Jonnie Fabrizio

English 199

Dr. Jill Swiencicki

11 April 2011

A Foreign Orange

My life has always been surrounded by the culture of food. I absolutely love cooking, most likely because it is an activity that I viewed as an expression of my creativity, as well as to form relationships with others through the bonding experience of it. I started a habit diary at the beginning of my research in order to observe my own lifestyle surrounding the topic of local food. During this series of reflection, I had a revelation that our society has become so adapted to purchasing food without thought to where it is coming from. Now that I am an adult, I need to come to realize that our society is not perfect. I am maturing and realizing that in order to be a better member of this world I need to become passionate about issues that I care about. There are numerous problems facing us, and action needs to be taken to fix them. What are the benefits of eating local food that people should realize? And why is not eating locally harmful? Recently on vacation, I realized the significance of these questions.

My entries to my habit diary were recorded over the time that I was on spring break in Palm Beach, Florida. At first, I saw this as a challenge; I was away from my typical lifestyle in Western New York. However, I made it my goal to grasp this challenge and think of it as an opportunity. Florida is a lot different than New York. Being closer to the equator was definitely noticeable. It was February, and the week I was there, temperatures averaged 85 degrees Fahrenheit. No wonder Florida is known as the Sunshine State. My friend Paula and I went to the supermarket in order to get some lotion for our painful sunburns. While browsing the aisles, I noticed a large display of oranges in the produce section. Living in New York my whole life, I have always eaten oranges that have been transported thousands of miles to reach my supermarket; I did not know any different. Being in a state that prides itself of this fruit made me excited. Finally I would be able to eat a fresh and locally grown orange. This state is known for their vibrant, juicy, and delicious oranges. I admit that my motivation to research more about local foods all started with an orange.

Something ironic happened when I turned to Paula and joked about the excitement of seeing *real* Florida oranges that had not had to be shipped from afar. Soon after I made this comment to her, the store clerk overheard me and corrected me. He stated, “No ma’am, California oranges” (Fabrizio). I note my reaction that was going through my head in my habit diary when I state:

What?! That’s ridiculous! It’s ironic that I went to a grocery store in Florida [then in return] get oranges from across the nation. Why do grocery stores choose to ship produce from miles away, when the produce can be found in their area? Shouldn’t we be supporting our local farmers? (Fabrizio).

This was definitely an eye-opening experience for me. This incident put me in awe, and still does. It is saddening that more of society does not take advantage of what local farmers are providing; rather, we ship items from afar.

Most of the time, it is the consumer’s choice of where they purchase their food from. This leads me to wonder, why is it that people consistently shop at supermarkets, when the products that they purchase are by far not the best option. Why should we choose to buy local food? Is it damaging to buy foods that are not local? How easy is it to live on a diet of local food? Through research, I discover the answers to questions. After analyzing and coming to terms with various sources relating to my research question, I have come to understand that our society’s consumption of food is unhealthy. There are more harms in not buying local than I had realized. I have gained insight on the problems, as well as systems that people are using to help solve these problems.

Before researching this topic, my answer to my research question was probably similar to many other peoples; it is simply more expensive to shop locally, so why the extra cost? Michael Pollan, famed author and researcher of the local farm community, counters this idea with his statement:

All of the costs are figured into the price. Society is not bearing the cost of water pollution, of antibiotic resistance, of food-borne illnesses, of crop subsidies, of subsidized oil and water--of all the hidden costs to the environment and the taxpayer that make cheap food seem cheap (Pollan)

It is shocking to know the detrimental effects of transporting food that is not locally grown. Think about it carefully. To ship food requires extra packaging, more fuel, and more handling with the product. The negative results of shipping food out ways the benefits. Our world is already facing the threats of global warming; therefore we should reflect on our actions and try to realize that our current practices are not going to lead to a “greener” future.

