



PRODUCE PHOTOS BY JOHN CURRY



PHOTO BY DAVID WALTER BANKS

# Eat Local

Support the local economy and sustainability by shopping for **homegrown foods**

## Some local choices for meats, produce, eggs, milk and more:

**Locally Grown:** For \$25 a year, members receive an e-mail each Sunday with a selection of local products available. Orders are placed on Mondays and Tuesdays until 8 p.m., with pick-up and payment due on Thursdays from 4:30-8 p.m. at Gosford Wine in the Alps Shopping Center. [athens.locallygrown.net](http://athens.locallygrown.net)

**Full Moon Co-op:** Members receive a weekly supply of fresh, organic produce from the end of May through the beginning of November. [www.fullmooncoop.org](http://www.fullmooncoop.org)

**Daily Grocery Co-op:** Some local produce is available through this true co-op with three types of membership. [www.dailygroceries.org](http://www.dailygroceries.org)

**The Oconee Farmers Market:** Open on Saturday mornings from early spring to late fall in front of Eagle Tavern Museum in Watkinsville, includes locally grown produce, flowers and baked goods. [oconeefarmersmarket.org](http://oconeefarmersmarket.org)

Small farms such as Full Moon Farms host special events and support the local economy with fresh vegetables.

Before the days of interstate highways and eighteen-wheeled refrigerator trucks, cooks counted down the day until the first summer tomato was brilliantly red and perfect for picking. Summer was the time of brightly colored produce piled high on every unused inch of counter space. Each meal was filled with the day's harvest. Any fruit and vegetables not devoured were packed into Ball jars for cold weather enjoyment.

Today the availability of food in America is seemingly endless, with a numbing selection of produce grown across the globe ready to purchase and eat on any day of the year.

But when harmful chemicals are discovered on some toys manufactured overseas, it makes sense to ask about the food that many times comes from the same places. Even so, many Americans pay more attention to where bottled water originates than the food on their table.

The truth is that most food in your local market has traveled farther than you'd think—an average 1,500 miles—according to Georgia Organics,

a member-supported non-profit organization working to integrate healthy, sustainable, and locally-grown food into the lives of all Georgians. Food in America can be driven across several states or enter through customs before it hits grocery store shelves.

Learning about the importance of eating locally is intrinsic to Barbara Kingsolver's latest book, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* (HarperCollins Publishers, May 2007). In it, the author recounts how she and her family, who live on a Virginia farm, spent a year eating locally—consuming only food produced where they live. It may not be realistic for most of us, but the lesson really hits home.

Within the first five pages, Kingsolver explains how approximately 400 gallons of oil is used each year, per citizen, for agriculture. It's used for running farm equipment, in the manufacturing of fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides. Most of the oil is used for the journey it takes food to travel from the farm to your refrigerator. According to Kingsolver's husband, Steven L. Hopp, if each American ate one meal of organically and locally raised produce and meats a week, the country's oil consumption would decrease by over 1.1 million barrels of oil every week.

Shopping from local farmers not only shrinks your footprint on the planet, it gives you better tasting food. As food travels over long distances, it loses some of its vitality. Nutrients in fresh vegetables are lost quickly after being picked. Most local produce is picked no more than one day before you take it home; at the grocery store, it's often as long as a week.

The definition of "local" differs among growers. Some say within 200 miles, others say 100, so it can be confusing to know if a product is actually local. Barbara Petit, president of the Board of Directors of Georgia Organics, explains that "local depends on the product. The closer to home you can source quality



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food, the better.” Petit buys most of her vegetables, meats, and eggs from farmers within 50 miles of her house in Atlanta. Other times, she buys from a little farther away; she loves the quality of White Oak Pastures beef in Bluffton, Georgia (available at Publix).

She even ensures her coffee has a local component. Petit says, “The product I buy from the greatest distance is probably coffee and my source is Cafe Campesino in Americus. They buy fair trade, sustainably grown beans straight from the farm or cooperative and roast them right here in Georgia.”

Most farmers who sell to large super-

market chains make just a few cents for every dollar spent by consumers on the food from their farm. When farmers sell locally, they can keep each and every penny for themselves. And why shouldn't they? After all, these are members of our community who contribute to the local economy just as we do.

Buying locally grown foods also ensures that the food you're consuming is in season. Buying blueberries and tomatoes from the grocery store in February is just not natural. The taste of a garden grown tomato fresh off the tailgate of a farmer's truck in July is proof that mealy, tasteless winter tomatoes just aren't supposed to be. Small farms also use fewer genetically modified seeds; often growing heirloom varieties and more varieties in general.

Athens is fortunate to have several options for eating locally, with a number of small family farms in the area (see sidebar). Petit says it best when she explains, “Connecting family and friends with exquisite food less than 24 hours from the field, from a farmer you trust...that is a true local food epiphany.” ★



### Earthy Resources

**To find out your ecological footprint, check out the quiz here:**  
[www.earthday.net/footprint/index.asp](http://www.earthday.net/footprint/index.asp)

**For more information on eating locally:**  
[www.Georgiaorganics.org](http://www.Georgiaorganics.org)  
[www.animalvegetablemiracle.com](http://www.animalvegetablemiracle.com)  
[www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org)



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