



Eating Locally, Seasonally, and Sustainably

There are many benefits to eating locally, seasonally, and sustainably, but what do those terms mean? Eating **locally** means eating foods that are grown in your city, state, or region—or maybe in your own backyard. Eating **seasonally** means eating foods that are grown at the same time of the year that you eat them. By doing both of these things, you are eating **sustainably**, meaning that the impact of your food choices on the environment is minimal. Some benefits of eating sustainably are discussed below.

Eating a Wide Variety of Fresh, Delicious Foods is Good for Your Health

One benefit of eating locally and seasonally is that you are more likely to eat a broad variety of foods, some of which are unique to your city, state, or region. Eating these foods results in a greater diversity of phytonutrients, which are vital for cellular health and chronic disease prevention.

It's a lot easier to eat seasonally when you're also eating locally, because less time is spent getting the food from the farm to your plate. The less the food has to travel to reach you, the fresher it will be, and the more vitamins and nutrients your food will retain. When you eat food that's in season, you'll notice that it's much more flavorful than out-of-season foods. Imagine the color and taste of a fresh summer tomato, and contrast it to that of a tomato purchased in the winter. No contest, the summer tomato is far better, and likely less expensive.

Eating Sustainably Saves Money

One of the most surprising benefits of eating sustainably is that it can save you money. When you grow your own food, or buy direct from farmers, you avoid incurring the costs associated with transporting the food. Also, food that's in season is usually in high supply, which means that grocery stores have a relatively short window of time in which to sell a lot of produce before it spoils. For this reason, in-season produce can usually be found on sale, or priced very reasonably—even at high-end grocery chains and farmer's markets. Growing your own food is even less expensive, and you can reserve a portion of your bounty for the later months by freezing or preserving what you can't use in-season.

By comparison, produce sold out of season is usually picked before it's ripe in order to survive the trip to your local grocery store from wherever in the world it was grown. Some out-of-season foods are also frozen before ripening, and thawed at the grocery store as they are needed in later months. The extra costs associated with transportation and refrigeration of out-of-season foods is passed on to the consumer. By eating locally and seasonally, you avoid these extra costs.

Support Your Local Economy and the Environment

Eating sustainably also allows you to put your hard-earned money back into your local economy. By shopping at your area farmers' market or food co-op, or buying direct from local farms, you are putting more of your money back into the hands of the people in your community who are growing your food.

Another way to support local farms is to participate in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), which is a growing trend that allows consumers and farmers to share the risks and benefits of growing food. In the CSA model, members or "shareholders" pay a fee at the beginning of the growing season to meet a farm's operating expenses for the upcoming season. In return, members receive a portion of the farm's produce each week. This method also encourages more ecologically-sound farming practices, minimizes food waste (by producing just the amount of food members need), and allows members to help plan and harvest crops. Many farms host field days, produce newsletters, and hold workshops that educate members about sustainable farming and healthy food choices.

