

Celebrating food from field to table



By Leanna Knox

There are plenty of messages in the media advising consumers to be more aware of where the foods they are eating come from. There has also been a growing movement towards eating local foods. The 100- Mile Diet, a book detailing the experiences of a couple buying and eating only foods that were grown and processed within one hundred miles from their home, appeared on many best-seller lists. These ideas have even led to new words being introduced into our vocabularies. The term locavore, or the trend of using locally grown and seasonally available foods, was the 2007 New Oxford dictionary's Word of the Year. Are you a locavore?

Eating foods that are raised and produced locally has a number of benefits. Many people find locally grown foods tastier. This is not surprising since the varieties of foods grown to be sold locally are chosen for their great taste, not because they can travel well or ripen on store shelves. Local foods are also usually fresher, often having been picked within hours of when they are purchased. Some locally grown produce such as broccoli, green beans, red peppers and tomatoes may even be more nutritious, as they are very delicate and tend to lose nutrients when traveling long distances. Other foods like apples, oranges, grapefruits and carrots can travel long distances and still keep all their nutrients. However, buying local foods supports local farms and farming families, reduces packaging and waste, and may even mean better prices for consumers. Plenty of advantages to visiting your local farmers' market!

Canada produces a wide variety of different foods. From the fishing boats to the farmers' fields, there are more than 160 species of fish and seafood and over 120 different crops produced. In addition to this variety, Canada produces some of the world's safest and highest-quality foods. Hormones to promote growth are not used in pigs, poultry or dairy cows in Canada. While some cattle producers may give their animals hormones to promote their growth, research has shown that the levels found in the beef are too low to be a risk to our health.

There is often confusion between locally grown and organic foods. Locally grown does not necessarily mean it is organic, and vice versa. You may think the food you buy at a local farmers' market is organic, but you need to inquire about the growing method from the producer. Guidelines for labelling organic foods were introduced in June 2009 to ensure that what is being sold as organic actually is. Many people believe that organically grown foods are higher in nutritional value, lower in pesticide residues and more flavourful than those foods grown by conventional agricultural methods, but there is no real evidence to support this idea. Purchasing organic foods is a personal choice, however, what is most important is serving up a diet that is high in fruit and vegetables to your family. The bottom line is to eat your fruits and vegetables, whether they are organic or not!

The cost of foods is a big consideration in healthy eating. While “fresh is best” may be a familiar phrase to us, it is not always easy or practical to put into practice. To get the biggest nutritional bang for your buck, choose foods that are crammed full of nutrients and low on cost. Meat alternatives like eggs, beans and lentils are an excellent way to meet protein and iron needs without the high price tag of meat. Frozen and canned foods offer healthy, lower-cost alternatives to fresh produce. Canned and frozen fruits and vegetables are preserved at their peak of ripeness and are a nutritious alternative to fresh. It is important to be aware that many canned fruits and vegetables may contain more salt or sugar than the fresh version. Frozen fruits and vegetables are often processed without added salt or sugar. Check the nutritional labels on these foods to be sure.

While it could be a challenge to be a locavore all year round in Canada, there are a lot of healthy local foods which can become a part of a nutritious diet. The Dietitians of Canada's National Nutrition Month Campaign for this year invites Canadians to celebrate food, right from where it is grown and harvested all the way to when it is served up on our plates. For recipes and more information on healthy food choices, visit the Dietitians of Canada website www.dietitians.ca. Explore the healthy and local flavours around you!

Festive Salad

This colourful salad is full of healthy vegetables that are available year-round. Enjoy a taste delicious taste of Canadian food products!

2 lbs	beets	900 g
1 cup	shredded carrots	250 mL
1 cup	shredded cabbage	250 mL

4	green onions, sliced	4	
2	Tbsp chopped fresh dill (or 1 tsp dried dill)		30 mL
2/3 cup	crumbled feta cheese	150 mL	
1/4 cup	red wine vinegar	60 mL	
1 tsp	dried mustard	5 mL	
2 Tbsp	canola oil	30 mL	
1 Tbsp	honey	15 mL	
1/3 cup	toasted sunflower seeds	80 mL	
	salt and pepper, to taste		

1. Wash beets and cut away the tops and tails. Wrap in foil and bake in preheated 375 degree oven for about 45 – 60 minutes or until just tender. Unwrap, let cool and peel under running water. Cut into 1-inch chunks and place in large glass or ceramic mixing bowl.

2. Add carrots, cabbage, green onions, dill and feta cheese and stir gently to combine.

3. Meanwhile, place red wine vinegar in a small bowl. Add mustard and whisk with a fork or small whisk to combine. Add oil, water and honey and continue to whisk. Pour over beets and other vegetables and stir to combine.

4. Garnish with the toasted sunflower seeds. From Dietitians of Canada.

For more delicious recipes, visit www.dietitians.ca/eatwell.

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