

The BIG Deal about Local Food

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You've probably heard a lot recently about the importance of purchasing food from local farmers. There's even a growing movement of folks who consider themselves to be "locavores," people who only eat food that has been grown within a hundred miles of their homes.

It's easy to see that buying local food keeps money in the local economy, but some of the benefits of buying local food may not be quite as obvious. Let's consider a package of hamburger patties at the grocery store. According to the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, more than half of the beef sold in the US comes from one of five states: Texas, Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, or Colorado. What this means is that most likely, your beef traveled to get to you, and traveling takes energy.

In fact, there's energy involved in every bit of the process, from irrigating and harvesting the plants that are fed to the beef cattle to processing the meat. Then, that meat has to be packaged, refrigerated, and shipped. Styrofoam

packages and plastic wrap are not only made from petroleum in a factory that uses energy, but they are almost never recycled. Refrigerated trucks transport the beef across the country using gasoline to do it, and that beef sits in the refrigerated and well-lit grocery store until you take it home.

Now let's consider a local farm where a small farmer raises free range beef. The cattle graze on crops that require minimal irrigation if any, and a local butcher prepares the meat, wrapping it in butcher paper for you to take home. There is still energy used in the process, but not nearly as much, and the beef doesn't have very far to travel to get to your table.

There are many reasons that people choose to buy local food. In addition to health and economic benefits, buying local can help save energy, reduce pollution, and protect the environment.

