

EATING LOCAL

What does eating local mean?

According to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), “local food” refers to food produced in the province or territory in which it is sold, or food sold across provincial borders within 50 kilometres of the originating province or territory.¹

However, there are many opinions about what “local” means. Most definitions relate to distance, but others include beliefs about how food is produced and sold.²

There are sometimes misconceptions about locally-grown food. One myth is that all local food is organic, which it may or may not be. Local food refers to *where* the food was produced. Organic refers to *how* the food was produced.³ To be certified organic, there are specific management principles that organic growers must follow.^{4,5}



Having access to food year-round

Because of our nation’s climate and short growing season, local food systems provide only a portion of the products Canadians need and demand. For example, locally-grown peaches and asparagus are only available fresh for a few months of the year. Many of the fresh fruits and vegetables we eat have to be imported from other countries to help fill the gap when locally-grown food is not an option.



GOOD FOR COMMUNITIES & GOOD FOR FARMERS

Local food systems have many benefits:

- Eating local supports local communities. Choosing to buy food produced in your area helps farmers and the regional economy because money is reinvested in the community.⁶
- Local farmers can tell you about the food. Consumers can learn firsthand where their food comes from, who produced it and how.
- You have access to fresher foods. Food sourced locally often gets to the consumer faster than food transported long distances.



Berries only grow during the summer months in Canada.

CANADIANS HAVE ACCESS TO A MUCH WIDER ASSORTMENT OF FOOD BECAUSE OF THE GLOBAL FOOD SYSTEM. MANY OF THE FOODS CANADIANS CONSUME ARE IMPORTED.



1. **Farmers markets** are always a great place to shop for local food.



2. Visit **farmers** who sell locally and support restaurants that source local food.



3. Eat **locally-grown foods in season**, or when they are being harvested. These foods can also be stored or preserved to eat throughout the winter months.

MAKING LOCAL FOOD CHOICES

There are several ways to access locally-produced food.



4. Many grocers work with farmers to put local products in **grocery stores**. Eggs, dairy products and poultry (chicken and turkey) produced in Canada are often sold locally.



5. Some **local greenhouses** grow produce, like lettuce, cucumbers, pepper and tomatoes, year-round.



6. Look for local foods that have been **locally-processed** (e.g., mustards, jams, dried or baked goods). This is a way for farmers to expand their market outside the growing season.

DYK? Grocery stores can offer lower prices when they purchase food in large amounts because it costs less per unit to buy and sell in volume. Local food is often produced in smaller quantities making it difficult for stores to source enough food to meet demand and remain competitive cost-wise.

LET'S TALK PRICE

Price is one barrier that can prevent consumers from purchasing local food. Some countries we import food from have a lower **cost of production** (the cost of growing a unit of food). This includes lower labour, fuel and land prices.

Is eating local more sustainable? It depends.

Eating local generally emphasizes reducing the number of **food miles**, or the distance food travels from the farm to your plate.⁷ The assumption is that reducing distance minimizes your **carbon footprint** (the amount of greenhouse gases released through food producing activities).

Measuring "sustainability" is complicated. It involves several factors: economical, ecological, social, ethical, health and more. Research suggests that the most important factors in determining a food's **environmental footprint** (how much a given unit of food impacts the environment) include the method of transportation,⁸ efficiency of production (how much food is grown) and the farming practices used to produce it.^{9,10}

Using food miles as an assessment tool can oversimplify whether or not a food is sustainable.¹¹ One study found that tomatoes transported hundreds of kilometres from Spain had a carbon footprint less than 1/3 of those grown locally in heated greenhouses in the UK.¹²

