

I first realized that local food was wonderful at a very young age. My summers were spent, as they still are, at my father's family beach home in Fairhaven, Massachusetts. I remember helping my father and his uncles raking quahogs and digging for steamers right in our "back yard". These gifts of the sea would then go immediately into the pot on the stove, or for special occasions, would be added to a huge pit of potatoes, chourico, corn on the cob and fish, covered with seaweed and steamed for several hours on the beach. Once in a while, if times were good, there would be an extra added bonus treat of lobsters too, purchased from a local fisherman at the docks just down the street. Because we always ate these meals outside, to this day I still cannot eat a lobster unless I am wearing a bathing suit.

Corn as a local delight also played a major role in our summertime fare, we would get the corn from a farm in Fairhaven that is now since gone. My father had some strict rules regarding the eating of this corn:

It had to be cooked the same day as it had been picked.

The large pot that it was to be cooked in was started with only 2" of water in the bottom and would be started by my mother when we were outside husking the corn.

Once the corn was put into the pot, it could steam for no more than 7 minutes.

Only butter & salt could be used to dress the corn, never margarine.

The corn had to be eaten across the rows, typewriter style, never around the ear and absolutely never here & there.

Even with these strict rules, or perhaps because of them, the corn was always amazing. Naturally, I still follow "the rules" to this day, and even though that farmstand in Fairhaven is gone, I still look for the "Corn Guy" who parks his truck on a strip of land behind Shaw's market in Fairhaven. Sometimes he has tomatoes too, or green beans, and oftentimes, Portuguese Sweet Bread that is locally made.

My grandfather on my mother's side, whose house I now live in, loved to forage for his food in the neighborhood. He would pick dandelions in his or the neighbor's yards and then cook them up. He assured me that they were delicious and I opted to believe him, rather than to try them myself. I did however, like to help him when he would take me down the embankment in front of the house to pick blackberries. Those berries never made it into anything except for our mouths. This has been a summertime tradition that I have continued with my nieces and nephews. We find blackberries in all kinds of places when we are out hiking, or walking the bike path in Fairhaven, and 2 years ago some of the children of this congregation were taken to a spot on the church

property to taste the blackberries that we have growing here. My nephews and nieces also delight in the blueberries that we find out on our walks in the woods, or when visiting the cemetery where their grandparents are interred. We've eaten them just as they are off the bush, or brought some home to freeze and still had enough left over to make a sauce to put over ice cream.

When my sons were young, I would take them each June to pick strawberries at a pick your own farm in Exeter, and after they had had their fill of warm fresh berries, they would then help me de-stem, mash and cook up the fruit to make strawberry jam. My oldest son, Jeremy is still making jams. He lives in Providence, but the house that he purchased 10 years ago used to be owned by an old Italian gentleman, and there are all kinds of fruit trees growing in his yard: a 40 ft. cherry tree, 3 grape arbors; both concord and white grapes, 2 peach trees, 1 pear tree and 2 mulberry trees. When he and his wife were married last September, they were proud to give as favors to their 100 guests 3 jars each of jams they had made themselves from their fruit trees and still have enough left over for Christmas gifts for the family. I think they still have more than 100 jars of jam left from their bounty.

Jeremy and Kristen also grow many of their own vegetables, a practice that Jeremy learned through so many hours at my side in the garden that I have had for 25 years. The menu of my garden has changed every year, with 2 exceptions; I have always grown tomatoes and basil. Last year I had pickling cucumbers and bush beans, plus the tomatoes and basil, jalapeno peppers, bell peppers, lemon balm, tarragon, chives, dill, oregano and strawberries. This year I am planning to add several more things to this mix: fennel, cilantro and snap peas.

I used to have a neighbor who loved to entertain, and I remember one evening I was sitting out on the deck with Chuck and his wife Joyce. She had just come from Morris Farms which is several miles from our house with bags of just picked tomatoes and 2 dozen ears of fresh, sweet corn. To my surprise (Chuck is a dedicated carnivore) we had a meal that evening of just corn and tomatoes.

When did I become committed to try to eat mostly locally grown food? Last summer one of my favorite authors, Barbara Kingsolver, published a book "Animal Vegetable Miracle" in which she chronicled the year that her family devoted to eating only food that they personally raised, or grew on their land in I think, Kentucky. What they

did not raise themselves, they procured from neighbors. It made sense to me from both a perspective of taste, plus the knowledge that I gleaned from her and others regarding the amount of fossil fuels that go into the transport of produce from places far away. Because of the distance and the place that I have to commute to work each day there is not much that I can do to reduce my gas consumption, but I realized that by eating local and mostly vegetarian that I could reduce my carbon footprint in another way, so I started to buy my produce and shellfish from local sources.

Quite soon after making this pledge to myself, I happened to be in a conventional grocery store with one of my sisters, where I experienced a type of Twilight Zone experience. It was in the middle of September, the height of tomato producing season in this part of the country, yet there I stood in disbelief looking at huge quantities of plastic boxes full of tomatoes that had been artificially ripened and flown in from Mexico! I felt like overturning the tables a la Jesus in the parable of the money lenders in the synagogue (but I restrained myself).

One event that Green Sanctuary did last fall was to host a Second Saturday Sampling dinner in October for which the topic was "local foods".

We had quite a good turnout for this dinner, and each person delighted in telling their story of gathering or purchasing the ingredients and cooking their meal by “the rules”.

