



Local Food vs. Organic Food: Which to Serve?

More and more Americans are becoming conscious of where their food is coming from and are actively choosing restaurants that serve local and organic products despite potentially higher prices. Would your business attract more customers if you served organic products? Could you increase your profit margin if you served locally grown products?

The ideal product to use in your kitchen are both organic and locally grown. Unfortunately, very often we are forced to choose between either local or organic. So how do you determine which choice is better? Samuel Fromartz, author of 'Organic, Inc.' stated: "the main point is to make a conscious decision about your food purchases, to send a signal to food sellers that you will buy items for reasons other than price and convenience. If more people buy local or organic, we'll see more of those foods in stores – and more of those farmers will be able to make a living." Use the information below to make help make your own conscious decision about food purchases.



Benefits of Locally Grown

- Reduces the costs, both monetary and planetary, of transportation, processing, and packaging
- Promotes a stronger local economy by reinvesting tourism dollars in the region
- Is more nutritional as produce is most nutritionally dense within three days of harvest and tastes fresher
- With increased demand for local food, local farmers are more likely to diversify their production, thereby making it easier to farm more sustainably
- Plastic packaging used to keep food fresh is not required for local food therefore reducing plastic and waste
- Local food is often tightly linked to a region's history, people, and natural environment and thus may have a higher appeal to tourists
- Supporting local farmers helps preserve local open space

Challenges of Local Products

- Critics argue that supporting local food damages the economies of third world nations, which often rely heavily on food exports and cash crops
- Can be difficult to find through standard suppliers
- Most products are not available year round

Benefits of Organic Products

- Is a seal of recognition by the US Department of Agriculture that a product is grown by farmers who emphasize the use of renewable resources and the conservation of soil and water to enhance environmental quality for future generations
- Organically raised livestock cannot be given hormones or antibiotics, must have access to the outdoors and must be fed 100 percent organic feed
- Organic farming uses less energy because it avoids synthetic fertilizers (which are petroleum products) and most pesticides
- Slightly more nutritious than conventionally grown food
- Ingest few-to-no pesticide and fertilizer residues
- Increasingly available through standard suppliers

Challenges of Organic Products

- Trucking organic products around the world to accommodate demand emits more greenhouse gasses
- Difficult to verify certified products are truly grown sustainably
- Can result in tourism dollars leaving the community

Tips for Seasonal/Local Eating

- Contact your local Cooperative Extension office for information on local agriculture products in your area (www.ces.ncsu.edu)
- Look for logos that indicate products are locally grown, such as the Goodness Grows in NC and Freshness from NC Waters
- Plan menus according to seasonal availability. A produce availability chart can be found at www.ncagr.gov/markets/chart.htm
- To find unique products contact the NC Specialty Crops Program at www.cals.ncsu.edu/specialty_crops
- Ask your suppliers where their produce comes from and if local sources are available
- Tell your customers that you use local products. You can indicate on your menu which items are from local farms, and provide information about those farmers and farms
- Consider starting your own vegetable or herb garden.
- Consider partnering with a local farm or gardener to offer combined gardening and cooking classes
- Participate in local agricultural events such as the NC Dept. of Agriculture's Best Dish in NC competition
- Encourage your local economic development organization to provide farm to table programs



Options for Fresh Food in NC

A List of Healthy, Fresh, and Seasonal Food Sources:

Find farmers markets, pick-your-own, roadside stands, and direct to market sources of locally grown products: www.ncfarmfresh.com

Learn more about sustainability, agriculture and how you can become more involved: www.carolinafarmstewards.org

For more information on how your business can become more involved with local agriculture in the southern Appalachian region: www.buyappalachian.org

Find fresh, local seafood from the coast of North Carolina: www.carteretcatch.org



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