

# At The Table with the Acting Food Policy Council

September 6, 2007

## THINKING AHEAD TO A LOCAL THANKSGIVING

Written by the Acting Food Policy Council for Seattle and King County

Harvest festivals and thanksgiving celebrations have occurred for centuries around the world. Each is imbued with cultural traditions and customs that reflect their place of origin and the bounty of their local agricultural production. As people have migrated, a wonderful mixing of these traditions has occurred to create a rich tapestry of celebrations around the globe.

Today, however, when people gather to celebrate Thanksgiving, many are distantly removed from the food sources and traditions of their parents and grandparents. We've lost the connection these celebrations had to local seasons and foods and, consequently, some of their richness and meaning. Can we reconnect our Thanksgiving tradition with our local agricultural tradition to create a more meaningful celebration? Should we? The answer to both is yes!

The global economy has changed the way many farmers grow, process, package and transport their products. One consequence of these changes has been a reduction in varieties of plants and animals and in genetic diversity. That is why at many grocery stores you'll only find two types of potatoes – red

"new potatoes" and brown Russets. Farmers growing for local markets, on the other hand, tend to grow a greater diversity of plant varieties and animal breeds selected for their regional adaptability and flavor. In King County, farmers grow over 200 varieties of fruits and vegetables - asparagus to zucchini, including over a dozen delicious varieties of potatoes, plus an array of livestock, poultry, cheese and other dairy products, honey, herbs and flowers. Buying locally grown products helps maintain this critical diversity as well as ensuring that the food we serve at our table is fresh and full of flavor.

### What, no green bean casserole?

Green bean casserole is a staple on many Thanksgiving tables. Green beans require temperatures between 65 and 85 degrees to grow. In our area, that means September is the latest that green beans can be harvested. You'd have to travel at least 1200 miles to Southern California to find temperatures warm enough to harvest 'fresh' green beans in November.

There are tremendous benefits to be gained by eating locally and supporting a local food system. Shortening the food chain – buying food grown closer to home – is one way to help improve the environment. There is increasing attention on how our current system of transporting foods over thousands of miles is detrimental to the environment and may be a significant factor in global warming. University of Washington researchers have shown that a Skagit Valley apple requires about two-thirds less climate-polluting energy to grow and ship to local retailers than an apple from New Zealand. And a recent World Watch Institute study

### Where's the Turkey?

Consolidation and regulatory changes throughout many sectors of our food system have resulted in loss of economically accessible processing facilities for many small and mid-scale livestock and poultry producers. While we might want a 'local' turkey this Thanksgiving, they are hard to find because there is currently only one USDA inspected poultry slaughter facility serving the entire Puget Sound region and only a few WSDA approved facilities on area farms. So, if local turkey is on your list this year, order early from local farmers. Visit [www.pugetsoundfresh.org](http://www.pugetsoundfresh.org).

### What's Fresh in November?

Apples, Asian Pears, Beef, Beets, Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Cabbage, Carrots, Cauliflower, Celery, Cheese, Cider, Crabs, Cranberries, Eggs, Flowers, Garlic, Geoducks, Grains, Hazelnuts, Hearty Greens, Herbs, Kohlrabi, Leeks, Lettuce, Milk, Mushrooms, Mussels, Onions, Oysters, Parsnips, Pears, Peppers, Potatoes, Quince, Salmon, Shallots, Spinach, Walnuts, Wine, Winter Squash

shows that 17 percent of global fossil fuel use goes to fertilizing and transporting food.

Supporting local growers also helps preserve our working agricultural lands and open spaces. Fields, pastures, woodlands and waterways are an important part of our landscape and our quality of life. In King County alone, farmers are stewards to over 40,000 acres of land that supports a diversity of plants and animals. Healthy, vibrant farms, supported by local purchases, help maintain these critical areas and our quality of life.

Buying locally grown also helps put more dollars in the hands of local farmers and circulating throughout local communities. Research conducted by Sustainable Seattle indicates that locally directed spending contributes as much as two to three times more to community income than spending at non-local businesses. At farmers markets, for example, for every dollar spent, 62 cents is re-spent locally. For every dollar spent at an average grocery store, 25 cents is re-spent locally compared with 52 cents at a locally-based grocery store. The increase is even greater for locally-based restaurants. For every dollar spent at an average restaurant, 31 cents is re-spent locally compared with 79 cents for locally-based restaurants.

### There are lots of ways to buy local:

- Shop at Farmers Markets – Several are open in November.
- Join a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) – Some farms have winter CSAs.
- Visit U-pick and on-farm stands at local farms.
- Look for Puget Sound Fresh or other 'locally grown' labels at your grocery store or Co-op.

For more on these options, visit [www.pugetsoundfresh.org](http://www.pugetsoundfresh.org)

Local agriculture is also good for the community by contributing more in taxes than it requires in public services. According to the American Farmland Trust, for every dollar of tax revenues generated by farms, forests and open lands, they only required 51 cents in public services. Residential development, on the other hand, required \$1.25 in services for every dollar of revenue generated. The benefits of supporting a local food system are many. Raising awareness about these issues is important if we, as consumers and individual decision makers, are to help make the changes necessary to realize such a system. The Acting Food Policy Council of Seattle and King County is one group working to ensure that all residents have access to nutritious, fresh food that is produced and distributed in a just manner; and that farming, food processing and distribution flourish as part of the local economy and contribute to a healthy environment. To find out more, visit <http://king.wsu.edu/foodandfarms/foodpolicycouncil.htm>.

This year, don't let your food travel farther than your guests! Vow to serve food that is locally grown, raised or harvested and take the **Eat Local for Thanksgiving Pledge**.

### Take the Eat Local for Thanksgiving Pledge

I love good food!  
I pledge to eat a local Thanksgiving by including food that is locally grown, raised or

harvested in my Thanksgiving meal.  
To register your pledge visit [www.pugetsoundfresh.org](http://www.pugetsoundfresh.org)

### What's your ecological footprint?

How many earths would it take to support everyone on the planet, if they made the same eating and energy use choices as you?

Find out at  [www.earthday.net/footprint/](http://www.earthday.net/footprint/)