



Newsletter of the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service: A project of the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT)

## Local Food Connects

The demand for local food has skyrocketed during the past few years. Farmers and ranchers are selling their products to nearby consumers, stores, restaurants, and cafeterias.

This commerce is a boost for the entire community, not just the farmers. Consumers' money stays close to home, their food is fresher and healthier, and less fuel is used for transport. In this issue of ATTRAnews, we look at some questions about local food and we feature a few of the groups that cultivate local food economies.

## What Is Local Food?

Local food is grown within a reasonable distance from where it is eaten. It is often raised on small and medium-sized farms that use sustainable practices. Local foods are very fresh and the crops change with the seasons.

Many local food producers sell their goods on their farms or through farmers' markets and community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs. A growing number of farmers sell to local restaurants, grocery stores, schools, colleges, hospitals, and senior centers.

## Why Does Local Food Matter?

Consumers have many questions about local food. Why is it important that I know my farmer? What are the positive effects of spending my food dollars in my community? Is my food being produced in a way that cares for the workers, the animals, the soil, the water, and the wildlife?

When consumers choose local food, they strengthen the communities where they live. They show respect for their region's environment. They build regional economic prosperity. Local food can generate an important part of a region's collective wealth.

Local food helps people understand their food choices. Buying locally connects consumers with nearby farmers. It invests more food dollars into the farms and it reduces *food miles* – the distance our food travels from farm to fork – which may in turn reduce food energy inputs. Local food production means something different in each community.



Photo by Neva Hassanein

Locally grown vegetables sell fast at Missoula, Mont. farmers' market.

Creating local food systems and buying local are valuable steps in creating a more sustainable farming future, but these actions will certainly not build a complete solution. Many questions are unanswered. Are local diets sustainable? Does a local product have fewer energy inputs than a non-local product? Is it possible to create energy-efficient regional, national, and even global distribution systems?

In the end, buying local food is one part of becoming responsible consumers. As we consider local food, we shouldn't limit ourselves to thinking in terms of local versus global, with local being good and global bad. We need to consider whether local food is healthier, whether it is valuable to ourselves and other consumers, whether it builds wealth in our communities, and whether it contributes to a better environment through stewardship of the land, water, and air. Only by looking at all the questions will we understand the value of sustainable local food at our tables and in our communities.

## Schools Use Local Food for Fundraisers

A Montana school district is proving that fundraisers can be good for local farmers and ranchers as well as classrooms. The Gallatin Valley farm-to-school program and six schools near Bozeman have found a way to raise

money without selling candy, magazine subscriptions or frozen pizza. The project sells local products such as huckleberry preserves, fresh winter produce, seasonings, roasted cereals, granola, specialty lentils, barley,

syrops, and honey. Farm-to-school connects children with fresh food from local farms and ranches. It improves student nutrition, local economies, and community understanding all at the same time. [www.gofarmtoschool.org](http://www.gofarmtoschool.org)

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 [www.attra.ncat.org](http://www.attra.ncat.org)

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## National Organizations that Promote Local Food

**Community Food Security Coalition** brings together almost 300 North American organizations that are developing food self-reliance among all communities. Member groups address hunger, environmental sustainability, community development, sustainable agriculture, community gardening, social and economic justice, and farm-to-school and farm-to-college initiatives. The coalition promotes policy change and networking to support community food security. See their member list to get an idea of what's going on across the country in these fields. [www.foodsecurity.org](http://www.foodsecurity.org)

**USDA's Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Initiative** is a new effort to connect consumers with local producers. Deputy Director Kathleen Merrigan is marshalling resources from across the USDA to focus on and help local farmers. [www.usda.gov/knowyourfarmer](http://www.usda.gov/knowyourfarmer)

**The Center for Food and Justice** collaborates on programs to build a sustainable and just food system. They pioneered farm-to-school projects and have expanded to farm-to-hospital programs. [www.departments.oxj.edu/uepil/cfj](http://www.departments.oxj.edu/uepil/cfj)

**Food Routes Network** provides communications tools such as Buy Fresh Buy Local campaigns for organizations that are rebuilding community food systems. [www.foodroutes.org](http://www.foodroutes.org)

**The Kellogg Foundation** works to improve the lives of children. The foundation supports

many programs that create local food systems and a safe, healthy food supply. [www.wkcf.org](http://www.wkcf.org)

