

BETHEL COLLEGE MENNONITE CHURCH
CREATION CARE COMMITTEE CREATION STEWARDSHIP NOTES # 17
January 2006

The following article is taken from the Fall 2005 issue of *Catalyst*, magazine of the Union of Concerned Scientists. Jenn Palembas is outreach specialist for the Food and Environment Program of the Union of Concerned Scientists.

Eating for the Environment

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What should I eat? Each time we ask ourselves this question we have an opportunity to lessen our impact on the earth.

Most of the food produced and consumed in the United States today is part of a highly mechanized, industrial system where the highest value is placed on producing crops and meat as cheaply as possible. However, the hidden costs of this system include air and water pollution, land erosion, and loss of wildlife habitat, not to mention human health risks associated with pesticide exposure and antibiotic resistance. We pay these costs through tax dollars used to clean up “factory farm” pollution and health care bills from treating agriculture-related illnesses. The good news is you have another way to spend your food dollars, by supporting farmers who take care to raise animals and crops responsibly. With that in mind, here are some environmentally friendly answers to the question “What should I eat?”

Buy locally produced food.

Most food sold in the United States travels an average of 1,300 miles from the farm to the supermarket. Purchasing locally produced food reduces agriculture’s contribution to fossil fuel use and pollution and supports the many regional small-scale farmers who share a commitment to environmental conservation and land stewardship. Farmers’ markets, roadside stands, membership-based farm groups known as Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs) and even some supermarkets offer opportunities to buy local vegetables, fruit, cheese, eggs, and meat.

Consider eating less meat.

Raising food animals exacts a greater toll on natural resources than other types of food production. Most meat, eggs and dairy products come from animals raised part or all of their lives on factory farms – facilities that crowd animals into tightly confined spaces, creating an ideal breeding ground for animal diseases (which is one reason why the animals are fed a steady diet of antibiotics). Factory farms pollute our air and water by generating enormous amounts of animal waste. Growing grain to feed animals depletes water resources and pollutes ecosystems with large quantities of pesticides and fertilizers. Consider reducing your consumption of meat and when you do eat meat, buying from farmers you know or looking for labels you can trust – such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) organic seal.

Choose organic products.

The USDA organic seal identifies foods that have been produced using practices that are less destructive to farmland and surrounding ecosystems. Organic farms do not use synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, antibiotics, growth hormones, or genetically engineered seed or feed.

Make informed seafood choices.

Farmed or wild? Atlantic or Pacific? Consumers today enjoy a wide array of seafood options, but much of it has been harvested in ways that severely damage ocean ecosystems and threaten species with extinction. Printable wallet-sized guides, such as the one available from the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch program (see below), will help you choose seafood that has been harvested to maintain healthy supplies of fish and other marine life.

In the end, some of these decisions might cost you more money, but there will be far fewer hidden costs to humans, animals, and ecosystems. In addition, your dollars will support farmers who go the extra miles to protect the environment and public health. Learn more by visiting the UCS (Union of Concerned Scientists) website (www.ucsusa.org) or those listed below.

These Websites Can Provide Help with Your Food Choices:

Institute of Agriculture and Trade Policy

www.eatwellguide.org

Can find contact information for suppliers of sustainably raised meat and dairy products in our area.

Kansas Foods Directory

www.kansasfoods.org

Can find sources of many locally produced vegetables, fruit, grain, meat and dairy products. You can search for sources in any county in Kansas.

LocalHarvest

www.localharvest.org

Can find suppliers of food and other agricultural products from producers in our area. ¹ This is a national directory, initiated in 1998, that allows you to search for sources from family farms, community supported agriculture, farmers' markets, restaurants, and food coops. They have 23 listings within 50 miles.

USDA National Organic Program

www.ams.usda.gov/nop/IndexNet.htm

Information on organic regulations and labeling requirements

Monterey Bay Aquarium

www.seafoodwatch.org

Information on ocean-friendly seafood choices with a wallet-sized list that can be printed.

You can also find information on food and environment on the Creation Care Bulletin Board in Fellowship Hall.

You can get more information at the Wednesday evening meeting on April 5. Creation Care Committee is sponsoring a program by Sara Regier on the new MCC cookbook *Simply In Season*. This cookbook introduces principles that link food choices to environmental and social issues.