

FARM TALK

No farms, no food Supporting Applegate Valley farms

BY MELISSA MATTHEWSON

I read a study recently by the New Economics Foundation in London that stated every dollar spent locally generates twice as much income for the local economy. I was pretty excited to read that. Then, I went on to think about the possible ripple effect of local spending. In his book *Eat Here, Reclaiming Homegrown Pleasures in a Global Supermarket*, Brian Halweil sums it up: "The farmer buys a drink at the local pub; the pub owner gets a car tune-up at the local mechanic; the mechanic brings a shirt to the local tailor; the tailor buys some bread at the local bakery; the baker buys wheat for bread and fruit for muffins from the local farmer. When these businesses are not owned locally, money leaves the community at every transaction." What a perfect example of how spending consciously in our communities comes full circle.



Photo: Jon Sullivan, PDphoto.org

There has never been a better time to support our Applegate Valley farms. Food costs are rising all over the world. The price of bread is up by at least 20 cents. Pasta costs double what it has in the past. Economists say food inflation is the highest it has been in 15 years. Gas prices are over \$4.00 a gallon. Grain prices are through the roof. Wheat supplies are in peril. Spring weather has been swirling from frost to heat to rain. It is getting more expensive to cut hay, plant corn, feed cattle and drive produce to market, not to mention pear blossoms frosted out and the challenge of growing vegetables and fruits in variable weather conditions. It only makes sense to turn to local farms in light of these global trends. Here are ten reasons we should support Applegate farms:

1. It is better for our economy. As stated above, one dollar spent locally actually translates into double the income benefits to our local economy. On average, the American farmer receives 20 cents of each dollar spent on food. That's not much considering how much expense goes into producing high-quality food products from the farm. If we support local farmers with our dollars, in turn, they receive the full retail value for their product, keeping them in business over the long-term.
2. Food we buy from the local farm is fresher. There is no doubt about it. You can't really argue with that point. The corn you just bought at the farm stand was picked that morning or the beef you just put in your freezer was raised on lush Applegate grass and sent to the butcher just a few days before. We can all taste the difference between a strawberry picked from an Applegate farm as opposed to one picked underripe and shipped from California.
3. It just tastes better. Fresh food has vitality to it that food shipped from other places does not have.
4. Typically, you get more variety from a local farm. Local farmers are experimenting with heirloom varieties, so you may have an opportunity to taste a type of apple or tomato that you never have before. Arkansas Black or Cherokee Purple. With names like that, you can't go wrong. Red delicious may be a standard in the grocery stores, but the crispness and sweetness of an heirloom apple from an old cranky homestead tree is pure bliss.
5. By supporting your local farm, you are actively creating new relationships and community. You are getting to know your farmer. Putting a face on food. You also build your own solid family relationships as you spend more time around the table together, enjoying the hard-working abundance of our valley.
6. Food brings stories. We all have some memory related to food. Many of our experiences and celebrations center on food. You can probably tell me a long story about your grandmother's date nut raisin bread or the time you burnt the turkey at Thanksgiving. We all have stories to tell and we will only create more stories and authentic experiences by supporting our local farms.
7. We become more in touch with the seasons when we support local farms. We know when the raspberries come on, or the apples are picked, or when the animals have reached full weight, or when they calve or lamb. And when we know these things, we are more in tune with our natural world and the

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changing of each season. We are blessed to have such dramatic shifts in seasons from snow to frost to spring to heat to changing leaves. Farming goes hand-in-hand with those shifts and by knowing the seasons, we know our world more deeply.

8. Food travels an average of 1,500 miles before it reaches your table. It is actually better for the environment if you buy your neighbor's goat milk. And with fuel prices the way they are, buying locally defrays some of those transportation costs.
9. Buying locally saves farmland. Farms are disappearing at an increasing rate to suburban developments and urbanization. Supporting our Applegate farms slows this trend and demonstrates the value of keeping farmers on the land doing what they do best.
10. Restores integrity to our food system. I stole this from the agricultural economist, John Ikerd. There is so much truth to this statement. Purchasing food locally becomes more than just convenience and low prices. It becomes relationships, builds trust, reliability, fairness, compassion, and responsibility. It goes beyond the bottom line to the future of our secure food system.

So, go call your local farmer, order your beef, stop at the farm stands along Highway 238, go to the Williams farmers' market, eat at our local restaurants that serve local farm products, join one of the many Applegate CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture), or find a new way to support our hard-working Applegate farmers in any way you can. By doing so, our agricultural and rural community will continue to thrive and flourish.

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