
Eating Locally, Seasonally, and Sustainably

Your food choices affect not only your health but also that of the planet. Whenever possible, opt for nutritious, locally produced, in-season foods. This is a more environmentally sustainable way to eat.

TERMS TO KNOW

Local foods: Those eaten near where they were produced, such as in your city, state, or region.

Seasonal eating: Consuming fruits and vegetables at the same time of year they are harvested in your area.

Food sustainability: Meeting our food and nutrition needs without harming the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

Health Benefits of Eating Locally and Seasonally

Some ways that buying local and seasonal produce can support your health and enjoyment of food include:

- **Higher nutritional value:** The less distance that plant foods travel to reach you and the less time they sit in stores, the more likely they are to retain their quality and nutrient levels. For example, one study found that, on average, mixed salad greens refrigerated for 10 days lost 59% of their vitamin C.
- **Greater phytonutrient diversity:** When you expand outside your usual food choices and eat a variety of local and seasonal produce, you will take in a broader array of healthful phytonutrients. Ask your functional medicine practitioner about IFM's [Phytonutrient Spectrum](#) documents to learn more.
- **More flavor:** In-season produce is typically more flavorful than out-of-season food. So, choosing seasonal food can make eating healthily easier. For example, imagine the taste and color of a fresh summer tomato and compare it with one purchased in the winter. No contest: the summer tomato is far better.

Eating Seasonally and Locally Could Save You Money

Out-of-season fruits and vegetables often come with a higher price tag due to the transportation and storage costs of foods shipped from far away. Prices also tend to go up when there is a limited supply.

In contrast, food that is in season is usually in high supply. That means grocery stores have a relatively short time to sell a lot of produce before it spoils. So, you can often find in-season foods on sale or reasonably priced at stores.

Buying directly from farmers has grown in popularity in areas such as North America and Europe. This approach may save you money compared to shopping in stores, but prices vary based on the item and where you live. In one U.S. study, cucumbers cost 24% less at the farmers market than at the grocery store, but farmers-market strawberries cost more than twice as much as store-bought.

Comparison shop at the farmers market, as different vendors' prices often vary for the same item. Ask about growers' farming practices, which can affect prices. Some vendors work with food assistance programs to help low-income shoppers.



RESOURCES

fallingfruit.org: Locate public fruit trees and edible plants across the globe.

pickyourown.org: Search pick-your-own farms in the U.S. and many other countries.

localharvest.org: Lists CSAs across the U.S. In other countries, search online for “community supported agriculture near me.”

ugrenci.net: This international network for community supported agriculture showcases CSA activities around the world.

Growing food yourself generally costs the least. If you don't have garden space, check if there's a community garden where you can grow food. In some areas, you may be able to pick fruit from trees that grow on public land.

Support Your Local Economy and the Environment

Making local, sustainable food choices supports farmers in your community and puts money back into your local economy. Besides shopping at farmers markets, you can also check for farm shops, pick-your-own farms, roadside stands, mobile markets (refrigerated trucks), and urban rooftop farms.

Another way to support local growers is to participate in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). This allows consumers and farmers to share the risks and benefits of growing food.

Though CSAs look differently worldwide, members (shareholders) generally:

- Pay a fee to help meet a farm's operating expenses, such as in one lump sum at the start of the growing season or in installments. Farmers may offer CSA shares at a discount (called cost-offset CSAs) to those with limited income.
- Receive a portion of the farm's produce each week during the growing season. Some farms may also offer items like honey, eggs, and milk. In some cases, you pick up the food at the farm. Other farms may have pick-up sites in cities.
- Get to know the farmers and how food is grown. Many farms host field days, publish newsletters, share recipes, and offer educational classes.

The CSA model of farming is growing across the globe. It encourages more eco-friendly farming practices. It can also help minimize food waste by basing production on the number of members.

Your choice of these and other healthy, sustainable food strategies will vary based on where you live, your dietary needs, and other factors. Check what is available in your area and choose what works for you.

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