

Hunting Down Good Food

Wendy Warner, MD, ABHM

It's summer, and you're ready for the rich, full taste of fresh produce. Do you stop at your local grocery store (chain or otherwise), or do you seek out truly fresh, local veggies and fruit? I'm hoping to give you enough information to help you avoid the grocery store and take advantage of the abundance we have here in Bucks and Montgomery counties.

Did you know that on average, food travels ~1300-1500 miles from farm to table? The bulk of produce sold in typical grocery stores comes from California, Florida or Washington state. That means it spends roughly 7-14 days in transit from picking to the store, then up to another week in your own fridge prior to being eaten. Most nutrients won't hang around that long; they have degraded even prior to your buying the food, making them nutritionally inferior to freshly picked produce. Beyond that, the practicalities of this transport system means that food has been bred for its ability to withstand travel (thicker skins, less bruising, etc) and NOT for taste or nutrients. This leads to over-planting of only a few varieties of plants. Decreased biodiversity like this is harmful to the planet, and without excellent planetary health, our personal health deteriorates.

The good news is that there are lots of alternatives. There are many local farmers markets that offer locally grown, organic produce. Even local NON-organic produce might have a smaller negative impact on the earth than something organic that has consumed lots of fossil fuel on its trip from the west coast to us. In addition to farmers markets, there are numerous farms with produce stands on their property; it's worth a drive in the country to find them!

The first and probably best website to check is www.localharvest.org. This national site lists farms and markets, as well as restaurants who try to use local food. The Bucks County Foodshed Alliance (<http://www.buckscountyfoodshedalliance.org>) is also a valuable resource, as are www.communityfood.com and www.foodroutes.org. For those of you living in or near Lower Makefield Township, there is a new farmers market this summer at Edgewood Pocket Park (on Edgewood Rd at Heacock Rd); it is open Thursdays from 4-7:30.

In addition to having healthier, better-tasting food, purchasing your food at farm markets helps support local farmers. In 2002, small farmers earned their lowest real net cash income since 1940; this is while corporate agribusiness profits have increased by 98% from 1990. This means we are moving more and more to agricultural monopolies. Currently, 4 large firms control >80% of beef slaughter, 59% of pork packaging and 50% of broiler chicken production. This not only leads to decreased biodiversity but also leads to increased damage if there is any contamination in the system.

We are what we eat. Locally grown, organic whole foods as the basis of our diet gives us the best chance of living healthy lives. In the meantime, we'll also be eating extremely well!