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# HUNGRY FOR CHANGE: FOOD, ETHICS AND SUSTAINABILITY



*We are as vulnerable as the eroding topsoil if we do not enrich ourselves with knowledge about our food system, and then share and support such knowledge with others.*

— WES JACKSON



# HUNGRY FOR CHANGE: FOOD, ETHICS AND SUSTAINABILITY



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By



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# INTRODUCTION

You are what you eat.

For many of us, this saying brings nothing more to mind than cartoon images of human-sized bananas with arms and legs, or smiling, anthropomorphized versions of broccoli and tuna fish. But “you are what you eat” can have a much more profound meaning than that.

Most elementary school children can tell you that in order to get a seed to grow into a plant, you need to expose it to water and light. These are vital to its survival, growth, and eventual development into a food source. But the plant also needs to be nourished by minerals and nutrients in the soil. If a seed is planted in nutrient-poor soil, the seed will require inputs (fertilizers) to grow. Organic gardeners and permaculturists tell us to feed the soil and invest in a long-term way to feed the world, instead of feeding a plant with artificial fertilizers that run off into our waterways and cause imbalances in ecosystems.

When we harvest the fruit of the plant's hard work and then eat it, our bodies break down the cells of the plant and harvest the nutrients it's accumulated. These nutrients not only feed our bodies the calories we need to work and play — they are the building blocks of our skin, our eyes, our brains. Our food choices affect our weight, our abilities, our strength and endurance, the diseases we face, and even the intelligence capacity of our children.

We create ourselves by what we choose to feed ourselves. And, as you can see, not only are we what we eat, we are also what our soil eats.

On the other hand, you could say that we create the world by what we choose to eat. Our food choices affect ecosystem health, how harvesters and factory workers are treated, the health of farm workers, which foods are grown and sold, how humanely animals are treated, and even how much carbon dioxide and methane are released into the atmosphere.

*Hungry for Change: Food, Ethics and Sustainability* explores the interconnections of our food systems and our relationship to and responsibility in these systems. This course challenges us all to look at our roles as not only as consumers of food, but also as creators — of food, of

systems, and of the world we live in.

With six sessions designed for weekly discussion, *Hungry for Change* offers an opportunity to dig deeper into the complex issues surrounding food. Each session includes readings, questions for the group, a “Putting It into Practice” list of suggested actions and “Further Readings and Resources.”

Each week as you meet with your discussion group, we invite you to bring your own experience and critical thinking to the process. The readings are intended to invoke meaningful discussion. Whether you agree or disagree, you will have an opportunity to clarify your views and values.

The course also includes weekly Action Plans to guide you in making change. Each week, group members will choose one action from their Action Plans to implement during the following week. During the next group meeting, participants share the actions they tried to implement and the successes, challenges, and inspiration they might have experienced. We also suggest sharing your long-term goals with your group during the optional Celebration session. This last session is encouraged as a way for your group to celebrate the completion of the course, share goals and progress and consider ways the group might continue to work together.

For resources to get a discussion group started, go to [www.nwei.org](http://www.nwei.org) and visit the “Course Resources” page for flyers, organizing guides and press releases. Included on pages 6 of this guide, “How to Start a Discussion Course” provides further information about organizing a course. You may also contact our office at (503) 227-2807. To become a member of NWEI and support the sharing of this work with others, please visit [www.nwei.org/join](http://www.nwei.org/join) or complete “Become a Member of NWEI” on page 127 of this guide.

Thank you for participating in the Northwest Earth Institute's discussion course, *Hungry for Change: Food, Ethics and Sustainability*. On behalf of the thousands of organizations, workplaces and volunteers who are involved in promoting Northwest Earth Institute programs, we trust that your experience with this course will be of deep value.

# How to Start a Discussion Course

Thank you for your interest in the programs offered by the Northwest Earth Institute. The following tips are for those of you who would like to organize NWEI discussion groups.

We are thrilled that you have taken the initiative to order this course book for small-group discussion. While this course book has tremendous standalone value, please keep in mind that it was designed to be used with others in a group dialogue setting. As such, we ask that you consider inviting others to participate with you. You can find steps for doing so below. If you have any questions about the process please visit our website ([www.nwei.org](http://www.nwei.org)) or contact any member of NWEI's Outreach Team at (503) 227-2807, or by email at [contact@nwei.org](mailto:contact@nwei.org). If you have joined an already formed group, please consider organizing future courses. We hope you benefit from participating in this course.

## STEP 1: FORM GROUP(S) — IDEAL SIZE IS 8-12 PEOPLE.

In certain regions, a local NWEI representative may be available to assist you in getting started. Visit [www.nwei.org/n\\_american\\_network](http://www.nwei.org/n_american_network) to see a list of regions where NWEI representatives may be available to mentor new groups and offer introductory presentations on NWEI's work and mission.

### TIPS FOR STARTING YOUR NWEI COURSE:

- Invite others to join your course via newsletters, email networks, personal invitations or the media. Download NWEI program flyers at [www.nwei.org](http://www.nwei.org). Include location information, times and dates for the entire program. Set clear registration deadlines for signups.
- Order any remaining materials from NWEI and get course books to participants before the date of the first group meeting.
- Call a noontime meeting or host a brown bag lunch in a workplace to offer an informal presentation on NWEI programs and how they work.
- Host an introductory group meeting at home, your community or faith center, local library or municipal office.
- Visit [www.nwei.org/course\\_resources](http://www.nwei.org/course_resources) to download the Course Organizer's Guide for additional tips and resources..

## STEP 2: BEFORE THE FIRST SESSION

- Get course books to participants well in advance of the first meeting. Make sure to ask participants to complete the first reading/action plan assignment before they come to the first session.

- As the course organizer, you should plan to serve as the facilitator for the first session.
- Recruit one of the course participants to serve as the first session opener.

## STEP 3: FIRST SESSION — GETTING STARTED

**TAKE THE FOLLOWING MATERIALS WITH YOU TO THE FIRST SESSION:** 1) Course book, 2) Course schedule on page 7 for participants to sign up for opener, facilitator, and notetaker roles for the remaining sessions.

**HAVE A ROUND OF INTRODUCTIONS.** Introductions serve several important functions, even if the group is already well acquainted. Participants begin to know each other on a personal level and have an opportunity to “get each person’s voice into the room.” A person who has spoken and been listened to early in the session is more likely to participate in the rest of the session. Ask participants to say their names and something personal about themselves. As the organizer of your group, you should give your answer first to model the length and content.

**DESCRIBE THE GROUP PROCESS.** NWEI programs are designed to encourage discussions that clarify personal values and attitudes. Consensus is not the goal, and the group should not seek to reach agreement at the expense of diversity of opinion. Most groups meet for an hour to an hour and a half for each meeting. Each session will be led by a facilitator from the group. Point out the “Guidelines for the Session Facilitator” on page 8.

**DISTRIBUTE THE REGISTRATION FORM** to ensure you have complete and current contact information for all participants. Once the registration form is complete, please scan and send to NWEI at [contact@nwei.org](mailto:contact@nwei.org) (or see the registration form on page 11 for our mailing address). You may wish to keep a copy for future correspondence with participants.

### CALL ATTENTION TO THE EVALUATION FORM.

Encourage participants to fill out the evaluation form on page 9 and share their feedback with NWEI.

**FILL OUT THE COURSE SCHEDULE** (found on the next page). This gives different group members an opportunity to sign up to present an opening, to facilitate, and to take notes. Information on opening, facilitating and note-taking is included at the beginning of each course book.

## STEP 4: FIRST SESSION — DESCRIBE/PRESENT THE OPENING

Please reference Guidelines for the Facilitator, Opener and Notetaker located on page 8.

**STEP 5: FIRST SESSION — FACILITATING THE DISCUSSION**

**EXPLAIN THE ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR, OPENER AND NOTETAKER.** Tell the group that you will help keep the discussion personal, focused, and balanced among the participants. Show them the “Guidelines” on page 8. Encourage each person to review these before taking their turn at facilitation, opening or note-taking.

**CIRCLE QUESTION.** Following the opening, the first step is for each person to answer the Circle Question found at the beginning of each session. The question provides a focus for the day’s discussion.

**STEP 6: FIRST SESSION — CLOSING**

Watch the time, and stop discussion a few minutes before the session is scheduled to end. Note whether the Course Schedule is completed. If it is not, work with participants to complete it. Confirm the time and place for the next meeting. Be sure to end the class on time. This shows respect for the participants, and demonstrates that their time commitment is predictable.

**STEP 7: DURATION OF NWEI PROGRAM**

Your group will meet four to six times, depending on how many and which sessions your group uses and on the meeting dates set by participants. Each session will be led by a rotating member of the group. Note the “Putting It into Practice” and “Further Reading” lists at the beginning of each session for ideas on further educational opportunities as well as tips for applying the learning into your life.

**CLOSING**

**FINAL SESSION — CELEBRATION.** The final session in each discussion guide is an optional celebration, and is an opportunity to:

- Celebrate the completion of the program and evaluate your experience.
- Discuss options for continuing as a group, reflect on actions taken during the course and consider goals and action items to implement.
- Consider organizing other NWEI programs in your community, workplace or organization.

**Don’t hesitate to contact NWEI for assistance with questions.**

**COURSE SCHEDULE FOR HUNGRY FOR CHANGE: FOOD, ETHICS AND SUSTAINABILITY**

This course schedule may be useful to keep track of meeting dates and of when you will be facilitating or providing the opening.

Course Coordinator : \_\_\_\_\_ Phone : \_\_\_\_\_

Mentor (if applicable) : \_\_\_\_\_ Phone : \_\_\_\_\_

Location For Future Meetings : \_\_\_\_\_

CLASS SESSION	DATE	OPENER	FACILITATOR	NOTETAKER
The First Bite	_____	_____	_____	_____
Politics of the Plate	_____	_____	_____	_____
A Healthy Appetite	_____	_____	_____	_____
Just Food	_____	_____	_____	_____
Eating for Earth	_____	_____	_____	_____
Hungry for Change	_____	_____	_____	_____

**PLANNERS**

Celebration\* \_\_\_\_\_

\*After the last regular session, your group may choose to have a final meeting and Celebration. This meeting celebrates the completion of the course, and may include a potluck lunch or dinner. It is an opportunity for evaluation and consideration of next steps.



# GUIDELINES

## FOR THE FACILITATOR, OPENER AND NOTETAKER

For each session of this course, one participant brings an “opening,” a second participant facilitates the discussion, and a third participant takes notes. The roles rotate each week with a different group member opening, facilitating and taking notes. This process is at the core of the Northwest Earth Institute’s culture — it assumes we gain our greatest insights through self-discovery, by promoting discussion among equals with no teacher.