Right around Thanksgiving, I started to feel nervous that I would have to revert to eating distantly grown food with the coming winter, but then I found out that there would be a winter farmer’s market at AS220 in downtown Providence. Dan, Cory and I have made this farmers market part of our Saturday routine. We were amazed at the selection of foods offered. Here is a sampling of different things that we have found there on many trips: squash, turnips, carrots, parsnips, beets, cauliflower, red potatoes, white potatoes, leeks, apples, onions, honey, eggs, locally made tortillas and cheese, jams and chutneys, shellfish that is farm raised in the Great Salt Pond and grass-fed meat from a local farm (for Dan). In addition to all this, there were people selling free trade citrus and coffee, hand made chocolates and dog treats made locally and often times a local group of college students playing music up on a stage at the back of the room. What a tremendously different shopping experience compared to going to a conventional supermarket.

Did all of the food we ate this past winter come from locally grown

sources? No, but a large majority did, and it was not that hard to do. I have some information about local foods and farms on the Green Sanctuary table set up in fellowship hall, visit us during coffee hour to find out about more local foods and for a list of farmer's markets for the upcoming season.

I recently read a book with the title of "Plenty" by Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon, which was about their experiences in eating food gleaned from a 100 mile radius. They also did this for a year. These authors did not live in Southern California, but in Vancouver, British Columbia. From them I learned that the Industrial Agricultural epidemic that has homogenized this country's eating habits has also contributed to greenhouse gas emissions produced in the manufacture of nitrogen based fertilizers used on huge conglomerate farms plus the amount of fossil fuel emissions used to move produce from one side of this country to the other. They also point out that it may seem better to diversify what we put on our plates, but in reality the "Turbo-Capitalist Globalization" of food has diminished our collective food culture. According to Edward O. Wilson, some 7000 species of plants are known to have been used by different human societies throughout history. Yet today just 20 species

provide 90% of the world's food. There may seem to be a variety in food when you walk into a supermarket, but when I realized that most processed foods have a background of either corn, wheat or soy, it doesn't seem all that varied.

Two of the purchases that I made at the winter farmers market were vegetables that I had never seen before, so I had to try them. One was similar to cauliflower or broccoli and I had to go to Google Images to find the name, which turned out to be "Romanesco". This was one of the more beautiful veggies that I have ever seen, so of course I had to photograph it from several angles before I cut it up and sautéed it with some garlic to put over pasta. My other unique find was purple carrots. I have never seen either of these items in a "supermarket".

Yes, my husband thinks that I should have a bumper sticker warning people "I Brake for Farmstands", but I like being able to put a face to my food. I think it is important to know who is growing my food and also knowing their farming practices. Recently I read "Omnivore's Dilemma" by Michael Pollan. During research for this book Michael spent a week on a farm in Virginia that is the living incarnation of our principle that speaks of the interdependent web of existence of which we are a part. This farmer



also believes in “relationship marketing”, that the only meaningful guarantee of integrity is when buyers and sellers can look one another in the eye during a transaction, and he finds it odd that people will put more work into choosing their car mechanic or house contractor than they will into choosing the person who grows their food.

I have had a relationship with Morris Farms, my local farmer for 25 years at least. I swear their corn is the sweetest that I have ever known and their pickling cucumbers are exceptional. Two years ago on a trip to this farm during corn season, Cory and I happened to be standing right over a peach pie that had just been delivered. This peach pie was still warm from the oven. Well, who can turn down fresh, warm pie? Cory and I had to make a slight detour back to the house to have a slice before continuing on to our next destination, the Pawtuxet Farmer’s Market.

Sometimes, you think kids are not paying any attention to the things you are teaching them and then along comes a remark that makes you say “Ah, I am getting through”. Once while at this farmer’s market, Cory overheard a woman saying to her companion, “I’m kind of disappointed, I was hoping to pick up some bananas”. Well Cory mentioned to me that he

could not believe what he was hearing, and I was delighted to realize that some things DO get through!

Is local or organic food more costly than food purchased through the industrial agricultural system? Yes and no. Cheap food comes with unseen cost, because of the environmental clean up costs and health care costs. Michael Pollan writes that “cheap food is highly subsidized in many ways, such that it’s price in the supermarket does not reflect its real cost. But until the rules that govern our food system change, organic or sustainable food is going to cost more. With organic food 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 subsidized oil and water – of all the hidden costs to the environment and the taxpayer that make cheap food seem cheap.”

Why eat organic? I also learned from Michael Pollan that shopping in an organic “supermarket” underwrites important values on the farm; shopping locally underwrites a whole set of other values as well, that because farms also produce a kind of landscape and a kind of community. The decision to eat locally is an act of conservation too, one that is

probably more effective and sustainable than writing checks to environmental organizations.

After this “experiment” that I promised to myself last summer, I am even more committed to eating local and am expanding my garden this year. How committed am I? Today is our 6<sup>th</sup> anniversary and we are going out to dinner tonight. Where are we going? A restaurant in downtown Providence, Local 121 whose menu is full of foods that are locally grown or raised.

During coffee hour, please visit the Green Sanctuary table to find out more about eating local and also to look into information regarding the current “Farm Bill” that is before the House.

I’d like to close with these words from Gary Paul Nabhan’s book “Coming Home to Eat”:

“What if each of us, day by day, fully fathomed where our food comes from, historically, ecologically, geographically, genetically? What would it be like if each of us recognized all the other lives connected to our own through the simple act of eating? What if we understood which other species were regenerated, and which were contaminated or destroyed by what we choose to eat, by our care or by our carelessness? The way we

garden, gather, fish, or forage can be a communion, or it can become an ecological calamity. The more we understand where our food comes from, the greater the chance there is that we can save the living riches of the natural world.”