So does buying organic help solve the environmental issues caused by shipping and packaging? Many people are under the impression that organic foods are the best option when given the choice. Though is it really? What if the item has to be shipped from across the country, or even sometimes on a multinational level? The transportation of foods can give off harmful emissions that affect the environment. TIME magazine journalist, John Cloud, writes the article "Eating Better Than Organic" aiming to understand if it is possible to live a life only eating local food, what are the flaws of purchasing organic foods, and what the ecological effects of organic versus local foods is. He carefully examines the problems with the transportation system of food. Cloud uses the term “petroleum miles” in order to describe how the amount of harmful pollutants is increased as miles increase when shipping food. Leda Meredith describes these food miles in her book *The Locavore's Handbook: The Busy Person's Guide to Eating Local on a Budget*. She states, “Those food miles require enormous amounts of fuel, not just to ship the food to us but also refrigerate the vehicles and the warehouses the food is stored in. The industrial food industry is one of the top two users of petroleum fuel…and accounts for 25 to 33 percent of climate change gases” (Meredith 28).This statement makes me reflect back on all the food that I have bought from supermarkets, as well as that frustrating moment at the supermarket in Palm Springs. Think about it, if you were to by an apple from your hometown, the miles that apple had to travel to get into your hands is probably very low. However, if you shipped an apple from Washington State, which many supermarkets do ship from other regions of the country or world, then that apple has traveled hundreds of miles more.

It is a popular idea that buying from large supermarkets can be damaging to the consumer. Like Pollan, Cloud examines this topic in his article. He describes his concern for supermarkets promoting fresh food that in actuality is not truly “fresh”. When we buy foods from the supermarket, we are not considering the effects it has on ourselves, the community, and the world as a whole. The immediate price tag at the supermarket may appear to be cheaper, but the effects resulting are much more costly than local foods. When you buy from the supermarket, you are risking yourself to the bacteria and diseases that the produce may have accumulated while in transportation. Also, you are supporting the pollution and water contamination that has been caused in order to ship the product to your grocery store. Lastly, Pollan would agree that by consuming supermarket products over locally-grown food, you are further loosing relationships between farmers and the community.

Brian Halweil, a known member of the Worldwatch Institute, has done notable work on the topic of food and agriculture. In his article, "The Argument for Local Food," he offers insight on what it means to transport food on a global scale, how buying locally can reinforce a community, the safety of local produce, and the economic role local foods have on an area. Throughout his article, Halweil uses facts and research by colleagues to support his project. The article follows the idea that, “most of the food that Americans eat travels at least 1,500 miles from farm to plate”. Because of advancements in technology, food is being transported across larger distances more than ever. Why is this significant? Halweil forwards food activist Herb Barbolet to study the effects that buying globally rather than locally has a community as well as the world. Concepts that he explores is the increased use of fossil fuels in food transportation, the need to preserve our local farmland and farmers, along with the idea that local food simply taste better (Halweil). Many consumers choose to eat locally because of this reason. Transporting food long-distances has safety and security risks. Halweil conceptualizes that many infectious bacteria and viruses can be easily carried on global produce if not handled correctly.

As I mentioned earlier, our nation began with due to the large agrarian society. Since the Industrial Revolution, our society has lost authentic farms, as they have been replaced by “agribusinesses” (Berry 20). Our society has become dependent on factories; therefore our focus in production has been based upon efficiency. Wendell Berry is a farmer and writer who writes about the problems of farming today in his book, *Bringing It to the Table: On Farming and Food*. Bringing attention to the shift in farm culture, he states, “Farming…is no longer a way of life, no longer husbandry or even agriculture; it is an industry known as ‘agribusiness,’ which looks upon a farm as a ‘factory,’ and upon farmers, plants, animals, and the land itself as interchangeable parts or ‘units of production’” (20). Farms being compared to factories are a considerable problem. This means that many farms have turned into business whose core focus is efficiency and “units of production” (22). This is a failure according to Berry. He believes that if these practices continue, then detrimental effects will occur to our land. These include soil erosion, soil compaction, soil and water pollution, pests and disease caused by monoculture and ecological deterioration, depopulation of rural communities, along with many more effects. These problems are caused by four elements that Berry explains; scale, balance, diversity, and quality. The scale of farmland is rapidly growing. Less farmers are owners their own farms due to the replacement of operators owning large “factory” farms. This is an issue because it prevents effective rotation of grazing, further leading to erosion (27). Second is the problem of balance. Third, the diversity of species is being significantly reduced. Lastly, Berry explains the problems of quality. There is a decrease in farm quality resulting in a decrease of quality of the products produced.

