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### Locavore is Not Bizarre, But Rather Honorable

“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 a 100-mile range from where they live. So who are the members of this ideology? Stereotypically, people may assume a locavore as a modern “hippie”, obsessed with the environment, and very eclectic. Though sometimes this is the case, 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.

Every ideology has a beginning. There is typically a defining moment in which an ideology motivates the interest of others. Los Angeles TIME journalist, Margot Roosevelt introduces the background of the locavore ideology in her article, “The Lure of the 100-Mile Diet.” In 2005, the movement began after several Californians were inspired by ecologist Gary Paul Nabhan’s book, *Coming Home to Eat* (Roosevelt). Nabhan launched a crusade for himself to restrict his diet to only native foods from his state of Arizona. In his book, a memoir of sorts, he records his experience for one year, and inspires the term “locavore”. Nabhan comments on this year stating, “I have initiated an extended communion with my plant and animal neighbors, the native flora and fauna found within 250 miles of my home” (Nabhan 33). Three years later, four food lovers from California popularized this ideology

through a movement called the Eat Local Challenge, and created a website, [Eatlocalchallenge.com](http://Eatlocalchallenge.com). The online support website “is committed to challenging themselves to eat mainly local food during a specific period of time during the year” (Eat Local Challenge). Fellow locavores and those wishing to be one, can express their thoughts on this site set up like a blog.

The locavore ideology in a sense can be compared to a religion. It is a belief system, begun with the history of Nabhan’s book, has followers who support and practice specific values based on their beliefs, and there is also an ultimate authority. [Eatlocalchallenge.com](http://Eatlocalchallenge.com) is in a sense, both the “ultimate authority” and “sacred text” for this ideology. The website is still active, intriguing more and more members each day. It is a community created for members of this food belief system. Support from others, advice, expertise, and visuals aid to encourage membership. It is where bloggers would, like Nabhan, engage themselves by becoming participants of this diet and reminisce about their experience.

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). The decision by Smith and Mackinnon to start with this quote is very wise. 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. Think about it, if you were to buy 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. John Cloud, a TIME journalist, reports on his findings after analyzing this issue further in his article "Eating Better than Organic". He states the irony that "shipping a strawberry from California to New York requires 435 calories of fossil fuel but provides the eater with only 5 calories of nutrition" (Cloud). The transportation of foods can give off harmful emissions that affect the environment.

Locavores tend to use the term "petroleum miles" when describing distance a product needs to travel to them. This term has negative undertones. 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).

Locavores think about the ecological damage that transporting food does. A question many locavores ask themselves is: why is that necessary, when you can get the same or even better produce from a local farm in your area? Transportation is the "devil" in the eyes of many

locavores. They aim to receive their food with as little transportation as possible in order to minimize the petroleum, miles.

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. 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.

Another aspect of the locavore “trinity” is their values for the taste of foods. 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 (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). Before researching this ideology, as well as thinking about alternative ways people lived, I did consider their lifestyles as being obscure

and out of the ordinary. Why would someone want to change their lives so drastically? Why couldn't they just live like the rest of us? This couple genuinely wishes to do this in order to live better. We as humans have the freedom to make our own choices on how we live. I now can understand that living as a locavore is not bizarre, but rather honorable. I respect the locavore ideology. 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.

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