

Local Foods

By John Porter, WVU Extension Agent, Kanawha County

Have you ever heard the word locavore? How about foodshed? Both are new words coined in response to the growing interest in eating locally grown foods. For instance, locavore is a term used to describe someone who consciously tries to eat more local foods. A locavore may decide to dedicate a certain percentage of their diet to local foods, or some even decide to eat nothing but local foods. For each individual, the term “local” means something different. Some base their idea of local on distance from their home, which is commonly 50 or 100 miles. Others may base their idea of local on the type of farm the food comes from, many opting for food from smaller, family owned farms. Wherever the food comes from, it is considered to be part of that person’s foodshed. Just like a river’s watershed includes all of its water sources, a person’s foodshed includes all sources of food that they consume. This goes from the ground where the food is grown to the table where it is eaten and everywhere it goes between them. A locavore strives to shrink the size of their foodshed by eating more local foods.

Each and every person can be a locavore and shrink the size of their foodshed by taking a few simple steps. First, shop at the local farmer’s market to find fresh and delicious produce. Typically local farm grown food is fresher and more nutritious than what you can buy at the supermarket. Secondly, don’t be afraid to seek out a local farm that you know offers produce and other foods for sale. Not only can you find great, fresh produce, but also things like eggs, meats, cheeses and, increasingly, grains. Also, don’t be afraid to ask your favorite grocery store to carry locally produced goods, which will not only help you find the food, but provide a new and valuable market to a local farmer. And if you can’t find a source of locally grown food, then grow your own. Don’t be afraid to plant or expand your vegetable garden. Buying a few backyard chickens can provide you with an excellent source of eggs better than any that you could ever buy at the store.

By increasing the amount of local foods that you buy and consume, you not only provide yourself and your family with fresher, healthier food, you also improve the health of the local economy by keeping your money local, where it can provide a much needed boost to local family farms and local businesses. You can also reduce the amount of energy used to transport the food you eat. Some sources say that the average food item in the grocery store travels between 1500 and 2500 miles before it reaches your plate. By eating more locally grown foods, you can reduce the amount of oil used to get the food to you, reducing both greenhouse gasses and our dependence on oil. Eating locally can improve your health, the economy and the environment, all in one.

For more information on local foods, including where you can find them in West Virginia, visit www.wvfarm2u.org, foodroutes.org and eatwellguide.org. Be sure to also visit <http://kanawha.ext.wvu.edu> for information about all of the programs and opportunities offered by the WVU Kanawha County Extension Service.

The WVU Extension Service will be partnering with the Capitol Market to offer “Family Fun Fridays” on June 26, July 10 and 24, and August 7 and 21 to bring you new ideas on how to prepare and enjoy local foods and improve your gardening skills as well as fun, science-based activities for kids. Please contact the WVU Kanawha County Extension Service at (304) 768-1202 for more information.