After doing extensive research, I conclude that the community that develops from supporting farms is inspirational. Our nation has grown due to its agrarian past. Farmers have been working hard to support their families, and simply because they truly care for the health of their community. Farm markets are a great way for consumers know about farms in their area, as well as personally being able to talk to the people who make their food. They offer an ideal opportunity for consumers to personally connect to the farmers, further forming relationships. Jill Richardson is the author of *Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It*. Her book examines the problems with how Americans obtains their food. She additionally introduces local food movements that are making progress in our society, including that of local farmers’ markets. Richardson realizes the relationships formed between consumers and producers after visiting the Dane County Farmers’ Market. Not only did she attend the market to obtain food, but it was also a “social event” (Richardson 78). These markets have been gaining popularity over the years, with two percent of Americans shopping at them (78). Knowing the farmer who grows your food is very beneficial to many people. They can give advice, recipes, personal stories, or just simply a friendly sale.

We cannot let the traditional farms in our nation disappear. Pollan states in an article, “Farms produce a lot more than food; they also produce a kind of landscape and kind of community” (Pollan). Like a religion, some people are dedicated toward supporting their local farm. I had not realized before how many opportunities to buy from local farmers are offered in my own area. Recently, I had the chance to visit the Rochester Public Market. I can now understand the “community-connecting importance” of local food buying. Local farmers devote hard work to please the lives of others. Their commitment and passion is truly visible when you get to meet one in person. I had the chance to briefly chat with a farmer who helps run the Finger Lakes Farms. This organization promises to provide local food that is guaranteed natural, meaning it is free from hormones and antibiotics. The farmer was very friendly and excited to be able to have one-on-one conversations with consumers. Consumers at the market can attest to the fact that they feel satisfied buying locally, and feel more connected and trusting of the farmers.

Eating locally may be seen as a difficult task for many. Though, with the help of Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), it does not have to be. Richardson examines these communities in her book, *Recipe for America*. This is an option for consumers to support their local farms and reduce petroleum miles is to become a member of a CSA community. Members of CSAs invest in a member, similar to a stock. CSAs allow the public to receive the produce directly from farmers, without the interference of supermarkets or large companies. In advance, that farm is paid by the costumer for the season. For that season, each week the customer is provided with a share of the farms’ produce. Local farmers involved become more secure with this system because it allows them to receive a secure payment in advance for their produce (Richardson 44). Though CSA member risk not receiving much products from the farms, based on if there happen to be any troubles on the farm, they still are able to support their local community, the food has a fresher taste, and they are also helping the environment by limiting the packaging and shipping necessary for the food (Richardson). Richardson explains how many farmers work together to “combine their resources to provide weekly newsletters with recipes, ensuring that the customers get the most from their CSA experience” (86). This proves that farmers want to make sure that their customers are pleased because they too care about the relationship between them and their customers.

Rafferty refers to the founder and manager of the CSA Good Food Collective. This organization is partnered with 10 local farmers within 55 miles from Rochester. Hartman believes in CSA as the best way to consume produce. Hartman states, “CSA as bringing the consumer and the farmer onto the same side of the fence...Many of our farmers sell twice as much through the CSA than they do at any given market.” He describes that farmers markets are great, however farmers are gambling with whether or not they will sell the amount that they need to in order to stay afloat (Rafferty). Rochester is a community where buying local food is made convenient. With both the many farms involved with CSA, and the access to the Rochester Public Market, why not buy locally?

