

Local Food and the Environment



Agriculture can have a huge impact on our environment, potentially for good or bad. About a quarter of our greenhouse gas emissions are tied to food, agriculture, and land use. Farming can also help protect—or harm—our soil, water, and biodiversity

The food choices we make every day make a big difference for the planet. So what should we do?



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Buy local and seasonal. When food is shipped long distances, it can take a lot of energy to transport and refrigerate. When we eat local food in season, we can enjoy food that is fresher and emits fewer greenhouse gases in production. And when we buy local, we can understand more about how our food is grown—which may be more important than exactly where it is grown.

Get to know your farmers, and buy from farmers who treat the land with care. When you buy local food—at a farmers' market, through Community Supported Agriculture, or at a local grocer—you have a chance to ask questions. You can look for sustainable or ecological farmers and ask questions about how they farm. For example, what do they do to protect or improve their soil? How do they encourage biodiversity and bird populations? Go to our website, www.nfuontario.ca, for a list of questions you can ask at the farmers' market.


Avoid food waste. In North America, nearly half of all food is wasted! That means that many crops are grown—taking up space and impacting the environment—without ever being eaten. You can reduce food waste in your household by planning meals and making sure to eat or freeze foods before they spoil. You can also support programs in your community or workplace to reduce food waste or to glean crops, and to compost organic waste that is created.

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Possibility grows here.

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Don't just buy food; support local food systems. When you buy food from a large transnational corporation, most of the money you spend leaves your community. When you buy local, your dollars stay and circulate in your community, benefiting farmers and small businesses. This helps to support rural economies and develop the infrastructure we need for sustainable food systems. We also need explicit policies to support sustainable local farmers, as well as government and institutional procurement so sustainable production can scale up.

Of course, all of this is complicated, and all of these things involve trade-offs. And what works in one place might not work in a different province, or county, or on a different farm.

What's the best way to navigate these complicated choices? Whenever possible, buy food from farmers you know and trust. When you buy food at a farmers' market or through a CSA, ask questions about how your food is grown and the choices your farmers make. Build a relationship with a farmer or a community of farmers.

And most importantly, be part of a local food movement. We need everyone—in cities and the countryside—to speak up about protecting our climate, our water, and our soil. We need Local Food Advocates.

If you want to be part of that movement, connect with us at the National Farmers Union. We're the only independent national organization for sustainable family farmers. We do research, advocacy, and training. And unlike many other farm organizations, we don't rely on corporate donations; we're an independent voice.

Get in touch with us through our website or on social media. And remember, you don't have to be a farmer to participate. If you care about building a more just and sustainable food system, you should join the NFU.