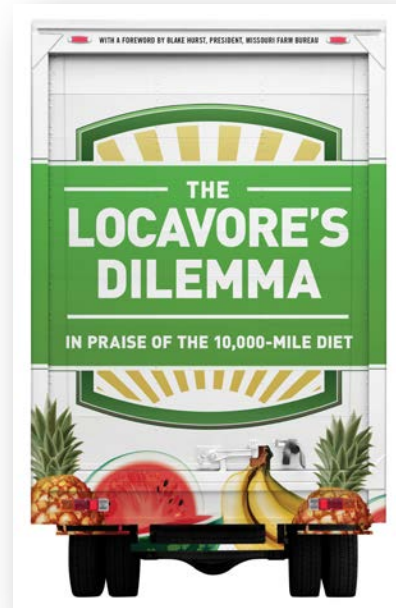


Q&A - *The Locavore's Dilemma*

1. What prompted you to take on locavores?

Hiroko heard an environmental studies professor describe Japanese people as the most parasitic on earth because they import more food than anyone else – which is, when you think of it, the logical conclusion of the current local food fad. But what about the products and technologies Japanese developed and sold to earn their food imports? Should they have instead starved like their ancestors because of a lack of agricultural land? We felt compelled to dismiss that kind of sloppy thinking.



2. Are you against all local food?

Obviously not. We enjoy local Niagara wines and peaches. Competitively priced, high-quality seasonal local fruits and vegetables have always been sought by nearby grocers and restaurateurs alike. We're also not concerned about hobby gardening or people who live in rural areas who produce, hunt or harvest in the wild much of their food. We draw the line where local food is deemed desirable simply *because of its geographical origin* and is not more affordable, nutritious, safer, or better tasting than alternatives produced further away.

3. Not many activists want a true 100-mile diet. Are you setting up a bogeyman?

A lesser amount of a bad thing doesn't make it a good thing. Local food activists who do not want to give up on coffee or chocolate but nonetheless promote the purchase of uncompetitive local items are doing everyone a disservice.

4. Why is it your business to opine on what people do with their own money?

We believe in truth in advertising. As we explain in the book, none of the myths put forward by local food activists hold up to scrutiny. On top of that, many activists have been hard at work to mandate the purchase of pricier local food by public institutions (most prominently government agencies, school boards, hospitals, prisons, universities and military bases), prevent the redevelopment

of abandoned marginal agricultural land for other useful purposes, prohibit modern agricultural practices and ultimately close national doors to foreign products. The outcomes of such initiatives range from bad to utterly disastrous. We've even been told by a number of people in charge of high school and college cafeterias that they agree with us and don't see the point of wasting money on lesser quality, pricier and often unavailable local food.

5. Why do you dismiss the idea of “food miles” — the distance from farm to fork — as a greenhouse gas emissions measure?

Food miles are only a valid indicator when everything else is equal. In the real world, of course, everything else is rarely if ever equal. Some places have more water or better pasture land. It makes more sense to grow a tomato in Spain in an unheated greenhouse and truck it to the U.K. where growing them requires a heated greenhouse. A U.S. study showed that about 4 per cent of food's energy signature was from long-distance transportation and 83 per cent from production. Cutting down on distance typically means a more significant environmental impact.

6. Doesn't buying local food help those farmers and boost the local economy, even create jobs?

It destroys more jobs than it creates. Let's say the same quality tomato is grown and delivered from Florida for \$1 whereas producing it in Ontario costs \$1.50. If you push the local one, you create tomato-growing jobs in Ontario, but consumers have 50 cents less to spend on other local services or goods, which destroys jobs. There's a lot more consumers than producers. To create a few jobs through feel-good initiatives, you're penalizing millions and the overall economic effect is detrimental.

7. Aren't locally grown foods tastier and more nutritious?

If you grant the locavore argument that food is tastier and more nutritious when it's fresher than it is while in season. But for the rest of the year you have to can, freeze or dry it, as opposed to eating global imports of fresh food. How can this be better overall?

8. If global agribusiness is so great, why do we have 1 billion people without enough to eat?

The ratio of undernourished people today is about one in seven. In the 1950s it was about one in 2.5. We've made progress. The undernourished are typically not part of the global food supply chain, but are rather true locavores like sub-Saharan African subsistence farmers. Also, we have to look at the political environment which causes starvation.

9. Doesn't the globalized food supply chain make us fat?

The globalized food supply chain delivers a more diverse and affordable diet than locavorism. It has nothing to do with the fact that most fat people don't exercise enough and eat too much junk. The real problems are poor lifestyle and nutritional choices. Again, Japanese people depend more on the globalized food supply chain than anybody else. Have you been to Japan lately? They don't have that many fat people.

10. Doesn't local agriculture keep the food supply secure?

As with everything, you need to spread the risk. Local food activists want us to put all our agricultural security eggs in one regional basket. Historically this has been a recipe for disaster. You have floods, hail storms, diseases. It's better to rely on multiple supplies, including local.

11. What about food safety? There are frequent recalls of tainted factory-processed foods.

Although not perfect, our food supply is safer than ever. Bigger operators have more knowledge, more control, more tracking. Bar codes on agribusiness products can trace a problem's source. The bottom line is that if recalls happen, we know exactly who is responsible.

12. If markets dictate progress, isn't the local food movement another link in the evolving supply chain, a new market?

It's a fad. There have been plenty of local food movements in the last century and they never last long. People ultimately vote with their wallets. Local food producers will always have a place, but it may be a specialized and expensive niche that caters to people all over the world, not something aimed at a large local market. They won't survive by producing more expensive tomatoes. Even in the U.S. the percentage of the food sold in farmers market is about 1% of the total.

13. Do you ever shop at farmers' markets?

From time to time. We live near the Niagara peninsula and love local white peaches in season. We also often take our guests to local wineries on our way to Niagara Falls. In that case, we don't mind paying a little extra to enjoy the experience!

Learn more about the book at globavore.org