

Thought for Food

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Local Diet Wins Ultimate Food Fight

Gail Southall

Ah food, food, glorious food. That delicious, nutritious essence of life that unites us all. In this country we have so much food, at such reasonable prices, it's easy to believe we will always be wallowing in it. We know that food supply is an issue in some regions of the world, but that will never touch us here... will it?

For the first time in recent memory food riots are making international news headlines. Rising fuel costs, land use changes from food production to fuel production, population growth, weather events and climate change, loss of agricultural land to development, investor speculation, and a flourishing Asian economy are putting unprecedented pressures on food supplies the world over, not just in deepest, darkest Africa. Terms like 'food security' and 'food sovereignty' are suddenly on tongues everywhere. The newly-formed United Nations Global Food Crisis Task Force reports that, simply put, global food demand has exceeded supply. Since January staple food prices have risen an average of 50% the world over. Several major food commodity producing countries have halted exports of peas, beans, corn, soy, wheat, and rice. Food prices are ballooning so quickly a new term has been coined to describe the phenomenon – agflation.

If you think you're fortunate to live in a country with a food production industry as vast and varied as Canada's, you're absolutely right. If you think this guarantees a steady food supply, you may want to take a closer look. Go for a walk through your grocery store and search for foodstuffs, whether fresh or packaged, that were actually grown and/or produced in Canada (and don't be fooled by the 'Product of Canada' label which only signifies the item was packaged here). The truth is the vast majority of the food we eat is imported. This fact alone puts us at the same risk as every other country with a food trade deficit. Canada is not immune to soaring prices or dwindling supplies. Every one of the aggravating factors listed above applies to us.

The solution? The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) calls for nothing short of a farming revolution. A group of 400 experts from 22 countries spent three years studying the issues and recommends “better safeguards to protect resources and more sustainable farming practices, such as producing food locally”. How will growing and eating local foods ease a global crisis? Less demand for fuel, more emphasis on responsible land use, increased control over supply, enhanced biodiversity, better nutrition, and improved local economies, the UNESCO study claims.

But how do we make the shift from import-based to homegrown goodness?

- *Grow your own food* – it doesn't take much space or money to get a small garden started.
- *Get to know your local farmers and make a conscious decision to buy local when you can* – visit www.crestonfarmfresh.ca for a list of local producers.
- *Shop at the Farmer's Market* – it starts June 7.
- *Ask grocers and restaurateurs to stock local food* – consumer demand drives choices.
- *Donate to the Food Bank* – they'll gladly accept the bounty of your garden and orchard and share it with those less fortunate.
- *Advocate for government policies that make your access to local food a priority* – email your MLA and MP with your concerns.
- *Be aware of the source of your food* – if you must buy imported food think about everything that went into getting it into your cupboard.

Gail Southall is Coordinator for the Creston Valley Food Action Coalition, a group of people dedicated to better feeding our community using local resources. For more information on the Food Action Coalition call 254-0254 or email cvfoodaction@gmail.com.