### FOR THE SESSION FACILITATOR

As facilitator for one session, your role is to stimulate and moderate the discussion. You do not need to be an expert or the most knowledgeable person about the topic.

Your role is to:

- Remind the designated person ahead of time to bring an opening.
- Begin and end on time.
- Ask the questions included in each chapter, or your own.
- Make sure your group has time to respond to the action-oriented discussion questions — it is a positive way to end each gathering.
- Keep discussion focused on the session’s topic. A delicate balance is best — don’t force the group into the questions, but don’t allow the discussion to drift too far.
- Manage the group process, using the guidelines below:

A primary goal is for everyone to participate and to learn from themselves and each other. Draw out quiet participants by creating an opportunity for each person to contribute. Don’t let one or two people dominate the discussion. Thank them for their opinions and then ask another person to share.

Be an active listener. You need to hear and understand what people say if you are to guide the discussion effectively. Model this for others.

The focus should be on personal reactions to the readings — on personal values, feelings, and experiences.

The course is not for judging others’ responses or problem solving. **Consensus is not a goal.**

The facilitator should ensure that the action item discussion:

- allows each person’s action item to be discussed for 1-2 minutes;
- remains non-judgmental and non-prescriptive;
- focuses on encouraging fellow group members in their commitments and actions.

### FOR THE SESSION OPENER

- Bring a short opening, not more than five minutes. It should be something meaningful to you, or that expresses your personal appreciation for food or the natural world.. Examples: a short personal story, an object or photograph that has special meaning, a poem, a visualization, etc. You can be creative.
- The purpose of the opening is twofold. First, it provides a transition from other activities of the day into the group discussion. Second, since the opening is personal, it allows the group to get better acquainted with you. This aspect of the course can be very rewarding.

### FOR THE NOTETAKER

At the end of each session, each participant will commit to one action item they will complete before the next meeting. They will share their action with the group, and it is your responsibility as notetaker to record each person’s commitment to action.

Each week the notetaker role will rotate. During the portion of discussion focused on action items, the notetaker from the previous meeting will read aloud each person’s action item, and group members will have the opportunity to share their successes and struggles in implementing their actions. The new notetaker for that week will then record each person’s commitment for the next meeting.

For more information on the NWEI process and organizing a course, see “How to Start a Discussion Course” on page 6.

H U N G R Y F O R C H A N G E

# EVALUATION

**PART 1. PLEASE FILL OUT WEEKLY**, while your thoughts and opinions are fresh in your mind. We suggest removing this page to use as a bookmark as you read through the course. Rate the six sessions. You may also complete an online evaluation at [www.nwei.org](http://www.nwei.org) on the “Hungry for Change” page.

	POOR CHOICE -----EXCELLENT					COMMENTS:
1. The First Bite	1	2	3	4	5	
2. Politics of the Plate	1	2	3	4	5	
3. A Healthy Appetite	1	2	3	4	5	
4. Just Food	1	2	3	4	5	
5. Eating for Earth	1	2	3	4	5	
6. Hungry for Change	1	2	3	4	5	

**Were the following resources helpful? Circle “Y” if we should use the resource next time or “N” if we should look for better material. Leave blank if you didn’t use it or have no opinion.**

	COMMENTS:	
1. Gardening as Politics .....	Y	N
The Working Mom’s Eating-In Challenge .....	Y	N
The Indignity of Industrial Tomatoes .....	Y	N
What Do You Eat in January? .....	Y	N
The Ecology of Food .....	Y	N
Most Good Least Harm .....	Y	N
Putting Down Roots .....	Y	N
2. The New Geopolitics of Food .....	Y	N
Feeding the World: It’s Not About Quantity .....	Y	N
Food is Cheap at Market... ..	Y	N
Aquacalypse Now: The End of Fish .....	Y	N
Can Organic Farming Feed the World? .....	Y	N
US Farming Subsidies Cost US Taxpayers Billions.....	Y	N
Food Rebellions: Seven Steps to Solving the Food Crisis ...	Y	N
The Paradox of Hunger .....	Y	N
3. Food Science’s Golden Age .....	Y	N
How to Save a Trillion Dollars .....	Y	N
Is the Rise of Food Prices All Bad? .....	Y	N
Still No Free Lunch .....	Y	N
What We Know — and Don’t Know — about the Safety of Eating GMOs .....	Y	N
The Dark Side of Soy .....	Y	N
Brain Food for Kids .....	Y	N
The Aborigine in All of Us .....	Y	N

- 4. What's Wrong With What We Eat ..... Y N
  - Fear Factories ..... Y N
  - Joel Salatin: How to Eat Animals and Respect Them, Too.... Y N
  - Fair Trade..... Y N
  - Child Slavery ..... Y N
  - The Price of Tomatoes ..... Y N
- 5. Factory Farms and Air Pollution ..... Y N
  - Is Your Cheese Killing the Planet? ..... Y N
  - Assault on Nature: CAFOs and Biodiversity Loss ..... Y N
  - Water: Will There Be Enough? ..... Y N
  - The Lowdown on Topsoil: It's Disappearing..... Y N
  - Perennial Solution ..... Y N
  - How Fertilizers Harm the Earth More than Help Your Lawn.. Y N
  - Global Warming and Food Choices ..... Y N
- 6. A Planetary Crisis Is a Terrible Thing to Waste ..... Y N
  - The Environmental Impact of Overconsumption..... Y N
  - Help the Planet: Stop Wasting Food..... Y N
  - Growing Power in an Urban Food Desert ..... Y N
  - A Better Fish Farm..... Y N
  - Transforming Our Tastes..... Y N
  - Three Pillars of a Food Revolution ..... Y N

Please send your completed evaluation to NWEI, 107 SE Washington Street, Suite 235, Portland, OR 97214. Thank you for your feedback!

**PART 2. PLEASE COMPLETE AT THE END OF COURSE.**

Has the course made a difference in your life? Yes No Please describe what actions you are taking or you plan to take in response to this course. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please list other articles, books or other resources that should be included in the course. Identify chapter(s)/page(s) and the session where they should be included. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Is the Action Plan a helpful tool for you? Why/why not? What would improve it? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Is the information "How to Start a Discussion Guide" on page 6 helpful? Why/why not? What would improve it?

\_\_\_\_\_

What has been the most valuable aspect of this course?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# Course Participant Registration Form

**PLEASE RETURN ONE FORM PER GROUP TO NWEI FOLLOWING YOUR FIRST SESSION.** Why does NWEI need this information? In order to keep accurate participant records and for grant reports. **This information is for NWEI use only, and is not shared with any other organization.**

The Course Organizer should have everyone in your group add their information, and return the form to NWEI after your first session. You can return the form via mail, email or fax — see below. Thank you!

COURSE ORGANIZER'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
 ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
 CITY, STATE, ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_  
 PHONE (H): \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE (W): \_\_\_\_\_  
 E MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
 ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
 CITY, STATE, ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_  
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 E MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

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 PHONE (H): \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE (W): \_\_\_\_\_  
 E MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

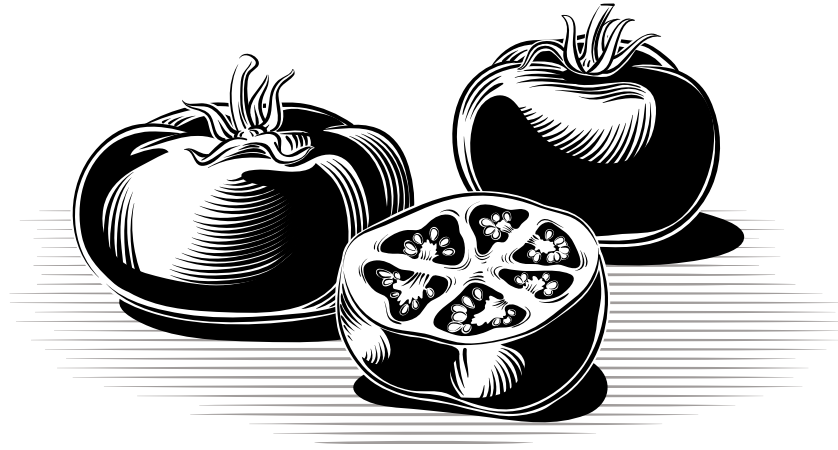
COURSE START DATE/FIRST MEETING DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
 MEETING TIME: \_\_\_\_\_  
 COURSE NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
 MENTOR (IF APPLICABLE): \_\_\_\_\_  
 TYPE OF GROUP [HOME, COMMUNITY, BUSINESS, GOVERNMENT, NON-PROFIT]: \_\_\_\_\_  
 NAME & ADDRESS OF MEETING PLACE: \_\_\_\_\_

**Mail to NWEI 107 SE Washington St., Suite 235, Portland, OR 97214;  
 fax to 503-227-2917 or scan and email to [contact@nwei.org](mailto:contact@nwei.org).**

Thank you very much for helping us accurately track participation in NWEI programs.  
 We greatly appreciate your prompt attention in returning this form as soon as possible after your course begins.



## SESSION 1



# THE FIRST BITE

*"If you send it halfway around the world before it is eaten, an organic food still may be 'good' for the consumer, but is it 'good' for the food system?"*

— GARY PAUL NABHAN

---

## SESSION GOALS

- To get acquainted, set a schedule for future meetings, and identify volunteers to facilitate each session.
- To introduce the interconnectedness of food, including the interconnections of politics, health, environment, ethics and justice.
- To explore our roles and relationships to the above mentioned aspects of food.
- To gain resources for future use and learning.

## SESSION BACKGROUND

The global food web has become increasingly more complicated with the industrialization and globalization of our world. The readings in this session explore the interconnectedness of food and our relationship to it, and preview the topics that will be addressed in the rest of the course.

## SUGGESTED GROUP ACTIVITY

### Where I'm From: My Food Heritage

Before you meet for the first time, consider your food story and how your experience with food has shaped you. Using the guidelines and examples at [www.nwei.org/hungryforchange/resources](http://www.nwei.org/hungryforchange/resources), write a short reflection or poem about your food heritage to share with the rest of your group as the opening for your first meeting.

## Circle Question

### **What is your motivation to care about food?**

Circle questions should move quickly — each member responds briefly without questions or comments from others. Facilitator guidelines are on page 8.

#### **SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. How could gardening (or agriculture) help restore America?
2. Which issues mentioned in “The Working Mom’s Eating-In Challenge” are similar to ones you face?
3. What was your reaction to *The Indignity of Industrial Tomatoes* article? What, in your opinion, makes today’s tomato indigent?
4. Barbara Kingsolver describes her pantry in January. What do you eat in January? Is it any different from what you eat in June?
5. What would be the hardest for you to give up, if you were to only eat what is in season locally?
6. What is one food choice that you make, or could make, that would do more good and less harm?
7. What “seeds” could you or do you plant for a more just and sustainable world?

