

Buy Local - It's Just That Simple
By: Linda K. Schneider

As you try to conserve gasoline in our current gasoline crisis, consider shopping at your local farmers' markets. With only two months left in this season, September and October are the biggest produce months of the year. You can stock up for winter just like squirrels. Buy carrots, potatoes and onions by the case. Or order your organic Thanksgiving Turkey. Save fuel bills, grocery bills and trips to the grocery store.

You will find a variety of local produce and hand made craft items. Some surprises are in store for you. Start thinking holiday shopping. Hand crafted items make wonderful gifts. The holidays are going to come if you are ready or not, so why not be ready this year!?!

Last week, the surprise for me, was a massage. A local massage therapist was exhibiting his craft and offering small sample massages. That was unique!

Typically found at farmers' markets are: tomatoes, plants, meat, jellies and jams, crafts, wool, eggs, herbs and spices, flowers, berries, baked goods, jewelry, vegetables and fruits. Many have musicians to entertain. However, this simply stated list does not give you the full array of color, sights, smells and sounds that you will enjoy. Just to make you drool...I've been picking up a home made apple sauce cake with Vermont maple frosting, to die for!

Plan to spend a percentage of your food budget at the local farmers' markets. Make this trip part of your weekly routine for shopping. Do not think of it as extra; think of it as part of the overall plan to stay healthier.

You have seen the stickers that say: "Buy Local – It's Just That Simple", "Seal of Quality – Vermont", and "Certified Organic". These are helping you to identify products of local origin and quality. Look for them and buy these products, both at the farmers' markets and in your grocery store.

Shopping at local farmers' markets is the ANSWER to many problems at once. You can make it be the answer to your personal gas woes, by only driving a short distance to these markets in your neighborhood. Most generations, other cultures and countries before us shopped this way. This is returning to a traditional way of shopping. We are not inventing anything new, just revitalizing an old tradition.

A feeling of community spirit happens when you shop at the local farmers' markets. Meet your neighbors. Enjoy a fun outing with the family.

Most of the foods in grocery stores *travel* hundreds if not thousands of miles. *Travel* means gas consumption. *Travel* means time. Time means foods are not as fresh and the nutrients leach out during that *travel time*.

Last week at Mt Tom's Farmers' Market, I bought locally grown corn. That corn was picked at 7:30am that same morning. It was served to my dinner guests that very evening. The only way it could have been fresher was if I had grown it myself!

Helping to improve Vermont's economy and keeping our neighbors in business is the answer. When you buy directly from the farmer at the market, you have cut out the middle man. The farmer gets to pocket a larger percentage of the actual dollar you paid. Keep your dollars local. Neighbors are helping neighbors. Talk to the farmers; get to know the grower personally. Ask questions. Vermonters helping Vermonters. Supporting our small farms in business helps to keep our Vermont landscape undeveloped. Those pastoral views are only there as long as we support our local farmers.

Organic choices are readily available. Many of our local farmers are organic which means they do not use pesticides or chemical fertilizers on their crops. Organic farmers do not use genetically engineered seeds. Organic foods are healthy choices; fresh, nutritious and delicious. Our ultimate choice is to pay the extra dollars NOW for organic foods to eat healthy OR possibly pay the extra dollars LATER in life for medical bills.

Is there a local farmers' market near you? Get a list of Upper Valley farmers' markets. For your convenience, Vital Communities has options: a handy refrigerator magnet, the Valley Food & Farm's Locally Grown Guide in print or on line. Call 802-291-9100 or www.vitalcommunities.org

For more information contact www.vermontagriculture.com

You can shop at the farmers' markets. Save gas, buy fresh and nutritious foods, buy holiday presents early, meet the farmers, ask questions, meet your neighbors, help the local economy and buy organic when available. The answer to so many questions is; Buy local, it's just that simple.

*Linda K. Schneider is the District Manager at Ottauquechee Natural Resources Conservation District located in White River Junction, Vermont. This District covers 18 towns in Windsor County and one in Rutland County. Phone: 802-295-7942 x11
Email: linda.schneider@vt.nacdnet.net
<http://vacd.org/onrcd>*