

## **Thought for Food**

*(as it appeared in the Creston Valley Advance newspaper, June 19, 2008)*

### **Local Diet Will Beat the Bulge**

*Gail Southall*

There are many diets, traditional and otherwise, on which human beings may thrive. The Western diet just doesn't happen to be one of them. Study after study will tell us definitively that our Western diet, with its emphasis on high-calorie, prepackaged, processed ingredients, refined grains, and pure sugar, is killing us in no small number. We've known this for a very long time. Yet we continue to snarf down Twinkies at unprecedented speed. But perhaps a couple of recent events may finally make us stop and rethink what we're stuffing into our cake holes.

For the first time in global history the number of obese people equals the number of malnourished. In the world today one billion of us are severely overweight and one billion of us are underfed. Also for the first time in history, life expectancy in our country is dropping. Children born today are not likely to live as long as their parents. Why? Obesity. Health Canada confirms that childhood obesity has tripled in the past 25 years.

What's making and keeping us fat? You guessed it, our Western diet. Studies show that the rising incidence of obesity is clearly not related to genetic changes but to changes in the environment, such as increased consumption of highly dense caloric foods. And as edible products high in calories and low in nutritional quality are cheap to produce and easy to ship, it's not just us in the West who are afflicted; those in developing countries are increasingly counted among the obese. Like a virus, the Western diet is spreading, with disastrous consequences.

The health problems associated with being overweight are numerous – heart disease, diabetes, specific cancers, joint diseases like arthritis, muscle and tendon complications – the list goes on. Obesity is already being called the next global pandemic. By 2030, the World Health Organization claims, obesity and obesity-related maladies will be the number one killer worldwide.

So how does a local diet fit into all of this? Can eating locally grown foods alter our course? Think about the foods you can source in and around Creston – fresh fruits and vegetables, herbs, gently raised meats, organic cheese (yes! coming soon), eggs, nuts, whole grains, and honey. Apart from lovingly processed jams, pickles and a few other canned goods, nothing the least bit refined. No packages of bundled chemicals, no unpronounceable ingredients, no modified this or new-and-improved that. Just bona fide, genuine food. Fresh, ripe food resplendent with nutrients. Pure food picked mere hours before it touches your lips. Unadulterated food that doesn't have to rely on misleading labels to boast its health claims. Authentic food, that if eaten in the right balance can help keep the Western diet, and its ills, at bay.

For a listing of healthy, local food sources, see the Farm Fresh Guide, available all over town, and online at [www.crestonfarmfresh.ca](http://www.crestonfarmfresh.ca).

*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 about the Coalition call 254-0254 or email [cvfoodaction@gmail.com](mailto:cvfoodaction@gmail.com).*