#### **PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE**

- Get to know your grocer. If you do not have a farmer’s market, CSA, or farmer, then talk with your produce grocer to learn more about your food.
- Try a new grain, fruit, and vegetable!
- Consider the ways you can garden: a plot of land? a patio container? hanging basket? windowsill gardens?
- Consider keeping a food journal for the week or entire course! Track things like what foods you eat, where they come from, where you buy them, questions that you have about them, etc.

#### **DEFINITIONS OF TERMS**

- **Agribusiness:** In the agriculture industry, agribusiness is a broad term for various businesses involved in food production. When used by critics of industrialized agriculture, agribusiness is synonymous with large-scale, industrialized, corporate farming.
- **Locavory:** A lifestyle in which a person purposefully chooses to eat only locally sourced food as much as possible.

#### **FURTHER RESOURCES**

Interested in finding out more on the topics presented in this session? Visit our website for further readings and resources: [www.nwei.org/hungryforchange/resources](http://www.nwei.org/hungryforchange/resources)

Join our Facebook page to continue the discussion online:

[www.facebook.com/northwestearthinstitute](http://www.facebook.com/northwestearthinstitute).





## GARDENING AS POLITICS: DIGGING THE FOUNDING GARDENERS

By Andrea Wulf

As America's gardeners dig, plant, weed and grow lettuce, beans and tomatoes in their vegetable plots this summer, they are part of a tradition that harks back to the beginnings of the United States. Just by working on a compost pile this weekend, you'll be in good historical company.

The first four presidents of the United States — George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison — were all utterly obsessed with manure and recipes for compost. Adams even jumped into a stinking pile when he was America's first "minister plenipotentiary" to Britain in London in 1786. Teasing apart the straw from the dung (clearly not minding the muck on his hands), he declared with glee that it was "not equal to mine."

Washington, Adams, Jefferson and Madison regarded themselves first as gardeners and farmers, not politicians. They wove their passion for gardens and nature into the fabric of America; it was aligned with their political thought.

Agriculture would be the foundation of the new republic, they believed.

"Cultivators of the earth," Jefferson wrote, "are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous." The greater the proportion of husbandmen, Madison believed, "the more free, the more independent and the more happy must be the society itself"

There is a pivotal moment at the beginning of the revolution that sums up their passion. In the summer of 1776, just after the colonists declared independence, New York faced 30,000 British troops, the largest enemy force that had ever arrived on America's shores. As he prepared for the first and largest battle of the Revolutionary War, Washington pondered not only his military strategy but also the voluptuous blossom of rhododendron, the sculptural flowers of mountain laurel and the perfect pink of crab apple.

One evening, just a few days before the battle, he wrote a long letter to the estate manager at Mount Vernon, his plantation in Virginia. Washington instructed that these trees and shrubs should be planted in groves next to his house. Even more remarkable than his timing was his choice of plants, for he made it clear that only native species would do. Facing the mighty British army, Washington decided that Mount Vernon was to be an American garden where no English trees would be allowed to claw their roots into the soil. It was his horticultural Declaration of Independence.

Into their speeches, their letters and their diaries, the founders brought metaphors drawn from the natural world. Jefferson described the blood of patriots as the "natural manure" for the tree of liberty, and Washington called the young nation after the war a "goodly field" that needed to be "judiciously cultivated." They used their gardens as canvases to paint (or to grow) political statements, and they saw in America's rugged wilderness a transcendent symbol of a unique New World nation. Jefferson commissioned a drawing of the Natural Bridge in Virginia, a spectacular granite formation on his land, so that he could present "to the world this singular landscape, which otherwise some bungling European will misrepresent."

Maybe most extraordinary — given the current miserable state of America's efforts to curb emissions and its failure to ratify international climate treaties — is that the birth of the environmental movement in this country can also be traced back to the Founding Fathers. In an 1818 speech, Madison said the protection of the environment was essential for the survival of the United States. He condemned Virginians for their ruthless exploitation of the soil and the destruction of the forests, and he talked about the "balance of nature." Man had to give back to nature what he took from it: "Vegetable matter which springs from the earth," he said, must "return to the earth" — radical views at a time when most still believed that God had created plants



and animals entirely for the use of humankind.

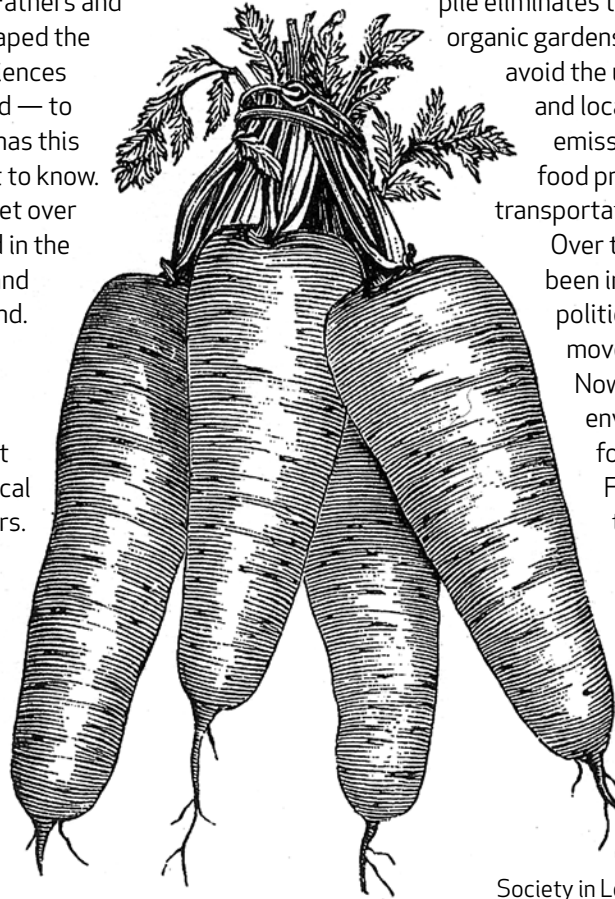
Over the past months I have given almost 40 lectures across the U.S. about the Founding Fathers and how their attitude toward nature shaped the American nation. Over and over, audiences have been surprised — and delighted — to hear about Madison's speech. "Why has this been ignored for so long?" they want to know. Many of the gardeners that I have met over the past months are deeply invested in the environment. Working with the soil and plants, they feel connected to the land. It gives many an understanding and ownership of the world around them (and the threat to this environment).

Most people today, however, don't regard gardening as an overtly political act, as it was for the Founding Fathers. But it can empower people and local communities. The rise of urban farming and gardening across the country in the past decade and the increasing interest in local produce is one example — it gives Americans control over their food and its production, which for the most part is in the hands of industry and huge conglomerates.

In big cities like Los Angeles, if you grow vegetables on "edible" food-producing wall panels and on roofs, or subscribe to weekly boxes of fresh produce

from local farms, or even plant drought-tolerant frontyards, you're making a political statement. Keeping a compost pile eliminates the need for chemical fertilizers; organic gardens that invite useful insects avoid the use of harmful pesticides; and local produce can reduce carbon emissions associated with industrial food production and long-distance transportation.

Over the years, the founders have been invoked by almost every politician and every political movement across a wide spectrum. Now it's time for the gardeners and environmentalists, who are already following in the footsteps of the Founding Gardeners, to claim their stake in the ideals and the heroes that formed the nation.



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This article originally appeared in a May 2011 edition of the *LA Times*. Andrea Wulf is the author of *The Brother Gardeners*, winner of the American Horticultural Society 2010 Book Award. She has lectured to audiences at the Royal Geographical Society and Royal

Society in London, the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, Monticello and the Missouri Botanic Garden amongst many others and is currently working on her fourth book.

"Cultivators of earth are the most vigorous,  
the most independent, the most virtuous."

— THOMAS JEFFERSON

## THE WORKING MOM'S EATING-IN CHALLENGE

By Lisa Bennett

I was in Trader Joe's frozen food aisle when I remembered the *Huffington Post's* "Week of Eating In" challenge. Did I really want to do this? I wondered. More to the point, could I? It seemed disconcertingly likely to expose me as a great green hypocrite.

I work for the Center for Ecoliteracy, which, for nearly 20 years, has advocated for improving school lunches; using gardens as a way to encourage kids to eat healthy foods; and teaching young people about the connections between food, health, and the environment.

This past year, we also developed a teacher's discussion guide to the Academy Award nominee, *Food, Inc.*, which, as the promotion says, will make you never look at dinner the same way again.

Professionally, in short, I understand food as a green issue. But personally, I find that living it is a very different story.

As the working mother of a 5- and a 10-year-old, I often absentmindedly pull something together for dinner while helping my oldest with his homework and trying to keep my youngest from filling up on crackers. My boys are hungry, tired, and cranky at the end of the day, and this does not always lend itself to fine dining — or, for that matter, even healthy cooking. So, in addition to roasted chicken and homemade burritos, there's a Trader Joe's lasagna or some other prepared food on the table at least once or twice a week.

Realizing this didn't even make my family particularly happy, I decided to take on the Eating In challenge to see if I couldn't adopt at least a few good new habits.

Things started out a little tougher than they should have; having been away the weekend before, I never got to the weekly food shopping. So on day one, I resorted to eggs and potatoes, with a few sliced apples and cheese. Lame, but the kids liked it.

On day two, I decided to stop in a new neighborhood produce market to pick up the ingredients for a stir-fry. Owned by a family that came to California by way of Yemen, it had a good selection and surprisingly reasonable prices. I found that I liked shopping there more than the usual places I frequent; I also enjoyed cooking and eating that night's meal more than usual. The challenge made me feel just a bit more mindful of what I was doing.

It also inspired me to get a little more ambitious. Thinking ahead about rice and lentils for day three, I soaked a cup of lentils for an hour after dinner before



planning to simmer them for several more. Then I got distracted by baths, books, and bedtime — and forgot the lentils entirely until the next morning, when I found my now-mushy beans still soaking.

That's when I realized that to truly match my actions to my principles and my intentions, I would have to get smarter about this. I'd have to really plan ahead. Cook on the weekend. Get a pressure cooker. Find recipes that are quick, easy, and healthy. Aim for leftovers. Involve the kids. And, most important, I'd have to take this on not as yet another thing to do, but because it felt good in and of itself.

As Michael Pollan wrote in the Center for Ecoliteracy's *Big Ideas: Linking Food, Culture, Health, and the Environment*: "If we all understood that how and what we eat determines to a great extent the use we make of the world and what is to become of it, we would eat with a fuller consciousness of all that is at stake."

