

## **South Central PA Buy Fresh Buy Local: Linking Local Food, Farmland and Conservation**

From concerns over food safety and childhood obesity to support for family farmers and the environment, the “market” is growing for locally-produced foods. As residents of South Central Pennsylvania, we are among some of the most fortunate in the country. We are surrounded by small family farms working hard to produce high quality foods that nourish us and tickle our taste buds. When we purchase locally-produced items, we do so much more than just feed ourselves and our families. We create a stronger local economy and support small farms so that they can remain in operation. We “vote” with our dollars. Plus, we help to preserve the beauty of open spaces in our communities.



*Buy Fresh Buy Local* is a national campaign of FoodRoutes Network to promote locally-grown foods and is led in the state by the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA). In the south central region, the Capital Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Area Council is the project sponsor. “We envision a future with more farmers working the land, resulting in vibrant and sustainable local communities in which fresh, delicious, local food is abundant and accessible to all” states Susan Manager, Program Manager for the Capital RC&D. Capital RC&D, along with the South Central *Buy Fresh Buy Local* (BFBL) Committee, has

created a local food guide for the region and is aiming to serve local communities by linking interested farmers with communities that need fresh, nutritious products.

Each of the groups partnering in this effort has an interest in supporting agriculture in the state and reminds the public of the plentiful and delicious products available in South Central PA. According to the *Buy Fresh Buy Local* campaign, buying local provides a number of benefits including: superior taste and freshness, stronger local economies, and a healthier environment through reducing fossil fuel usage and protecting open space. Most food consumed in the United States travels an average of between 1,500-2,500 miles from field to plate, resulting in approximately 120 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions each year; local food doesn’t travel nearly that far. This reduces fossil fuel dependence, carbon dioxide emissions and use of excessive packing materials.

The uncertain economic situation in this country also causes us all to look for more value for every dollar we spend. Now, more than ever, shoppers are looking for food that is grown and produced closer to home. Keeping local farms economically viable is critical to preserving the beautiful landscapes in the rural areas, also known as “foodsheds,” surrounding towns and

urban centers. When we make farming more profitable, we help to make selling farmland for development less attractive, ensuring that local land is utilized for farming well into the future.

Buying local keeps dollars circulating in your community and increases local food security. Getting to know the farmers who grow your food builds relationships, which are the foundation of strong communities. With each local food purchase, you ensure that more of your money spent on food goes directly to local farmers. Another benefit of eating locally-produced food is the higher nutrient levels that can be retained in produce. As soon as fruits and vegetables are picked, they begin to degrade; nutrients are lost while our food is shipped to us!



Conservation and agricultural groups are beginning to create valuable partnerships to focus on the need for education and community outreach to raise the awareness among citizens about the value of conservation and its connection to our lives. The knowledge of where our food comes from can be quite empowering for us all. By educating our local citizens of the value of supporting each other and our farmers, we are instilling an intrinsic value to the land that we all cherish. We can also partner to bring back the corner grocery within the city that sells fresh rather than processed food. There is a great need in our cities to invigorate urban communities to demand access to better sources of nutrition. If we are able to build up urban communities, we will start to see more people living in city neighborhoods, plentiful “victory gardens” popping up throughout and, as a result, less migration out of the cities to suburban open spaces that can be saved for farmland and natural habitat.

The recent incidences of e.coli outbreaks sourced from within the fresh food industry in our country have caused many of us to question how safe the goods are from our local grocery store chain. And while it is important to keep production agriculture viable to ensure that the United States can assist in global food issues, we can take control of our own lives in the sense that we know what we are putting into our bodies, if we want to (and many of us do!). The more people that ask “where was this food grown?” the more vendors and businesses will be willing to provide what we are requesting.

This is a chance to make real, concrete change and to build the market for local foods: We invite you to become a member of the *Buy Fresh Buy Local* initiative, or start a campaign in your community today. Visit [www.buylocalpa.org](http://www.buylocalpa.org) to find a CSA, farmers' market, farm stand, or local food outlet near you and look for the *Buy Fresh Buy Local* trademark in your community. For additional information regarding the Capital Resource Conservation and Development Area Council, contact the office at (717) 724-0009 or check out the website at [www.capitalrcd.org](http://www.capitalrcd.org).

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