

Local Food: Taking the Road Less Traveled

By Shivonne Quintero

On average, food purchased at the supermarket or in a restaurant travels 1,500 miles to reach our tables. For something simple and basic, such as strawberries, that's a lot of road to travel. And just what do 1,500 miles represent?

Let's break it down: 1,500 miles means a lot of fossil fuel (a major factor in global warming and climate change); chemicals and preservatives necessary to keep the strawberries looking decent while they're stored and transported (which we and our families will then eat); greatly reduced flavor and nutritional value during the weeks or even months it takes the strawberries to reach us (equaling a major loss of essential vitamins and minerals). Suddenly those 1,500 miles seem like a heck of a long way for *any* food item to travel. So what are the alternatives to purchasing strawberries and other foods that come from so far away?

Local food, available right here in the High Country.

When we buy local food, it doesn't have to travel far (very little fuel burned to transport those strawberries). It requires little or no added preservatives (enjoy the strawberries as they were grown). We and our families have the pleasure of richer flavor and abundant nutrients because local food is typically harvested within 24 hours of the time it's purchased (lots of essential vitamins and minerals in those strawberries). We'll also find that many local farmers welcome our input regarding what they grow as well as how it's grown (would we like those strawberries to be organic?).

There are even more added benefits to buying local food, such as preserving the local, rural landscape that we hold so dear here in the High Country. When we buy food direct from local farmers—or from restaurants who buy locally—we are helping our farmers stay on their land. They get a fair price because there is no middleman, and money is kept within the community and local economy. We also help foster and strengthen the local food supply so that, as a community, we are less dependant on farmers who are 1,500 miles away.

And are we lucky! The High Country has a bounty of wonderful local farm foods just waiting for our enjoyment. We have all kinds of fresh fruits and vegetables, cheeses, fish, meats, eggs, honey, herbs, grains, baked and canned goods, even fresh cut flowers and wine! (And yes, strawberries, too.)

One of the easiest (and fun!) ways to buy these great local foods is at the local Farmers' Market. Most counties in the High Country have one every Saturday morning during summer (and sometimes other days of the week, too). There are also roadside stands, U-pick farms, and CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture: in exchange for a fee at the beginning of the season the farm sends a box of its produce once every week or two). You can also find local produce and other

food items at local natural food stores as well as at some local eateries. Many farms will even welcome families for a visit!

For more information, or to receive a guide to buying and eating locally in the High Country, check out the following websites or give them a call:

Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project

www.buyappalachian.org

(828) 236-1282

Carolina Farm Stewardship Association

www.carolinafarmstewards.org

(919) 542-2402

Happy High Country eatin'!