Living according to that fuller consciousness — not only about the implications of our food choices but also about the pleasures of the process — is what inspires me now.

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Lisa Bennett is the communications director for the Center for Ecoliteracy and is a former fellow at Harvard University's Center on Press, Politics, and Public Policy in the John F. Kennedy School of Government. Her writing has appeared in many newspapers, magazines, and blogs, including *The New York Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and *Chronicle of Higher Education*.



## THE INDIGNITY OF INDUSTRIAL TOMATOES

By Barry Estabrook

My obituary's headline would have read "Food writer killed by flying tomato."

On a visit to my parents in Naples, Fla., I was driving I-75 when I came up behind one of those gravel trucks that seem to be everywhere in southwest Florida's rush to convert pine woods and cypress stands into gated communities and shopping malls. As I drew closer, I saw that the tractor trailer was heavy with what seemed to be green apples. When I pulled out to pass, three of them sailed off the truck, narrowly missing my windshield. Every time it hit the slightest bump, more of those orbs would tumble off. At the first stoplight, I got a closer look. The shoulder of the road was littered with green tomatoes so plasticine and so identical they could have been stamped out by a machine. Most looked smooth and unblemished. A few had cracks in their skins. Not one was smashed. A 10-foot drop followed by a 60-mile-per-hour impact with pavement is no big deal to a modern, agribusiness tomato.

If you have ever eaten a fresh tomato from a grocery store or restaurant, chances are good that you have eaten a tomato much like the ones aboard that truck. Florida alone accounts for one-third of the fresh tomatoes raised in the United States, and from October to June, virtually all the fresh-market, field-grown tomatoes in the country come from the Sunshine State, which ships more than 1 billion pounds every year. It takes a tough tomato to stand up to the indignity of such industrial scale farming, so most Florida tomatoes are bred for hardness, picked when still firm and green (the merest trace of pink is taboo), and artificially gassed with ethylene in warehouses until they acquire the rosy red skin tones of a ripe tomato.

Beauty, in this case, is only skin deep. According to figures compiled by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Americans bought \$5 billion worth of perfectly round, perfectly red, and, in the opinion of many consumers, perfectly tasteless fresh tomatoes in 2009 — our second most popular vegetable behind lettuce. We buy winter tomatoes, but that doesn't mean we like them. In survey after survey, fresh tomatoes fall at or near the bottom in rankings of consumer satisfaction. No one will ever be able to duplicate the flavor of garden-grown fruits and vegetables at the supermarket, but there's a reason you don't hear consumers bemoaning the taste of supermarket cabbages, onions, or potatoes. Of all the fruits and vegetables we eat, none suffers at the hands of factory farming more than a tomato grown in the wintertime fields of Florida.

Perhaps our taste buds are trying to send us a message. Today's industrial tomatoes are as bereft of nutrition as they are of flavor. According to analyses conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, fresh tomatoes today have 30 percent less vitamin C, 30 percent less thiamin, 19 percent less niacin, and 62 percent less calcium than they did in the 1960s. But the modern tomato does shame its 1960s counterpart in one area: It contains 14 times as much sodium.

A couple of winters ago, I brought some supermarket tomatoes home. I accidentally nudged one and watched as it rolled off the counter and fell on our newly refinished pine floor with the solid thud of a baking potato. I bowled the fruit through the kitchen door, across the dining room, over a wooden threshold, onto the tile floor of the sunroom, where *The Tomato That Would Not Die* crashed against the door. No damage done.

The best way to experience true tomato taste is to grow your own. Little wonder that tomatoes are by far the most popular vegetable for home gardeners, found in nearly nine out of 10 backyard plots. Both *The Tomato That Would Not Die* and the heirloom Brandywines in my Vermont garden are of the species *Solanum lycopersicum*, and both are red. But the similarity ends there. My Brandywines are downright homely — lumpy, deeply creased, and scarred, they look like badly sunburned Rubens derrieres. Nor are they made for travel. More often than not, one will spontaneously split during the 25-yard stroll from garden to kitchen. But there is no better-tasting tomato than a garden-ripe Brandywine. With sweetness and tartness playing off each other perfectly, and juices that burst into your mouth in a surge that forces you to abandon all pretext of good table manners and to slurp, a real tomato's taste is the distilled essence of sun, warm soil, and fine summer days.

Not everyone can grow a garden or head out to a neighborhood farmers' market in search of the ideal tomato.

But we all have an alternative to the sad offerings of commercial agriculture. At a lunch spot in the town where I live, a handwritten notation appeared on the blackboard one afternoon. "Dear Customers, we will not be putting tomatoes on our sandwiches until we can obtain ones that meet our standards. Thanks." With that small insurrection, the restaurant's proprietor had articulated a philosophy that more of us should embrace: Insist on eating food that meets our standards only, not the standards set by corporate agriculture.

Organic, local, seasonal, fresh, sustainable, fair trade — the words have become platitudes that skeptics associate with foodie elitists who can afford to shop at natural food stores and have kitchens that boast \$5,000 ranges. It's easy to forget that those oft-repeated words do mean something. Florida's tomato fields provide a stark example of what a food system looks like when all elements of sustainability are violated.



If it were left up to the laws of botany and nature, Florida would be one of the last places in the world where tomatoes grow. Tomato production in the state has everything to do with marketing and nothing to do with biology. Florida is warm when the rest of the East and Midwest — within easy striking distance for a laden produce truck — is cold. But Florida is notoriously humid. Tomatoes' wild ancestors came from the coastal deserts of northern Peru and southern Ecuador, some of the driest places on Earth. ... When forced to struggle in the wilting humidity of Florida, tomatoes become vulnerable to all manner of fungal diseases. Hordes of voracious hoppers, beetles, and worms chomp on their roots, stems, leaves, and fruit. And although Florida's sandy soil makes for great beaches, it is devoid of plant nutrients. To get a successful crop, they pump the sand full of chemical fertilizers and can blast the plants with more than 100 different herbicides and pesticides, including some of the most toxic in agribusiness's arsenal.

Workers are exposed to these chemicals on a daily basis. The toll includes eye and respiratory ailments, exposure to known carcinogens, and babies born with horrendous birth defects. Not all the chemicals stay behind in the fields once the tomatoes are harvested. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has found residues of 35 pesticides on tomatoes destined for supermarkets.

All of this might have a perverse logic to it if tomato growing were a highly lucrative, healthy business. But it isn't. As large as most of them are, Florida's tomato companies are struggling, always one disaster or disappointing year away from insolvency. Cheap tomatoes from Mexico stream across the border during the winter months. Advances in hydroponic technology have enabled greenhouse tomatoes from Canada and the northern states to eat into Florida's

market share during the spring and fall.

An industrial tomato grower has no control over what they spend on fuel, fertilizer (which requires enormous quantities of natural gas in its manufacture), and pesticides, but they can control what they pay the men and women who plant, tend, and harvest the crops. This has put a steady downward pressure on the earnings of tomato workers. Those cheap tomatoes that fill produce sections 365 days a year, year in and year out, come at a tremendous human cost. Although there have been recent improvements, a person picking tomatoes receives the same basic rate of pay they received 30 years ago. Adjusted for inflation, a harvester's wages have actually dropped by half over the same period. Florida tomato workers, mostly Hispanic migrants, toil without union protection and get neither overtime, benefits, nor medical insurance. They are denied basic legal rights that virtually all other laborers enjoy. Lacking their own vehicles, they have to live near the fields, often paying rural slumlords exorbitant rents to be crammed with 10 or a dozen other farm workers in moldering trailers with neither heat nor air-conditioning and which would be condemned outright in any other American jurisdiction.

Paid on a "piece" basis for every bushel-sized basket they gather, tomato pickers are lucky to earn \$70 on a good day. But good days are few. Workers can arrive at a field at the appointed time and wait for hours while fog clears or dew dries. If it rains, they don't pick. If a field ripens more slowly than expected, too bad. And if there is a freeze as there was in 2010, weeks can go by without work and without a penny of income. Unable to pay rent, pickers slept in encampments in the woods. The owners had crop insurance and emergency government aid to offset their losses. The workers had nothing.



All of this is happening in plain view, but out of sight, only a half-hour's drive from one of the wealthiest areas in the United States with its estate homes, beachfront condominiums, and gated golf communities. Meanwhile, tomatoes, once one of the most alluring fruits in our culinary repertoire, have become hard green balls that can easily survive a fall onto an interstate highway. Gassed to an appealing red, they inspire gastronomic fantasies despite all evidence to the contrary. It's a world we've all made, and one we can fix. Welcome to Tomatoland.

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Barry Estabrook is a James Beard Award-winning journalist and a former contributing editor at *Gourmet* magazine. He now serves on the advisory board of *Gastronomica*, *The Journal of Food and Culture*, and writes for the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *TheAtlantic.com*, *MarkBittman.com*, *Saveur*, and *Men's Health*. *Tomatoland* was published in 2011 by Andrews McNeel.



## WHAT DO YOU EAT IN JANUARY?

By Barbara Kingsolver

"January brings the snow . . ." began the well-thumbed, illustrated children's book about the seasons that my children cleaved to as gospel, while growing up in a place where January did nothing of the kind. Our sunny Arizona winters might bring a rim of ice on the birdbath at dawn, but by midafternoon it would likely be warm enough to throw open the school bus windows. Tucson households are systematically emptied of all sweatshirts and jackets in January, as kids wear them out the door in the morning and forget all about them by noon, piling up derelict sweatshirt mountains in the classroom corners.

Nevertheless, in every winter of the world, Arizona schoolchildren fold and snip paper snowflakes to tape around the blackboard. In October they cut out orange paper leaves, and tulip in spring, just as colonial American and Australian school children once memorized poems about British skylarks while the blue jays or cockatoos (according to continent) squawked outside, utterly ignored. The dominant culture has a way of becoming more real than the stuff at hand.

Now, at our farm, when the fully predicted snow fell from the sky, or the leaves changed, or tulips popped out of the ground, we felt a shock of thrill. For the kids it seemed like living in storybook land; for Steven and me it was a more normal return to childhood, the old days, the way things ought to be. If we remembered the snow being deeper, the walks to school harder and longer, we refrained from mentioning that to any young person. But the seasons held me in thrall.

And so those words from the Sara Coleridge poem, "January brings the snow," were singing a loop in my head as I sat at the kitchen table watching the flakes blow around in one of those featherweight boxing match snowstorms. It was starting to drift at bizarre angles, in very odd places, such as inside the eaves of the woodshed. The

school bus would likely bring Lily home early if this kept up, but at the moment I had the house to myself. My sole companion was the crackling woodstove that warms our kitchen; talkative, but easy to ignore. I was deeply enjoying my solitary lunch break, a full sucker for the romance of winter, eating a warmed-up bowl of potato-leek soup and watching the snow. Soon I meant to go outside for a load of firewood, but found it easy to procrastinate. I perused the newspaper instead.

