



Does Your Food Travel More Than You?

Our global food system is responsible for over one-third of greenhouse gas emissions. Surprised? It's not that bewildering when you consider that 1/5 of America's consumption of petroleum goes to producing and transporting our food¹. Even though most of your food is available at a grocery store that is within 5-10 minutes of your home, your meal may actually travel a long and complex journey just to arrive at your plate.



food miles

A staggering statistic is that most produce in the United States travels an average of 1,500 – 2,500 miles before it gets sold. 'Food miles' is a term which refers to the distance food is transported from the time it is produced until it reaches the consumer². Shipping, flying, and trucking food around the country and the globe may increase global warming and air pollution. Eating food that is locally produced is one way of reducing food miles. Eating locally also has other benefits such as supporting local farmers, avoiding excessive pesticides and chemicals used for food preservation, and providing fresher, more nutritious foods. The concept of food miles is only one dimension of measuring the environmental impact of food. Although there are great benefits to eating locally, sometimes refrigeration of local foods may actually have a higher carbon footprint. Certain local foods might also be more energy-intensive to produce and in these instances; the energy cost of transporting foods from a distance could be lower³.

Eating food that is locally produced is one way of reducing food miles.

frequent fliers

Food shipped by air travel gives off more global-warming, greenhouse gases than any other form of transport. Here is a frequent flier list of commonly air-freighted foods and their country of origin. Try to get these at a local farmer's market when they're in season. (They'll taste a lot better, too)⁴.

- Asparagus (Peru)
- Bell peppers (Netherlands)
- Grapes (Chile)
- Blackberries (Chile)
- Cherries (Chile)
- Raspberries (Chile)
- Peaches (Chile)
- Nectarines (Chile)
- Papayas (Brazil)
- Tomatoes (Netherlands)
- Blueberries (Argentina)

eat local

- **Buy food in season.**
Go to <http://www.nrdc.org/health/foodmiles/>; enter your state to create a list of produce grown by season or year-round.
- Hit the **Farmers' Market** before the supermarket and plan your meal around local ingredients. Check out www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets for locations.
- Subscribe to a **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)**, where a local farm will prepare a box of fresh fruits and vegetables for you. Visit www.localharvest.org to find a CSA near you.

References:

1. Pollan M. *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, A Natural History of Four Meals. 1st ed. NY, NY: The Penguin Press; 2006.
2. Food Miles on Wikipedia. Accessed on May 20, 2009 at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Food_miles.
3. Hill H. *Food Miles: Background and Marketing*. Fayetteville, AR: ATTRA National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service; 2008. ATTRA Publication #IP312. Accessed on May 29, 2009 at: <http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/foodmiles.html>.
4. Eat Local: Does Your Food Travel More Than You Do? NRDC, Natural Resources Defense Council. Accessed on Aug 15, 2008 at: <http://www.nrdc.org/health/foodmiles/>.



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