

Top 8 Reasons to Buy Local Produce

BEVERLY JO NOBLE



One of the wonderful things about living in southern California is year-round access to fresh, local produce. Here are the top eight reasons to take a little extra time and get to your favorite farmer's market or local merchant:

1 **Fresh, local fruit tastes better.** This first reason is purely selfish. Most fruit does not ripen off the tree. It may be gassed in the packing shed or warehouse to imitate ripeness, but the flavor just isn't there. Sadly, ripe fruit does not transport well. Most fruit you see in the

grocery store, organic or not, was picked at least a week earlier, far before it was ripe. Buying fruit from a local source means getting riper, juicier and much more delicious fruit.

2 Better health for you and your family. Health issues exist for both organic and non-organic foods. Consider the recent news about arsenic in organic brown rice syrup; not from errors or contamination during processing, but because the plants naturally absorbed arsenic from the soil in which they grew. You are much more likely to know about environmental health concerns in your backyard than 300 or 3,000 miles away.

3 Shorter food chain. A second health issue arises from the processing itself. From spinach to mixed lettuce to bean sprouts, healthy food can become a source of disease either from employee error or poor industrial hygiene standards. The more processed a food item is, the more potential exposure to contamination exists. And the further it travels, the more potential threats can enter the food supply. The shorter the food chain is, the fewer opportunities for disease to enter the picture.

4 Less chemicals. Food processors also add preservatives for longer shelf life, so if you want to limit your consumption of those chemicals, buying local and minimally processed produce is crucial.

5 Sustainable practices. Small, local farms are more likely to use sustainable agricultural methods. Diversity of crops, in particular, is seldom practiced by agribusiness.

6 Support local community. Buying food from local farms supports the local economy. Many studies have shown that local businesses of all kinds tend to keep their profits in their local communities, while the profits of global businesses are returned to the corporate headquarters.

7 Global health. Local food is healthier for the global environment. On average, food consumed in America travels 3,000 miles from source to table. That's a lot of jet and diesel

fuels pumped into the atmosphere. One of the easiest, lowest cost ways to reduce your personal carbon footprint is to buy locally produced food.

8 Learning opportunity. A trip to the farmer's market or independent grocer is also an opportunity to learn about specific fruits, get some cooking tips, and experience different cultures. It's also a fun family experience. If your children are reluctant to try new fruits or vegetables, take them along and let them ask questions and make their own selections, then help to prepare the meal. It's a great learning experience as well as an antidote to picky eating habits.

Beverly Jo Noble is the author of A Lifetime of Recipes: Fabulous Fresh Fruit now available at ALifetimeOfRecipes.com.

Strawberry-Spinach Salad

Strawberries are now available at many locations in San Diego County. Look for the Chandler variety for a real taste treat and then try this easy recipe:

1 pt. strawberries, cut in quarters
1 lb. baby spinach
½ cup sugar
2 Tbsp. sesame seeds
1 Tbsp. poppy seeds
1 ½ tsp. onion, minced
¼ tsp. paprika
¼ tsp. Worcestershire sauce
½ cup walnut oil
¼ cup raspberry vinegar

Combine spinach and strawberries in a large bowl. Mix remaining ingredients together in a shaker jar; pour over spinach and gently toss. Serve immediately.

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