We newspaper readers all have our pet vexations. Somewhere in one of those sections is the column we anxiously turn to for the sole purpose of disagreeing with the columnist. Volubly. Until family members, rolling their eyes, remind us it's a free country and you don't have to read it every time. My own nemesis is not in the World or Op-Ed sections; it's the food column. While I am sick to death of war, corporate crime, and science writers who can't understand the difference between correlation and causation, I try to be open-minded. And yet this food writer has less sense than God gave a goose about where food comes from.

I'd worked on our relationship, moving through the stages of bafflement, denial, and asking this guy out loud, "Where do you live, the moon?" I knew the answer: he didn't. He was a local fellow writing just for our region of bountiful gardens and farms, doing his best I'm sure. But no one was ever keener on outsourcing the ingredients. The pumpkins of his world all grow in cans, it goes without saying. If it's fresh ingredients you need, you can be sure the combinations he calls for won't inhabit the same continent or season as one another, or you. On this cozy winter day when I was grooving on the snow that stuck in little triangles on my windowpanes, he wanted to talk pesto.

To lively up anything from pasta to chicken, he said, I should think about fresh basil pesto this week. How do I make it? Easy! I should select only the youngest, mildest flavored leaves, bruising them between my fingers to release the oils before dumping them in my blender with olive oil to make a zingy accompaniment to my meal.

Excuse me? The basil leaves of our continent's temperate zones had now been frozen down to their blackened stalks for, oh, let's count: three months. Sometimes at this time of year the grocery has little packages containing approximately six leaves of the stuff (young and mild flavored?) for three bucks. If I hauled a big bag of money out to my car and spent the next two days on icy roads foraging the produce aisles of this and the neighboring counties, I might score enough California-grown basil leaves to whip up a hundred-dollar-a-plate pesto meal by the weekend. Gee, thanks for the swell idea.

Okay, I know, it's a free country, and I'm a grouch. (Just two weeks later this chef took off for other work in a distant city where he remains safe from my beetle-browed scrutiny.) But if Arizona children have to cut out snowflakes in winter, maybe cooking-school students could be held to a similar standard, cutting out construction-paper asparagus in springtime, pumpkins in the fall, basil in summer. Mightn't they even take field trips to farms, four times a year? In our summer garden they'd get a gander at basil bushes growing not as a garnish but a crop. When the leaves begin releasing their fragrance into the dry heat of August, we harvest whole plants by the bushel and make pesto in large batches,

freezing it in pint-sized bags. At farmers' markets it starts showing up by the snippet in June and in bulk over the next two months: fresh, fragrant, and inexpensive enough for nongardeners to put up a winter's supply.

Pesto freezes beautifully. When made in season it costs just a fraction of what the grocery or specialty stores charge for pestos in little jars. It takes very little space when frozen flat in plastic bags, then stacked in the freezer like books on a shelf. A pint bag will thaw in a bowl of warm water in less time than it takes to boil the pasta. Tossed together with some pecans or olives, dried tomatoes, and a grind of Parmesan cheese, it's the best of easy meals. But the time to think of bruising those leaves with our fingers to release the oils would be August. Those of us who don't live in southern California or Florida have to plan ahead, not just for pesto but for local eating in general. That seems obvious. But apparently it isn't, because in public discussions of the subject, the first question that comes up is always the same: "What do you eat in January?"

I wish I could offer high drama, some chilling tales of a family gnawing on the leather uppers of their Birkenstocks. From childhood I vividly recall a saga of a family stranded in their car in the Mojave Desert who survived by eating the

### GETTING IT WHILE YOU CAN

By Camille Kingsolver

When our family first started our local food project, I was daunted. How ironic, I thought: while most parents are harping on their kids to eat more fruits and veggies, my sister and I are being told to give up the juicy pleasure of a fresh peach or pear all winter. I tried to picture how I would get through the months when there are no apples, no plums, and the strawberries of spring seem light-years away. This may sound dramatic, but fruit is my favorite food.

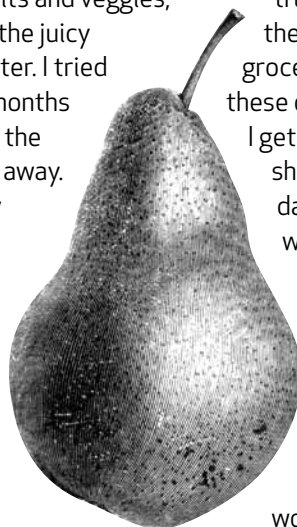
I was forced to get creative. The first step, shopping, is actually easier. When you peruse the farmers' market for fresh produce, the options are clear. You don't miss what's not there, either, like Skittles placed at a third-grader's eye level in the checkout. No wailing kids or annoying tabloids (omigod . . . is Brangelina really over?!). Just wonderful, fresh things to eat. As the seasons change, different fruits and vegetables come and go, so as a shopper you learn a get-it-while-you-can mentality.

The first strawberries showed up at our farmers' market in late spring, on a day when I'd stopped in alone

on my way home from a morning class. When I saw giant boxes of strawberries piled on the tailgate of a farmer's truck, I didn't waste ten seconds asking myself the questions I would mull over in a conventional grocery: "Hmmm, do I really want berries today? Are these overpriced? Are they going to mold the minute I get home?" I power-walked past other meandering shoppers and bought a bucket load. I drove home daydreaming about the creations I could cook up with my loot.

The key to consuming enough produce and reaping maximum nutritional benefits is planning meals around whatever you have.

This presents opportunities to get inventive in the kitchen and try new things, like stuffed zucchini. How many spinach dishes can you have in one week without getting sick of it? When working with fresh ingredients, the answer is, a lot!




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Camille Kingsolver graduated from Duke University and is an active advocate for the local-food movement, speaking to young adults on navigating food choices in a difficult economy. She lives in Asheville, N.C., and grows a vegetable garden in her front yard. This reading was excerpted from *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* (2007).

children's box of Crayolas. I hope in those days crayons were made of something yummy like rendered lard, rather than petroleum. In any case, my childish mind fretted for years about the untold *bathroom* part of the tale. Our family's story pales by comparison. No Chartreuse or Burnt Sienna for us. We just ate ordinary things like pasta with pesto, made ahead.

In the winter we tended more toward carnivory, probably in answer to the body's metabolic craving for warm stews with more fats and oils. Our local meat is always frozen, except in the rare weeks when we've just harvested poultry, so the season doesn't dictate what's available. A meat farmer has to plan in spring for the entire year, starting the Thanksgiving turkeys in April, so that's when the customer needs to order one. But the crop comes in, and finishes, just as vegetables do. When our farmers' market closed for the winter we made sure our freezer was stocked with grass-finished lamp chops and ground beef, crammed in there with our own poultry. And we would now have fresh eggs in every month, thanks to Lily's foresight in raising good winter layers.

People who inhabit the world's colder, darker places have long relied on lots of cold-water ocean fish in their diets. Research on this subject has cracked open one more case of humans knowing how to be a sensible animal, before Little Debbie got hold of our brains. Several cross-cultural studies (published in *Lancet* and the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, among others) have shown lower rates of depression and bipolar disorder in populations consuming more seafood; neurological studies reveal that it's the omega-3 fatty acids in ocean fish that specifically combat the blues. These compounds (also important to cardiovascular health) accumulate in the bodies of predators whose food chains are founded on plankton or grass — like tuna and salmon. And like humans used to be, before our food animals all went over to indoor dining. Joseph Hibbeln, M.D., of the National Institutes of Health, points out that in most modern Western diets "we eat grossly fewer omega-3 fatty acids now. We also know that rates of depression have radically increased, by perhaps a hundred-fold."

In the long, dark evenings of January I had been hankering to follow those particular doctor's orders. We badly missed one of our imported former mainstays: wild-caught Alaskan salmon. We'd found no local sources for fish. Streams in our region are swimming with trout, but the only trout in our restaurants were the flying kind, we'd discovered, shipped on ice from Idaho. And we weren't going to go ice fishing. But instead of plankton eaters our local food chain had grass eaters: pasture-finished beef has omega-3 levels up to six times higher than CAFO beef; that and Lily's egg yolks would get us through. Steven threw extra flax seeds (also rich in Omega-3s) into his loaves of bread, to keep the

troops happy.

Legumes were one of our mainstays. Our favorite meal for snow days starts with a pot of beans simmering all afternoon on the woodstove, warming the kitchen while it cooks. An hour before dinnertime I sauté a skillet of chopped onions and peppers until they sweetly melt; living half my life in the Southwest won me over to starting chili with a *sofrito*. Apart from that, my Kentucky chili recipe stands firm: to the bean pot I add the sautéed onions and peppers, two jars of canned tomatoes, a handful of dried spicy chilies, bay leaves, and a handful of elbow macaroni. (The macaroni is not negotiable.)

Winter is also the best time for baking: fruit pies and cobblers, savory vegetable pies, spicy zucchini breads, shepherd's pies covered with a lightly browned crust of mashed potatoes. The hot oven is more welcome now than in summertime, and it recaptures the fruits and vegetables we put away in season. We freeze grated zucchini, sliced apples, and other fillings in the amounts required by our pie and bread recipes.

So many options, and still that omnipresent question about what local fare one could possibly eat in January. I do understand the concern. Healthier eating generally begins with taking one giant step back from the processed-foods aisle. Thus, the ubiquitous foodie presumptions about fresh-is-good, frozen-is bad, and salads every day. I've enjoyed that program myself, marking it as progress from the tinned green beans and fruit cocktail of my childhood era when produce aisles didn't have so much of everything all the time.

While declining to return to the canned-pear-half-with-cottage-cheese cookery I learned in high school Home Ec, I've reconsidered some of my presumptions. Getting over the frozen-food snobbery is important. The broccoli and greens from our freezer stand in just fine for fresh salads, not just nutritionally but aesthetically. I think creatively in winter about using summer when the ingredients were rolling us over. Chard and kale are champion year-round producers (ours grow through the snow), and will likely show up in any farmers' market that's open in winter. We use fresh kale in soups, steamed chard leaves for wrapping dolmades, sautéed chard in omelets.

Another of our cold-eater saviors is winter squash, a vegetable that doesn't get enough respect. They're rich in beta-carotenes, tasty, versatile, and keep their youth as mysteriously as movie stars. We grow yellow-fleshed hubbards, orange butternuts, green striped Bush Delicata, and an auburn French beauty called a *potimarron* that tastes like roasted chestnuts. I arranged an autumnal pile of these in a big wooden bread bowl in October, as a seasonal decoration, and then forgot to admire them after a while. I was startled to realize they still looked great in January. We would finally use the last one in April. I've become a tad

obsessive about collecting winter squash recipes, believing secretly that our family could live on them indefinitely if the world as we know it should end. My favorite so far is white beans with thyme served in a baked hubbard-squash half. It's an easy meal, impressive enough for company.