**The Leopold Center's** Marketing and Food Systems Initiative conducts research and education to help farmers and communities retain more of the value of their production. Based in Iowa, the center develops practices relevant to the entire nation. [www.leopold.iastate.edu](http://www.leopold.iastate.edu)

**Local Harvest** is a searchable online network of family farms and CSAs (community-supported agriculture programs) that sell directly to the public. The site lists about 17,000 U.S. members and farmers' markets, with a huge array of farm products. [www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org)

**Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network** helps small and mid-sized processors and the livestock producers and buyers who depend on them. [www.nichemeatprocessing.org](http://www.nichemeatprocessing.org)

**The Wallace Center** promotes equal access to healthy food produced with fair and humane practices and entrepreneurial spirit. Their National Good Food Network offers a searchable database of producers, buyers, distributors, advocates, and funders. [www.wallacecenter.org](http://www.wallacecenter.org)

**World Hunger Year** fights hunger and poverty by supporting grassroots organizations working for self-reliance, economic justice, and equal access to nutritious food. [www.whyhunger.org](http://www.whyhunger.org)

## Selected Regional Groups that Promote Local Food

**Alternative Energy Resources Organization** (AERO) is dedicated to grassroots solutions for resource conservation and local economic vitality in Montana. Phone: 406-443-7272. [www.aeromt.org](http://www.aeromt.org)

**Colorado Local Sustainability** supports local sustainable food production, and educates consumers about food and sustainability. Phone: 303-258-7460. [www.localsustainability.net](http://www.localsustainability.net)

**Community Alliance with Family Farmers** links California consumers and food producers by promoting good practices, markets, and policies that protect family farmers. [www.caff.org](http://www.caff.org)

**Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture** works with farmers, families, restaurants, and markets to strengthen agriculture in western Massachusetts. [www.buylocalfood.org](http://www.buylocalfood.org)

**Ecotrust Food and Farm Program** is building Oregon food networks of flourishing farms, vibrant communities, and healthy eaters. [www.ecotrust.org/foodfarms](http://www.ecotrust.org/foodfarms)

**Family Farmed** encourages organic farming by connecting Chicago buyers with regional farmers. [www.familyfarmed.org](http://www.familyfarmed.org)

**Farm to Table** promotes New Mexico agriculture with education and outreach. Phone: 505-473-1004. [www.farmtotablenm.org](http://www.farmtotablenm.org)

**The Food Project** trains youth and adults to produce healthy food for residents of urban Massachusetts. [www.thefoodproject.org](http://www.thefoodproject.org)

**P-Patch Community Gardens** programs contribute to Seattle's vital urban agriculture with CSAs, youth projects, and more than 60 gardens. [www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/ppatch](http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/ppatch)

**Rural Roots** supports and enhances sustainable and organic agriculture and local food networks in Idaho and the Inland Northwest. Phone: 208-883-3462. [www.ruralroots.org](http://www.ruralroots.org)

**Southwest Marketing Network** helps local producers and communities develop new and improved markets and enterprises. Phone: 970-588-2292. [www.swmarketingnetwork.org](http://www.swmarketingnetwork.org)

## ATTRA's Local Food Publications

In addition to the publications listed below, ATTRA offers hundreds of others on all aspects of sustainable and organic agriculture. You can see and download these free publications at [www.attra.ncat.org](http://www.attra.ncat.org). Call 1-800-346-9140 to order a paper copy.

### Community and Urban Agriculture

Finding Land to Farm: Six Ways to Secure Farmland IP349

\**Encontrando Tierra para Trabajar: Seis Maneras de Asegurar Tu Terreno Agrícola* SP349

