty-five calories for every calorie of beef produced.

What's more, the John Hopkins study didn't include the energy used in processing and transporting food. Studies that do take into account processing and transportation estimate that it takes an average of seven to ten calories of input energy to produce one calorie of food. Most of this wasteful equation is due to industrial practices upon which our food system is built. These include inefficient growing practices, food processing, and storage, as well as our system of transporting foodstuffs thousands of miles between the field and the end consumer.

CONCLUSION: Shopping at the Farmer's Market reduces packaging, processing and transportation expenses. By supporting your local economy, and buying locally you are strengthening interconnections between real people. With the cost of gas prices sky high it pays to buy local now more than ever! Farmer's Markets make summer easy to shop local. When you buy from local farmers and merchants your dollar stretches farther, you reduce your carbon footprint, and you keep your neighbors (relatively speaking) in business.

Summer is the perfect time to do something good for your body, your wallet, and the environment by buying local. It feels good to support locals!



Eat Smart Program * Missoula City-County Health Department
(406) 258-3827 * www.co.missoula.mt.us/healthservices/EatSmart