

Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

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Savoring the Gift of Local Organic

As the holidays come around again, and we pause to remember what we love and value, I encourage you to include the bountiful and nourishing mother earth in your embrace.

Among the items on my eco-gratitude list are the wonderful array of local organic foods in our area. I love how they fill my body with health and aliveness, even moments of time-transcending delight. Plus I'm thrilled to help nurture local eco-farmers and ecosystems.

Now I've heard some people declare that consumers should choose *either* local or organic. But don't we especially want the farms near us to avoid putting toxics into our air, water, and food?

The underlying problems

To me, it's vital that we find as many ways as we can to address the serious problems plaguing our current food system and harming our health, finances, communities, democracies, and planet.

Too often, our industrial food system feeds us a limited selection of toxic, contaminated, and tasteless fruits and vegetables. These are usually grown by poorly protected workers, using poisons that hurt people and ecosystems, and picked unripe for easy transport.

Then they're shipped long distances, using enormous amounts of petroleum that create large quantities of pollution and greenhouse gases. These cause health problems, foul ecosystems, and push our weather systems increasingly towards disaster. Significant packaging waste is created, and 25% of the produce doesn't even make it to our plate. Then, because of the produce's bland taste, it's often packaged with unhealthy levels of sugar, fat, salt, and fake flavors.

Worse, the supermarket's illusion of choice hides the consolidation of power into big farms and corporations

that make life-and-death decisions for their benefit at our cost, and leave countless small farms struggling and considering closure. (Read more about these issues in *Eat Here*, by Brian Halweil.)

How local + organic can help

By buying LOCAL food, you can:

- **Reduce the eco-harm from petroleum-powered transportation and storage.**
- **Enjoy food that's often more fresh, nutritious, and diverse** (because crops are chosen for flavor not shipability).
- **Support our local farmers, neighbors, and economy**, and help protect our open space and rural pace of life.

• **Connect to this specific place**, by eating with the seasons, exploring our region's special foods, and getting to know local people's unique gifts.

• **Enhance our food security and self-sufficiency**, so that we're less vulnerable to disruptions of transportation systems and distant food supplies.

By buying ORGANIC food, you can:

- **Remove toxic pesticides and fertilizers** from our shared air, water, soil, and ecosystems.
- **Savor food that's less-toxic, more nutritious, and non-GMO.** Even simple preparation can yield tasty results!
- **Support the farmers and producers** who nurture the soil, avoid toxics, reject GMOs, and prove that farming can align with the earth's needs.
- **Encourage more farmers and producers** to adopt these practices. Believe me, they follow the money!
- **Help this grassroots movement achieve its goal of removing toxics from all of agriculture.** Countless people have worked decades to create this path.

Your next steps

1) Buy local and organic produce and packaged products; this is often easier at locally-owned stores. Encourage others to do the same. We have so many wonderful options! (Note: "Organic" has a specific legal definition, but "local" doesn't. Ideally, look for items from your county or within 100 miles of home.)

2) Make farmers' markets a joyful habit for yourself and your family. They're an easy way to get fresh local organic produce, plus jam, cheese, eggs, fish, meat, flowers, pastries, etc. Plus you can get decent prices (by cutting out the middlemen), connect with neighbors, and help children build healthy food as a lifelong habit. Find Sonoma County markets at www.bit.ly/GYIWHm.

3) Give gifts of local organic food and beverages, as unique treats and to introduce folks to our local treasures.

4) Encourage the businesses and nonprofits in your life to buy local organic products.

For more on this topic, plus lots of eco-holiday ideas, see www.patriciadines.info/EcoGirl7c.html. And I wish you all a wonderful season!

Ask EcoGirl is written by Patricia Dines, Author of The Organic Guides, and Editor and Lead Writer for The Next STEP newsletter. Email your questions about going green to EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info for possible inclusion in future columns. Also see "Ask EcoGirl" on Facebook! And contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this syndicated column in your periodical.

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Published in the *Sonoma County Gazette*, November 2013.

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