

UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

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Eating Local

Did you know that food produced in the U.S. travels an average of 1,500 miles before being eaten? Even further, the foods we import travel over 2,600 miles—consuming 4 times as much energy for transportation than they provide when eaten! Obviously this practice is quite inefficient in terms of energy consumption and a growing number of individuals, for various reasons, are trying to seek more locally produced foods.

Those of us that can remember back to grade school are familiar with the terms carnivore (meat-eater) and herbivore (plant-eater), but many may not recognize the term *locavore*. This word, describing someone who seeks locally produced food, was first used in 2004. It quickly gained a cult following, and in 2007 the New Oxford American Dictionary chose locavore as the word of the year.

So what does it take to be a locavore, and does this mean giving up all foods that weren't grown within walking distance? Don't give up your car just yet. Everyone has their own definition of local, but many consider the 'food miles'—some going as far as to put 100-mile limitations on the food that they eat. Here in Wyoming it is more difficult to impose such rigid mileage restrictions, but most locavores would agree that closer is better. And fear not, coffee lovers and chocoholics, many locavores make exceptions for things like coffee, chocolate, and spices that cannot be obtained locally.

So is local food really better for you? Possibly—local growers are able to utilize varieties of plants bred for taste and nutrition as opposed to durability and shelf life. And we do know that many nutrients degrade during storage and transportation, meaning that most foods are going to be more nutritious when they're fresh. In addition, local growers often use organic or natural methods—putting less chemicals into your body as well as the environment.

How do you find locally grown foods? This can sometimes be the hard part, but things are getting easier. In our area there are community gardens, farmer's markets, CSA's (community-supported agriculture—a wonderful concept!), and many grocers that support locally grown foods. It is a little more work for the consumer, but many people find comfort in knowing where their food came from, and prefer the experience of truly fresh food.

The Sheridan and Buffalo areas have many local food producers that are excited to share their products with you. For more information on local food producers, visit the Wyoming Local Food Network at www.uwyo.edu/wyominglocalfood. Click on Sheridan County for a link to a wonderful local foods directory put together by the Sheridan Area Local Foods group. If you have a product that is not included on this list please call or email me with your information. *Kentz Willis, M.S., is the University Extension Educator in Nutrition and Food Safety for Sheridan and Johnson counties. He can be reached via email at kwillis3@uwyo.edu.*