With stuff like this around, who needs iceberg lettuce? Occasionally we get winter mesclun from farming friends with greenhouses, and I have grown spinach under a cold frame. But normal greens season is spring. I'm not sure how lettuce specifically finagled its way, in so many households, from special-guest status to live-in. I tend to forget about it for the duration. At a January potluck or dinner party I'll be taken by surprise when a friend casually suggests, "Bring a green salad." I'll bring an erstwhile salad of steamed chard with antipasto tomatoes, crumbled goat cheese, and balsamic vinegar. Or else everybody's secret favorite: deviled eggs.

In our first year of conscious locavory (locivory?) we encountered a lot of things we hadn't expected: the truth about turkey sex life; the recidivism rate of raccoon corn burglars; the size attained by a zucchini left unattended for twenty-four hours. But our biggest surprise was January: it wasn't all that hard. Our winter kitchen was more relaxed, by far, than our summer slaughterhouse-and-cannery. November brought the season of our Thanksgiving for more reasons than one. The hard work was over. I'd always done some canning and freezing, but this year we'd lain in a larder like never before, driven by our pledge. Now we could sit back and rest on our basils.

"Driven" is putting it mildly, I confess. Scratch the surface of any mother and you'll find Scarlett O'Hara camping on that gnarly beet she'd yanked out of the ground. "I'll never go hungry again" seems to be the DNA-encoded rallying cry for many of us who never went hungry in the first place. When my family headed into winter months my instincts took over, abetted by the Indian Lore books I'd read in childhood, which all noted that the word for February in Cherokee (and every other known native tongue) was "Hungry Month."

After the farmer's market and our garden both closed for the season, I took an inventory of our pantry. During our industrious summer we'd canned over forty jars of tomatoes, tomato-based sauces, and salsa. We'd also put up that many jars of pickles, jam, and fruit juice, and another

fifty or so quarts of dried vegetables, mostly tomatoes but also soup beans, peppers, okra, squash, root vegetables, and herbs. In pint-sized freezer boxes we'd frozen broccoli, beans, squash, corn, pesto, peas, roasted tomatoes, smoked eggplants, fire-roasted peppers, cherries, peaches, strawberries, and blueberries. In large ziplock

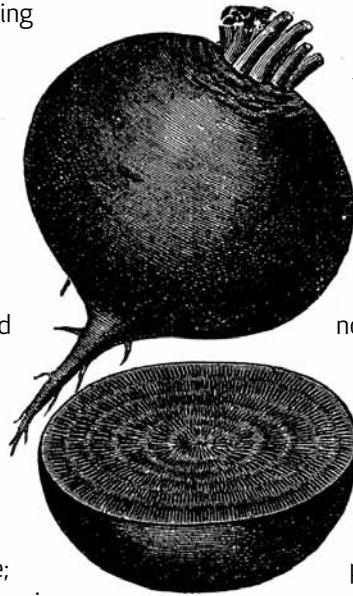
bags we froze quantities of our favorite snack food, whole edamame, which Lily knows how to thaw in the microwave, salt, and pop from the pod straight down the hatch. I do realize I'm lucky to have kids who prefer steamed soybeans to Twinkies. But about 20 million mothers in Japan have kids like that too, so it's not a bolt out of the blue.

Our formerly feisty chickens and turkeys now lay in quiet meditation (legs-up pose) in the chest freezer. Our onions and garlic hung like Rapunzel's braids from the mantel behind the kitchen woodstove. In the mudroom and root cellar we had three bushels of potatoes, another two of winter squash, plus beets, carrots, melons, and cabbages. A pyramid of blue-green and orange pumpkins was stacked near the back door. One shelf in the pantry held small, alphabetized jars of seeds, saved for starting over — assuming spring found us able-bodied and inclined to do this again.

That's the long and short of it: what I did last summer. Most evenings and a lot of weekends from mid-August to mid-September were occupied with cutting, drying, and canning. We'd worked like wage laborers on double shift while our friends were going to the beach for the summer's last hurrah, and retrospectively that looks like a bum deal even to me. But we had taken a vacation in June, wedged between the important dates of Cherries Fall and the First of Tomato. Next summer maybe we'd go to the beach. But right now, looking at all these jars in the pantry gave me a happy contented feeling, as if I had roots growing right through the soles of my shoes into the dirt of our farm.

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This reading was excerpted from *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* (2007), winner of the James Beard Award. Barbara Kingsolver has written thirteen books and is a Pulitzer Prize finalist, a recipient of the National Humanities Medal, and was named one of the most important writers of the 20th Century by *Writers Digest*. She lives with her family on a farm in southwestern Virginia where they raise free-range chickens, turkeys, Icelandic sheep, and an enormous vegetable garden.



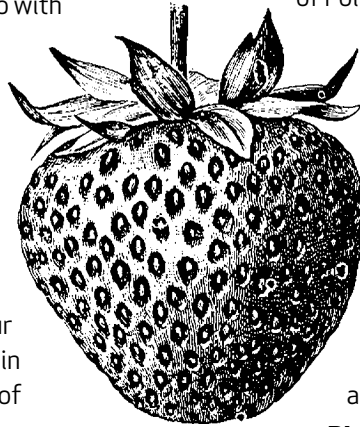


## GETTING NUTRITION SEASONALLY

Compiled by Erik Horngren

You don't have to eat foods that have traveled halfway across the world, or even halfway across the country, to meet your nutritional needs. Here are 13 local/seasonal foods that can keep your diet balanced and healthy year round.

- **Carrots:** One raw, medium sized carrot can provide 204% of your USDA daily recommended dosage of vitamin A and can also work as an anti-inflammatory.
- **Potatoes:** One large, white baked potato with the skin on can provide 25% of your daily fiber, 63% of your daily vitamin C, 13% of your daily protein, 23% of daily Niacin, 32% of vitamin B6, 28% of Folate, 20% of Magnesium, 22% of Phosphorous, 46% of Potassium, 19% of Copper, and 28% of Manganese.
- **Lettuce:** One cup of raw, shredded romaine lettuce can provide 82% of your daily vitamin A, 60% of your daily vitamin K, 19% of your daily vitamin C, and 16% of your daily Folate.
- **Swiss chard:** One cup of chopped and boiled Swiss chard can provide 214% of your daily vitamin A, 716% of vitamin K, 53% of vitamin C, 17% of vitamin E, 15% of daily fiber, 22% of Iron, 38% of Magnesium, 27% of Potassium, 29% of Manganese, and 10% of Calcium.
- **Kale:** One cup of chopped and boiled kale can provide 1328% of your daily vitamin K, 354% of daily vitamin A, 89% of vitamin C, 27% of manganese, 10% of daily fiber. It is also a strong anti-inflammatory
- **Apples:** One raw, medium-sized apple can provide 17% of your daily fiber and 14% of your daily vitamin C.
- **Spinach:** One cup of boiled spinach can provide you with 377% of your daily vitamin A, 1111% of your daily vitamin K, 29% of daily vitamin C, 19% of daily vitamin E, 22% of daily vitamin B6, 66% of daily Folate, 84% of daily Manganese, 17% of daily fiber, 25% of Riboflavin, 36% of Iron, 24% of Calcium, 11% of Protein, 39% of Magnesium, 24% of Potassium, 16% of Copper, and has 166 mg of Omega-3 fatty acids. No wonder Popeye relied so heavily on this wonder food!
- **Peaches:** One medium-sized peach can provide you with 17% of your daily vitamin C and 10% of your daily vitamin A.



- **Broccoli:** One cup of chopped and boiled broccoli can provide you with 20% of your daily fiber, 48% of daily vitamin A, 168% of daily vitamin C, 42% of daily Folate, 276% of vitamin K, 14% of Potassium, 16% of Manganese, and 185 mg of Omega-3 fatty acids.
- **Peppers:** One cup of raw red pepper can provide you with 317% of your daily vitamin C, 93% of your daily vitamin A, 13% of daily fiber, 22% of vitamin B6, 17% of Folate, and 12% of vitamin E.
- **Strawberries:** One cup of raw strawberries can provide you with 149% of your daily vitamin C, 12% of your daily fiber, 29% of Manganese, and 100 mg of Omega-3 fatty acids.
- **Raspberries:** One cup of raw raspberries can provide you with 54% of your daily vitamin C, 32% of daily fiber, 12% of daily vitamin K, 41% of daily Manganese, and 155 mg of Omega-3 fatty acids.
- **Blueberries:** One cup of raw blueberries can provide you with 36% of your daily vitamin K, 24% of your daily vitamin C, 14% of daily fiber, 25% of daily Manganese, and 86 mg of Omega-3 fatty acids.

Here's how some popular food choices stack up to local and seasonal varieties when it comes to vitamins and minerals:

- An average banana contains 12% of your daily Potassium, far less than that available in potatoes, spinach, or Swiss chard.
- An average orange contains 188% of your daily vitamin C. Peppers, broccoli, and strawberries can all provide you with just as much per serving.
- A typical cup of milk contains 29% of your daily calcium. That's just slightly more than a serving of spinach provides.

For more information about local and seasonal foods in your area visit:

[www.nwei.org/hungryforchange/resources](http://www.nwei.org/hungryforchange/resources)



## THE ECOLOGY OF FOOD

By Vanessa Barrington

You're standing in the cereal, snack, drink, or dairy aisle and the packages are screaming their claims at you: "high fiber," "low fat," "contains probiotics," "now with added soy protein."

Welcome to the world of functional foods — foods that claim to have health promoting or disease-preventing properties beyond the basic function of supplying nutrients.

Healthy food doesn't exist in a vacuum. The idea that we can take a nutrient that has been proven in one study to lower cholesterol, increase energy, or repair cells, and then simply add it to a processed food to give that food a healthier profile is faulty. It's an illustration of our societal belief that every problem can be solved and there is a formula to doing so. If you don't believe we in this society share such a belief, take a walk through the self-help section in any bookstore and look at the book titles.

It would be simple to advise not buying packaged food, and indeed, I have said that before. But ultimately, I think we need to look at food and nutrition ecologically. Each nutrient is part of a functional system and each food that we ingest is a part of the body's functional system. Beyond that, the food we eat is also part of our larger socio-economic and cultural system around food.

When I shop for food I think a lot about the different

levels of nourishment in it. Does it nourish my heart, my soul? Does it nourish my pleasure centers by tasting good? Does it nourish the relationships I have with the people I'm eating with? Does it nourish the environment, or cause harm? Does it nourish the people who produce it, or exploit them?