Local Food Directories—online only

Market Gardening: A Start-up Guide IP195/201

Start a Farm in the City: Change Your Community by Growing What You Eat IP350

\**Comience Una Granja en la Ciudad:*

*Haga un Cambio en Su Comunidad al Cultivar Sus Alimentos* SP350

### Local Marketing and Distribution

Beef Marketing Alternatives IP290

Bringing Local Food to Local Institutions IP242

Community-Supported Agriculture IP289

Direct Marketing IP113

Entertainment Farming & Agri-Tourism IP109

Evaluating a Rural Enterprise IP041

Farmers' Markets: Marketing and Business Guide IP146

Food Miles: Background and Marketing IP312

Grazing Networks for Livestock Producers CT166

Lavender Production, Products, Markets, and Entertainment Farms IP243

Marketing Organic Grains CT154

New Markets for Your Crops IP328

\**Nuevos Mercados para Su Cosecha* SP309

The Organic Chronicles No. 1: Mysteries of

Organic Farming Revealed IP314

\**Las Crónicas Orgánicas No. 1: No Tenga*

*Pánico—Vuélvase Orgánico* SP310

Pork: Marketing Alternatives IP153

Postharvest Handling of Fruits and Vegetables IP116

Selling to Restaurants IP255

### Local Processing

Food Dehydration Options IP147

Grain Processing: Adding Value to Farm Products IP140

Keys to Success in Value-Added Agriculture IP172

Oilseed Processing for Small-Scale Producers IP134/140

Moving Beyond Conventional Cash Cropping IP201

Small-Scale Egg Handling IP348

Small-Scale Poultry Processing IP231

\**Procesamiento de Aves en Escala Pequeña* SP231

Soyfoods: Adding Value to Soybeans CT153

Value-Added Dairy Options CT151

*\*Spanish titles are translations of the publications listed above them.*



## Groups Acting to Strengthen Community Food Systems

A large number of organizations are working to create and improve local food systems in every region of the United States.

Each group is working with a specific set of concerns and resources. A few examples are described on these pages.

To find groups in your area, see ATTRA's online database of Local Food Directories at [www.attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/local\\_food](http://www.attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/local_food) or the Community Food Security Coalition's member list or the Web sites of the other national organizations listed on page 2.

**The Lands at Hillside Farms** (TLHF) is a nonprofit farm-based educational organization near Wilkes-Barre/Scranton, Penn. TLHF offers educational programs designed to teach children and adults the importance of eating healthy, locally raised foods. The farm is home to a working grass-based dairy herd. Consumers can buy the farm's milk, ice cream, and butter at the Dairy Store, through a home delivery program, or at the weekly Wilkes-Barre Farmers' Market.

Thousands of children attend educational field trips to TLHF every year to experience first-hand where their food comes from. They visit the cows, tour the milking barn, and make butter with an old-fashioned churn. TLHF Peace and Carrots Summer Camp teaches middle-school children to prepare delicious meals from foods harvested on the farm. High school students monitor the quality of the farm's stream and pastures.

The Lands at Hillside Farms' educational programs are not just limited to the young. Approximately 7,000 people attended their most recent Fall Festival, where much of the food served came from local farms. Other programs reconnect the elderly with their farming background. TLHF hosts a Local Foods Club, created by NCAT intern Hannah Sharp. Club members include local college students and community members who meet with area farmers, discuss issues related to local foods, and watch films about sustainable agriculture. NCAT's Northeast office is located on the farm. To learn more, visit [www.thelandsathillsidefarms.org](http://www.thelandsathillsidefarms.org) or contact Christine Doherty, [christine@thelandsathillsidefarms.org](mailto:christine@thelandsathillsidefarms.org)

The **Grow Montana** coalition is working to establish a sustainable and equitable Montana food system. Over the past four years Grow Montana has revamped state institutional procurement and meat inspection laws to improve access to local food markets for Montana farmers and food processors. The group has conducted nationally recognized food system research, and collaborated with the governor to host a 280-participant summit on food and agriculture. They also launched the nation's first FoodCorps, whose members develop local food programs at public institutional food services across the state.

Within the past year alone, Grow Montana leveraged \$500,000 in state funding for technical assistance to local food entrepreneurs, and helped return \$1.2 million to Montana farmers and ranchers through the FoodCorps. The key to Grow Montana's success is a strong steering committee comprised of experts and organizations who are grounded in the day-to-day

work of food system change. These members include key staff from Alternative Energy Resources Organization; National Center for Appropriate Technology; Artemis Common Ground; Lake County Community Development Corporation; Dawson County Farm to Table; Montana Farmers Union; Working for Equality and Economic Liberation; Big Sky Organics, LLC; and Montana State University's Sustainable Food and Bioenergy Systems. To learn more, visit [www.growmontana.ncat.org](http://www.growmontana.ncat.org) or contact Crissie McMullan, [crissiem@ncat.org](mailto:crissiem@ncat.org), (406) 531-5162.

### Iowa's Regional Food Systems Working Group

is creating vigorous, sustainable food systems in the state. The working group includes county supervisors, farmers, chefs,

entrepreneurs, food distributors, food service directors, chambers of commerce, resource conservation and development coordinators, USDA employees, community colleges, Iowa State University faculty and extension staff, graduate students, and business leaders.