Many chefs are choosing to cook using local produce to benefit the environment, the health of the consumers, and to positively influence communities. Consumers can eat local meals at restaurants that are grasping the concepts of this new movement. The Chefs Collaborative makes it easier for chefs to become local food cooks. Formed in 1993, this organization help provide restaurant businesses with the necessary tools to operate “economically healthy, sustainable food service businesses” (Richardson 81). The Farmers Diner in Barre, Vermont has joined movement to serve solely locally grown items. The owner of the diner states, “My favorite job is writing checks for local farmers”. It is rewarding to know that you supported the farmers “down the road” who devote their time and hard work for the consumers (Halweil). Cloud specifically chooses to analyze the techniques of Café 150, a cafeteria at the Google headquarters. The restaurant is true to its mission to provide locally produced foods, even to the extent of canning their own food in the kitchen. I find it very honorable that people are so dedicated to eat and serve locally, especially this example of such a large company’s efforts.

There are some individuals who have formed their own community, in which they transform their lifestyles to only eat local foods. “Locavore”, a newly added word to the Oxford American Dictionary in 2007, is “a person who endeavors to eat only locally produced food” (Newman). Members to this ideology vow to eat only local foods grown within about a 100 to 200-mile range from where they live. So who are the members of this ideology? A locavore is simply just a concerned citizen who is concerned with the transportation, taste, and ecological diversity of their food; in a sense, a trinity of their core values.

Alisa Smith and J.B Mackinnon, a couple from the Canadian city Vancouver, challenged themselves to partake in a locavore diet for one year. In their book *Plenty: Eating Locally on the 100-Mile Diet,* the couple recounts their experimentation. Smith and Mackinnon begin their book with a quote from Graffiti, “Man is born free and everywhere is in chain stores” (Smith 1). It is implying that we as humans are born free, though we are actually jailed down due to our consumption habits. We are too reliant on chain stores to buy from, even when it comes to buying food. Smith and MacKinnon, like many other locavores, have reached the decision that they do not want to be “chained” down anymore. They would rather break away; having freedom to support local agriculture.

In a world where global warming is a consistent issue on many peoples’ minds, it is unfortunate that many of us non-locavores are supporting consumption habits that cause so much damage to the environment. Locavores are concerned with environmental damage that is caused by transportation of products. Shipping and transporting foods can cause a lot of damage on the environment. Smith and MacKinnon had a moment in their lives that helped to motivate their change to become locavores. They realized that the diet they had been following, the “SUV diet”, was unrepresentative of their principles (5). The distance need to transport the food they were buying was causing much damage on the environment; similar to that of a large, gas-guzzling SUV. The couple felt hypocritical for not wanting to purchase an SUV, though for their whole life, they have been supporting a consumption pattern that does even more damage to the environment than any SUV could. The couple decided that they needed to challenge their food consumption habits tin order to avoid a continuance of the SUV diet that they have been practicing (5).

Another aspect of the locavore “trinity” is their values for the taste of foods. This trinity can be related to Berry’s idea of scale, balance, diversity, and quality as important values we must consider. Many locavores also choose to become members of this ideology because they state that the food locally grown simply taste better. Take a look back to the example of the Washington State apple versus a local apple. Washington State is known to produce great apples; in fact it is their official state fruit. So, why is the argument even made that a local apple would taste better than an apple from a state that is known to produce them? If you consider the distance that that product has traveled, and the things it has endured during that process, the taste is affected. Cloud, agrees, by stating the question, “Didn't the apple's taste suffer after the fruit was crated and refrigerated and jostled for thousands of miles?” (Cloud). Shipping these items in crates over a course of several days causes impairment to the taste of the produce. Locavores would argue that this transportation leads to a worse taste in comparison because of the handling from location to location, and the chemicals that the produce receive in order to stay “fresh”. Rather, when eating a locally grown apple, that apple has been produced and received to the consumer only shortly after it has been cultivated.