To take an ecological view of food is to understand that the physical, cultural, social, environmental, and economic results of ingesting a food or nutrient cannot be predicted or understood in isolation. Foods interact with one another, in the body, around the table, and in society — all of which contribute to their overall ability to nourish. None of this can be described by a marketing claim.

Next time you're shopping, instead of thinking about whether the food in your cart is going to provide you with the proper balance of Omega-3s and 6s, sufficient antioxidants to prevent cancer, or enough fiber to lower your cholesterol, think about how it will taste, who you will eat it with, how you will prepare it, where it came from, who produced it and if it's in season. In short, think about whether that food is the right thing for you to eat right now.

The marketing of functional foods is not just annoying because it takes advantage of consumer confusion and fear around nutrition. It's also dangerous because it assumes we don't have our own holistic understanding of food and, in the end, dis-empowers us to make our own decisions about what to eat.

When you see the following statements or ingredients on a package of food, chances are what you're buying isn't nutrition but marketing:

**Antioxidants**

**Probiotics**

**Vitamins**

**Fiber**

**Soy protein**

**DHA**

**Green Tea (unless the product is tea)**

**Healthy**

**Reduces cholesterol**

**Clinically proven**

**Heart healthy**

**Digestive health**

This June 2011 article originally appeared in EcoSalon's *The Green Plate*, Vanessa Barrington's weekly column on food politics and social justice. Barrington is a cooking teacher, food stylist, editor, and recipe developer. She is the author of *DIY Delicious* and co-author of *Heirloom Beans*, both filled with mouth-watering recipes.

"I'd like to teach the world to eat, in perfect harmony."

— MIKE MERCER



## **MOST GOOD, LEAST HARM: A SIMPLE PRINCIPLE FOR A BETTER WORLD AND MEANINGFUL LIFE**

By Zoe Weil

Food choices are among the most personal decisions we make, and discussions about diet are among the most sensitive. Many of us have very strong opinions about food that stem from family traditions, religion, culture, what we enjoy eating, what we have been taught and what we believe about nutrition, our body image, how certain foods make us feel emotionally and physically, and, for some people, our ethics.

I would venture to guess that, for most people, ethics are not a primary issue in their dietary choices. Most of us eat what we were raised to eat, as well as what our culture promotes, advertises, and sells. You may eat few plantains (a relative of the banana) because you never ate plantains growing up, do not know how to cook and prepare them, and do not even know where to buy one. If a plantain salad (similar to potato salad) were prepared for you at a friend's house, and if you liked it, you might add plantains to your diet. But you probably wouldn't question the ethics about eating plantains. We just do not often ask moral questions about our food.

Yet, food choices are among the most important in the quest for doing the most good and the least harm. Modern agricultural practices are often destructive, oppressive, cruel, and, for the most part, hidden. Our individual food choices affect our health, the environment, other people, and other species. Perhaps more than any other choice we make in our daily lives, diet has the most far reaching consequences.

If, for example, we were to make connections between a typical food choice and its myriad effects, what might we find? Let's look at a fast food hamburger.

The fast food burger is high in fat, salt, cholesterol, and calories, and usually contains pesticides, hormones, and drug residues. Sometimes it contains dangerous

(occasionally fatal) bacteria. Eating these burgers in quantity may lead to weight gain, obesity, high blood pressure, strokes, heart disease, various cancers, impotence, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, and other health problems.

Such health problems are commonplace in the United States, contributing to health care costs that are skyrocketing, a growing percentage of people without health insurance, increased taxes to pay for the uninsured, fewer raises at work because employer health care costs are gobbling up profits, and more.

Scientists are at work trying to cure many of these largely preventable diseases, to perfect surgical procedures, and to produce new drugs to counteract many of our self-created health problems. In the process, they are killing millions of animals in laboratories. Rabbits, birds, dogs, cats, mice, cows, pigs, sheep, and primates (among others) are drugged, made ill, genetically engineered, cut open, and finally killed when the experiments are over. Meanwhile, medical students entering the profession discover few courses on preventive medicine or nutrition. In a telling Philadelphia Inquirer article, the reporter pointed out that preventive medicine doesn't pay back the huge student loans of medical students because people stay healthier and require less medical care.

The fast food hamburger is part of a much larger system that includes the suffering and death of cows and calves, enormous water pollution, significant fossil fuel use, soil erosion, wasted grain, fresh water depletion, rainforest destruction, loss of biodiversity, and greenhouse gas production.

People are exploited in this process as well. Slaughterhouse workers suffer the highest injury rates of any profession in the United States. Many of these employees are illegal immigrants who have fled their own country's poverty and oppression, and have no health insurance. If they seek medical attention for their injuries — which they may or may not, given their illegal status — they have little money to pay for it.

And the fast food nation (soon to be world) that we have created has contributed to suburban sprawl, more car use (and hence more pollution and climate-altering gases in the air), more traffic accidents, more strip malls, fewer downtown centers, and less community.

And so on.

I've only just touched the surface of the fast food hamburger, not mentioning many of the issues raised in Eric Schlosser's excellent book, *Fast Food Nation*, or the enlightening film, *Super Size Me*. Yet, even in an entire book on the subject of fast food, Schlosser himself fails to mention several of the connections above, making us realize just how many connections there are with something as simple as a burger. When we unlock the door to the

most common of our food choices, we see countless interconnected passageways leading to evermore doors. If we view the fast food hamburger in isolation, as a dietary preference or convenience food and nothing more, then we fail to recognize the connections between our choice and its many effects. But when we open the doors of this labyrinth, we create the possibility for not only making better food choices, but also solving problems in many of the various “rooms” that are all connected to one another.

There is no single diet that is the most sustainable and humane. Depending upon where you live, and your climate and terrain, a MOGO (most good) diet will include a variety of factors. But in general, eating organic and seasonal foods that are produced locally, and a primarily plant-based, whole foods diet, does more good and less harm to you, animals, and the environment than eating animal-based products, processed foods, and pesticide-sprayed (i.e. conventional) produce that has been transported long distances.

When we sit down to eat, unless we have grown, raised, and killed the food in front of us, there is much we do not know. And until we learn about the effects of our food choices, we cannot make the best dietary decisions. Unfortunately, if we are eating the typical American diet, the chances are high that we’re consuming foods that contribute to significant environmental destruction, disenfranchisement of farmers, and, in the case of animal-based foods, cruelty.

The issue of animal cruelty in agriculture is rarely discussed in the media. Diet articles and talk shows generally revolve around weight loss or health. Some recent books and films have thankfully begun to explore social justice and environmental issues regarding modern food production, but there is little information in the mainstream media about the animals who wind up on our plates. Thus, the image that most of us have of animals on the farm is from an era that has long since passed. Most still imagine hens pecking outdoors and sitting in the nest boxes to lay their eggs. We still envision pigs in barnyards, rolling around in the cool mud, and cows spending their lives grazing on wide, open fields. But sadly, for over 95 percent of the animals consumed in the United States, such images have nothing at all to do with reality.

I have visited factory farms — those modern facilities that supply the vast majority of meat, dairy products, and eggs to consumers — and I’ve been shocked by what I have seen, smelled, and heard. Visiting one of the largest egg-producing factories on the East Coast, I saw hundreds of thousands of hens crammed into cages so small they were unable to stretch a wing. I listened to the cries of the birds that sounded like screaming. I choked on the fumes from their accumulated wastes, which they had to breathe twenty-four hours a day for the approximately year-long duration of their lives. This facility was not only perfectly

legal, but also represented the norm for modern commercial egg production.

When I arrived with a group of students for a tour of this particular facility, our guide, a friendly and obviously caring man, proudly showed off this factory that was producing millions of eggs for consumers from Maryland to Maine. But when one of the students asked him if we could see the birds, his face fell.

“Yes, but it’s not as nice,” he responded.

He did not seem to like the cruelty inherent in the system either.

The birds’ beaks had all been sliced in half, without anesthesia, to prevent them from killing each other under such extreme confinement and stress; but even their deformed beaks could do damage, and many of the chickens had open, oozing sores. When the tour brought us to the pharmaceutical room and we learned about the drugs fed to sick animals, we asked how they were able to treat just the sick ones. Clearly, we had asked a silly question: all the birds were routinely fed antibiotics and other drugs in their feed. That’s what kept them alive under these conditions.

I have also brought students to see a confinement veal operation, those infamous factories where male calves of dairy cows are chained at the neck in tiny stalls, unable to take more than one step forward or backward. If we wish to make MOGO food choices, it’s important to know the reality behind what we eat, and, for example, inquire about the conditions under which these poor calves live before they are killed at four months old, anemic to keep their flesh pale, with atrophied muscles to keep their flesh tender.

Pigs fare no better than these calves, nor are turkeys exempt from de-beaking and confinement. Dairy cows must endure the sorrow of their young taken away at a day old, and some bellow out for days when, for all intents and purposes, their newborns are kidnapped. Surely, the fact that half of U.S. dairy cows wind up suffering from mastitis, a painful udder infection, speaks to a system gone awry.

And what about fish? While fish are often touted as health food, the carnivorous fishes humans consume



concentrate the toxins and pollutants that we dump into our waterways up the food chain, making their flesh repositories of mercury, PCBs, and other poisonous substances. Regulatory agencies advise women of childbearing years, as well as children, to eat minimal amounts of fish, lest they consume toxic levels of these pollutants. The trend toward aquaculture (fish “farming”) often exacerbates this problem, with “farm”-raised fishes being some of the most unhealthy to eat, and their wastes contaminating and polluting bays.

Even if the flesh of fishes were not so polluted, there are ethical considerations involved in their consumption as well. The oceans are literally being strip-mined, with mile-long nets scouring the seas and killing everything in their path — including about a thousand marine mammals per day, by some estimates, along with millions of non-target sea animals. Aquaculture does not prevent overfishing since, on average, three pounds of wild fish are caught and fed to the penned fish in order to produce every one pound that is “farm” raised, depleting species that had previously been ignored by the industry. One fishery after another is collapsing, often permanently. And what is rarely discussed or considered is the suffering the fish endure — slow death by suffocation or long-line hooks that drag fishes by their sensitive mouths for hours before they are killed. An estimated two billion long-line hooks are set worldwide each year, each line baited with up to ten thousand hooks. Not only do long-lines kill their intended prey (primarily tuna and swordfish), but also approximately forty thousand sea turtles, three hundred thousand sea birds, and millions of sharks annually.