Part of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture's Value Chains Partnership (VCP) initiative, the working group is funded primarily by the Leopold Center and Wallace Center at Winrock International. Other VCP working groups include Pork Niche Market, Small Meat Processors, Fruit and Vegetables, and Grass-Based Livestock. These local groups get together to discuss challenges and oppor-

tunities related to production capacity, economic development, business planning, infrastructure, transportation, farm-to-school and farm-to-institution initiatives, and other regional food system development efforts. To learn more, go to [www.valuechains.org](http://www.valuechains.org) or contact the Leopold Center's Rich Pirog, [rspirog@iastate.edu](mailto:rspirog@iastate.edu)

**Growing Power** is based at urban farms in Chicago, Milwaukee, and Merton, Wis. The nonprofit organization demonstrates urban farming and community food systems, and offers workshops for emerging food producers. Growing Power also runs a farmers' co-operative with more than 300 family-farmer members, through which they distribute meat, produce, and value-added products. The group teaches organic methods and vermicomposting, and runs an aquaponics system that raises fish and food in greenhouses. Growing Power operates Farm-to-City Market Basket, a community-supported agriculture program. Milwaukee and Chicago young people have the opportunity to learn farming, leadership, and entrepreneurial skills through the Growing Power Youth Corps. To learn more, call 414-527-1546 or see [www.growingpower.org](http://www.growingpower.org)



Photo courtesy The Lands at Hillside Farms  
Children plant flowers with Christine Doherty, director of education at The Lands at Hillside Farms near Scranton, Penn.



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## A Few More of the Many Regional Organizations Working to Strengthen Community Food Systems

**Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP)** helps create and expand local food markets that preserve agricultural heritage, give everyone access to fresh healthy food, and keep local farmers farming. ASAP publishes an online Local Food Guide and sponsors the Growing Minds Farm-to-School program, as well as farmers' markets, workshops, grants, and online resources for farmers, consumers, and institutions. [www.asapconnections.org](http://www.asapconnections.org)

**Atlanta Local Food Initiative** is a network that joins individuals, corporations, nonprofits, universities, and governmental agencies to build a local food system. The initiative aims to enhance human health, promote environmental renewal, foster local economies, and link rural and urban communities. [www.atlantainitiative.org](http://www.atlantainitiative.org)

**Chef's Collaborative** works with chefs and the greater food community to celebrate local foods and foster a more sustainable food supply. The collaborative inspires action by translating information about our food into tools for making knowledgeable purchasing decisions. Through these actions, members embrace seasonality, preserve diversity and traditional practices, and support local economies. [www.chefscollaborative.org](http://www.chefscollaborative.org)

**Kansas City Food Circle** is a volunteer grassroots effort to create a permanently sustainable local food system for eaters and growers in the greater Kansas City area, including parts of Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa. In operation

for more than 15 years, the Circle links regional organic producers with people who want to eat delicious, nutritious, locally grown food. [www.kcfoodcircle.org](http://www.kcfoodcircle.org)

**The Slow Food** movement was founded by Carlo Petrini in Italy in 1986 to combat fast food outlets springing up all over the world. Slow Food aims to preserve regional cuisines that rely on distinctive crops, seeds, and farm animals. The movement now has 800 chapters in 132 countries and over 100,000 members. Each chapter, or convivium, promotes local artisans, farmers, and flavors through regional events such as specialty food workshops, wine tastings, and farmers' markets. [www.slowfood.com](http://www.slowfood.com)

**Terra Madre** is an international network of food communities, each committed to producing high-quality food in a responsible, sustainable way. Coordinated by Slow Food, Terra Madre holds a major biennial conference in Torino, Italy. The meeting draws food producers from all over the world to exchange ideas about edibles, globalization, and economics. Former ATTRA specialist Dr. Anne Fanatico attended the Torino meeting in 2006. [www.terramadre.info](http://www.terramadre.info)

**Sustainable Homer** is building a local food system on Alaska's Kenai Peninsula. The organization promotes projects like the Homer Farmers' Market, a food business collaborative, home gardening, the Alaska Root Cellar Blog, and a sustainable food policy for Alaska. [www.sustainablehomer.org/local\\_food.htm](http://www.sustainablehomer.org/local_food.htm)

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**New Publication from ATTRA**  
Small-Scale Egg Handling IP348

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## ATTRAnews

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