One of the final concerns of locavores, the last part of that locavore trinity, is the concern for ecological diversity. Smith and MacKinnon manipulate the supermarket as being the enemy. They share facts that discourage buying from supermarkets. Smith and MacKinnon state, “A single supermarket today may carry 45,000 different items; 17,000 new food products are introduced each year in the United States. Yet here we are, in the horn of plenty, and almost nothing came from the people or the landscape that surrounded us” (Smith 13). They feel guilty for being responsible for supporting this type of consumption all of these years. Typically, supermarkets are in the eyes of locavores, the enemy. These businesses are the suppliers of food that damage our planet, and disconnect communities from farmers. They offer only a select variety of products, excluding the diversity of produce that actually exists. This exclusion is further leading to the extinction of various agricultural products. Why should we continue to shop and buy from places that destroy our society? Locavores are people who have had enough with this system and want the change.

MacKinnon’s purpose is not to change the world, or just join the locavore movement to seem “cool”. The couple has tried to make changes in their lives for years. They have tried giving up motor vehicles as a mode of transportation, or even reusing plastic bags and other things as if they were living in the Great Depression. Mackinnon makes a profound statement about these attempts to live more ethically when he admits, “It doesn’t make me feel ‘good.’ It makes me feel like an alien” (17).

I now can understand that living as a locavore is not bizarre, but rather honorable. I respect the locavore ideology. However, I know that at this point in my life, becoming a locavore just would not be practical. Reflecting on my own life, I realize how I have already been valuing the importance of local foods. My mom has always encouraged eating farm fresh foods, but I never really did understand the impact.  My mom has always taken pride in her garden, which contains everything from hot banana peppers to lavender.  As a child, she would have my siblings and I help her weed and manage the garden, even sneaking a cherry tomato or two when she turned away.  My summer months have always consisted of picking fruit with my mom at the local farm down the road from me.  And then the process of canning begins in the hot summer heat.  A sweet aroma sweeps throughout the house of fresh fruit and warm sugar.  Not only jams, but our family makes salsa, marinara sauce, pickles, and much more, all from local produce. Though there are still many options for me to do to support farmers, lessen my ecological footprint, and receive better quality produce. We as humans have the freedom to make our own choices on how we live. It is inspirational to know that there are people in this world that care so much about their lives and the world as well, that they would change their lifestyles completely for the better of all.

Works Cited

Berry, Wendell. *Bringing It to the Table: On Farming and Food*. Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2009. Print.

Cloud, John. "Eating Better Than Organic." *TIME.com*. TIME Magazine, 2 Mar. 2007. Web. 10 Mar. 2011.

Fabrizio, Jonnie A. *My Habit Diary* 1.1 (2011): Feb. 25, 2011-Mar. 11, 2011. Print.

Halweil, Brian. "The Argument for Local Food." *World Watch* 16.3 (2003): 20. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 11 Mar. 2011.

Meredith, Leda. *The Locavore's Handbook: the Busy Person's Guide to Eating Local on a Budget*. Guilford, CT: ThreeForks, 2010. 15-33. Print.

Newman, Andrew A. "How Dictionaries Define Publicity: The Word of the Year." *The New York Times*. NYTimes, 10 Dec. 2007. Web. 18 Mar. 2011.

Pollan, Michael. "NO BAR CODE. (Cover story)." *Mother Jones* 31.3 (2006). *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 11 Mar. 2011.

Richardson, Jill. *Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It*. Brooklyn, N.Y: Ig Pub, 2009. Print.

Smith, Allison and J.B. Mackinnon. *Plenty: Eating Locally on the 100-Mile Diet*. New York. Three Rivers Press, 2007. Print.