I grew up eating a fairly typical “American” diet of the 1960s and 1970s. Breakfast was usually some sugary cereal or glazed donuts with a glass of Tropicana orange juice. Lunch was whatever the cafeteria served up at school — creamed tuna, shepherd’s pie, hot dogs and hamburgers, and cake or pie for dessert. Dinner was always some form of meat, starch, canned or frozen vegetables, and a salad, accompanied by a glass of milk that I was required to drink. Snacks and desserts included candy, Doritos, Sara Lee and Entenmann’s cakes, sugary yogurt, soda, and ice cream. I never ate foods that had more than a few spices, whole grain bread or whole wheat pasta, and certainly no soy products.

In 1981, I decided not to eat mammals and birds anymore. I had always loved animals, and I was vaguely aware of the suffering they underwent in modern agriculture. When I realized that there was no significant difference between my dog (whom I would never eat) and a cow, pig, chicken, turkey, or sheep, I could not justify my food choices to myself anymore. I really didn’t want to participate in causing pain, fear, and death to sentient beings if I did not have to. This choice did not present much of a culinary challenge, but

nine years later, having learned about the suffering of dairy cows and their calf (veal) offspring, hens in the egg industry, and marine animals killed by the billions, I decided to stop eating dairy products, eggs, and sea animals to become a complete vegetarian (vegan). This necessitated overhauling my food choices. Soy, almond, and rice milk replaced cow’s milk; a variety of ethnic dishes replaced typical American fare; whole grains replaced white flour and white rice; tofu and tempeh (a fermented soy food) became staples; fresh fruits and vegetables replaced canned and frozen foods; and my taste buds happily adjusted. Slowly but surely, I stopped enjoying highly processed foods and preferred whole foods; I stopped missing meat and cheese, and started craving the risottos or whole wheat pasta dishes I had learned to prepare. I came to love the sweetness of steamed kale.

I tell you these stories about myself with the hope that they will inspire you to question your assumptions about food.

I am not trying to suggest that my particular diet is the most likely to bring inner peace, or be the most sustainable, healthy, and humane for everyone. It represents my own effort to make food choices that do the most good and the least harm to myself, animals, the environment, and other people. You will need to determine your own MOGO diet. The challenge is not to let your taste buds, food fads, trends, advertising, and mainstream diets stand in the way of your willingness to learn and choose deliberately. If you decide to modify your food choices with the MOGO principle in mind, you may face some initial challenges, but if you try several different dishes, you are likely to find a few that you and everyone in your household enjoy.

If you begin to make MOGO food choices, you will likely discover some delightful personal benefits. You may come down with fewer colds and illnesses because your immune system will be supported by vitamins and minerals often absent in processed and fast food; and because your body will not be so stressed by excessive exposure to toxins, drug residues, hormones, and pesticides that become concentrated in animal flesh. You may also lose excess weight because you will probably be consuming fewer calories if you choose a healthier, more humane diet than is the norm in the United States and increasingly in other industrialized countries. Choosing foods with the goal of doing the most good and the least harm leads not only to peaceful eating, but also to better health. What is best for others turns out to be best for us.

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Zoe Weil is the co-founder and president of the Institute for Humane Education (IHE). A humane educator since 1985, Zoe has been giving people the tools to make humane and sustainable choices and solve entrenched global challenges through her classes, workshops, and training programs. Her book *Most Good, Least Harm* (2009) is a Silver Winner for the 2010 Nautilus Book Awards.



## PUTTING DOWN ROOTS

By Scott Dodd

“Is there such a thing as onion grass?” I asked my father over the phone. “Because if there is, I think I’ve got an awful lot of it!” It was mid-March, and a deluge of cold rain had finally cleared my new backyard of the snow, ice, and slush that had covered it since before Christmas.

All through this especially harsh North Jersey winter — our first in the little gray house with the green shutters — I had been eyeing a particular spot near the back porch to plant a vegetable garden with my young son. It got plenty of sunlight, and the outdoor spigot was close enough that I wouldn’t have to drag a hose across the yard every day to keep it watered.

This weekend had provided my first chance to sink a shovel into the dark, moist dirt and begin tilling. But I’d quickly found myself at war with a foul-smelling plant with bright green stalks and bulbous roots that had laid claim to the same swath where I intended to sink tomato plants and carrot seeds. The gardening books that I’d curled up with on cold winter nights called this “getting to know your soil.”

I was encouraged by the fact that my chosen plot clearly supported life (the dozing earthworms I’d disturbed also seemed like a good sign), but I was starting to feel a little bad about evicting the current occupants, noxious-smelling as most of them were. After all, my wife and I had bought this house only the previous summer, and I knew that the prior owner had used this same spot to plant flowers and ornamental herbs. As I attacked the onion grass and encountered the thick roots of other plants waiting to spring from the earth, I felt a mild pang of regret. Who was I, the new guy, to say they had to go, when clearly they had such a hold on the place?

Still, I kept digging. I was determined to take up vegetable gardening, in part to establish what the more philosophical of my books called a “connection to the earth.” But I was also seeking a connection to my past and, I hoped, to my future as a husband, father, property owner, and all-around responsible adult. My growing sense of putting down roots — my feeling that this house represented not a temporary stopping point but a long-term relationship — was something novel for me. As a kid I’d moved with my family every few years, my father’s job taking us to places as varied as New Orleans, Tulsa, and Pittsburgh, where my parents finally settled. It wasn’t until college that I spent four straight years in the same school, and I can’t picture what any of my many bedrooms looked like in all those different houses.

But wherever we went, Dad would always pick out a spot in the backyard to plant his vegetables. It was one of the few constants and comforts in a childhood dogged by too many intimidating lunch tables in too many new school cafeterias. Now, with a house and family of my own, I wanted to build memories with my son, Henry — who turned two in early March — like the ones I have of helping out my dad. I wanted to trace furrows in the dirt together and drop in seeds; to keep out pernicious weeds and trespassing rabbits; to cheer when that first tiny green tomato appeared on the vine and wait impatiently for it to turn crimson and ready to pluck.

During our phone chat, my dad told me that his gardens had served as a source of relaxation over the years, a welcome break from the high stress of the office. But the joy of raising his own food had also given him a special tie to the earth, one that sitting at a desk all day never could. Now that I was the one with the job and the kid and the mortgage payments and the leaky basement, I was hoping for the same. And I was hoping my own son would get a sense of it, too.

Even if the joy-in-growing thing didn’t speak to him right away, I was pretty sure the food would. When I was a kid, it was all my parents could do to get me to eat vegetables, but I was crazy over the tomatoes that came right out of the garden. One of my favorite late-summer dinners was — and still is — a BLT sandwich. Half the time we’d eat them without even bothering with the B or the L. As long as the tomatoes were sweet and juicy, and the toast sufficiently dressed with mayo and salt, we were happy with them just like that. My dad’s fresh corn on the cob wasn’t half bad, either.

One of the books I’d read over winter informed me that vegetable gardens have declined in popularity over the past few decades, passed over for ornamental lawns and flower beds. Curious about the shift, I called Bruce Butterfield, research director for the National Gardening Association, who has tracked interest in food gardening since 1978. While it’s true that vegetable gardening had been on the wane for

a while, he said, that's beginning to change: 2009 showed one of the biggest upticks he's seen in his career. The annual surveys commissioned by Butterfield indicated that 43 million U.S. households planned to grow some of their own food in 2009, up 19 percent from the previous year. The numbers stayed pretty much the same in 2010.

You might recall that 2009 was the year Michelle Obama tilled the South Lawn to plant her own vegetable garden — the first at the White House since Eleanor Roosevelt's, during World War II — and I wondered if the growing cultural interest in healthy eating, fighting obesity, and eating local had anything to do with Butterfield's rebounding numbers. He said all of those factors probably helped, as did that perennial style shaper: the economy. When it's good, people worry about how their grass looks. When it's bad, they start thinking about how they can use their yards to help feed their kids. There's also a psychological aspect. When the rest of the world feels out of control, Butterfield said, "people at least want to feel that they can control what happens in their own backyard."

Unfortunately, the more I worked on my garden plans, the less in control I felt. Despite my fond childhood memories, it had been more than two decades since I'd lived in a house with a yard. How was I supposed to deal with all those acorns embedded in the grass? Or the weeds and ivy choking the flower beds? I went back to my books, then ordered a few seed catalogs and debated whether to buy that soil-testing kit I'd seen at Home Depot. My reading told me that proper planning is essential to making sure that plants get enough space, nutrients, and sunlight to prosper. So one day, looking nothing like a gardener, I trudged into the backyard armed with graph paper, a mechanical pencil, and a tape measure. The plot was six feet by ten, I dutifully recorded. There were 108 inches from the knotted stump to the paving stone, and 16 inches from the corner of the back porch to the rose bushes. As April crept closer and spring showed little sign of arriving, I sketched out dozens of possible configurations for my rows, planting on paper what

the cold soil wasn't yet ready to receive.

A week after the conversation with my dad, I could wait no longer. I grabbed my seed starter kit and interrupted Henry at his train table. Did he want to come out on the porch and help me plant? I'd been telling him about my garden plans all winter, even describing those bacon- and lettuceless sandwiches to get him interested, but I don't think he had any clue what I was talking about. How could he? This was my first chance to show him. Snug in our fleece hoodies, we sat side by side with the kit before us on the patio table. "Look," I told him, pulling a white speck from the seed packet, "this is a tomato seed." His brown eyes grew wide as I pushed it deep into the wet soil and out of sight. "And these are peppers." I showed him the slightly larger, yellowish seeds. He tried to grab some and knocked them off the table, so I put a few in my palm and let him pluck at them one by one. "Dirty," he said, following my lead and pushing them into the soil. "That's right," I replied. "We're getting our hands dirty!"

"How are you guys doing?" my wife asked as she came through the door to check on our progress.

"Tell Mommy what we're planting," I said.

Henry pointed to the big red tomato pictured on the packet and confidently proclaimed: "Apple."

Okay, so maybe I hadn't yet passed on any profound wisdom to my son. But as I'd learned from my father all those years ago, these things take time. Right at that moment, poking seeds into the starter soil, I couldn't have cared less if I ever got anything to sprout from my meticulously measured plot. I knew I was planting more important seeds out there on the back porch of our new home, and even if Henry couldn't yet tell a Red Delicious from a Roma, I could already feel them taking root.

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This article originally appeared in the Summer 2011 edition of *OnEarth Magazine*. Scott Dodd is the editor of OnEarth.org and has more than 15 years of experience in newspapers, magazines, and digital media. He is an adjunct professor at Columbia University, where he earned his master's degree in science writing.

"Eating with the fullest pleasure — pleasure, that is, that does not depend on ignorance — is perhaps the profoundest enactment of our connection with the world. In this pleasure we experience and celebrate our dependence and our gratitude, for we are living from mystery, from creatures we did not make and powers we cannot comprehend."

— WENDELL BERRY

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