

# Food Production

Over the last 50 years farmers have had to intensify their farming methods in order to increase yields and reduce costs. This intensification compacts and erodes the soil and relies upon chemical fertilisers and pesticides. 31,000 tonnes of pesticides are used in the UK each year. These chemicals cause pollution, release greenhouse gases, harm wildlife, and can leave residues in our food. Many of these chemicals are oil-based and so any increase in oil price could have serious impacts on the price of our food.

To produce the quantities of meat and dairy that modern lifestyles now demand, whilst keeping costs down, animals are often factory farmed. This system compromises basic welfare standards. A factory farmed chicken for example, will spend its entire life confined to a cage the size of an A4 sheet of paper.

It takes 10kg of grain to produce just 1kg of beef and as a result, large areas of forest across the world are cleared to grow the feed for livestock. Don't be fooled - even where cows are reared in the UK, most of the feed still came from abroad. This deforestation as well as the methane gas released from the animals contributes to climate change.

# Food miles

Food is transported further than ever before as consumers increasingly demand year-round access to produce from all over the world. In the UK, we import 95% of our fruit and 50% of our vegetables.

The further food travels, the greater the transport emissions and hence the greater the impact on climate change. Long distance food transport also means loss of freshness and flavour as products are harvested before they are ripe, and stored and refrigerated for long periods between production, packing and distribution. Chemicals are sometimes used to increase the shelf life.

As we become more reliant on imported food, we lose our ability to be self-sufficient, thereby putting our long-term food security at risk.

## A better way forward

By adopting more informed food shopping or eating habits, we can have a powerful effect by encouraging and supporting better farming methods. Eating healthily, protecting the environment and boosting the local economy go hand in hand, as when it comes to food, what tends to be good for us is also good for the environment and our farmers. Here

are a few tips on what to look out for when buying food.

## 1. Keep it Seasonal and Local:

All fruits and vegetables have a particular growing season. Eating food which is locally in season is one of the most important choices that consumers can make because

- Food doesn't have to travel so far - therefore reducing food miles and the need for storage, refrigeration and packaging.
- Less time traveling means that food is fresher and more nutritious.
- Reduced food miles means less congestion on our roads.

- It supports the local farmers and economy
- It increases long-term food security
- Products are cheaper

## 2. Go for Organic:

Organic produce is grown without the use of chemical pesticides, fertilisers and genetically modified food stuffs. Antibiotics are only used where necessary rather than routinely given. It also respects wildlife by preventing contamination of surrounding habitats.

Animals raised on organic farms are always free range and so by buying organic we support higher levels of animal welfare.

Whilst it is often considered more expensive, it more truly reflects the real costs of farming as farms tend to be less intensive. Organic produce only costs a few pence more - surely a small price to pay for better flavour.

## 3. Reduce consumption of Meat and Dairy products:

There are many benefits associated with a meat lean diet.

- Less land being required to grow animal feed addresses the deforestation issue.
- If grain was used to feed humans rather than animals, we could produce enough food to feed everyone on earth.
- Our health improves as reducing consumption of meat and meat products has been shown to reduce the risk of obesity and intestinal cancer.
- By reducing our overall meat consumption, it is possible to buy higher quality meat within the same overall budget.

## 4. Choose Fairtrade

Fairtrade ensures that the producers are paid a fair wage for their produce. It helps improve the working and living conditions and the prospects of producers in poorer countries. Look for the Fairtrade mark when buying products that have to come from abroad such as tropical fruits, coffee and tea. The variety of Fairtrade products is increasing and many are now available in supermarkets.



## 5. Wise-up with Fish:

Today, 97% of world's fish stocks are either fully exploited, over exploited, depleted or moderately exploited. Check the labels to ensure that the fish you buy comes from sustainable sources - such as those accredited by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) and exclude any species identified as most 'at risk' to ensure that we protect the marine environment. The MSC website has more information: [www.msc.org/cook-eat-enjoy/fish-to-eat](http://www.msc.org/cook-eat-enjoy/fish-to-eat).



## 6. Reduce Waste

8.3 million tonnes of food is thrown away by households in the UK every year, amounting to about £680 per year for an average family. Most of this could have been eaten. Isn't it senseless that after all the effort of producing, packaging and transporting food to us, so much ends up in the bin? Here are some tips to help reduce food waste:

- Plan your meals for the week in advance
- Freeze left-overs or have them for lunch
- Keep your fridge at 1-5°C to make chilled food last for longer
- Cook the correct portions - try using measuring jugs and spoon.
- Store fruit and veg in the fridge to make it last up to two weeks longer
- Avoid processed food - this is heavily packaged, costs more and is less nutritious.



## Where to buy?

Local producers sell their produce at monthly Farmers Markets held in St Albans, Harpenden and Wheathampstead.

Alternatively why not have your local organic produce delivered straight to your door with a Box Scheme. Distributors are also able to provide a wide range of food stuffs including meat and dairy. Look online to see which companies deliver in your area.



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	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Asparagus												
Aubergine												
Carrot												
Cucumber												
Kale												
Leek												
Lettuce												
Marrow												
Mushroom												
Onion												
Parsnip												
Peas												
Pepper												
Potato												
Pumpkin												
Purple Sprouting Broccoli												
Radish												
Spinach												
Squash												
Swede												
Sweetcorn												
Swiss Chard												
Tomato												
Turnip												
Watercress												
Apple												
Blackberry												
Blackcurrant												
Chestnut												
Cherry												
Gooseberry												
Pear												
Plum												
Raspberry												
Rhubarb												
Strawberry												



### Did you know?...

St Albans has the highest ecological footprint for food and drink in Hertfordshire.

Almost 20% of our greenhouse gases come from producing, transporting, preparing and storing food and drink.

