

# Eat Fresh, Buy Local!



*National Farmers Union  
Youth Education  
Curriculum*





Greetings!

Through guidance from its national board of directors and state education directors, National Farmers Union has chosen “Eat Fresh, Buy Local” as its 2007 youth education curriculum theme.

The future of family farm agriculture depends heavily upon the interest and involvement of the next generation of consumers. With this in mind, National Farmers Union believes it is important to teach young people the positive attributes of fresh foods from local, sustainable family farms.

Through the following lesson plans, students will explore how food choices can impact our health, environment, economy and community. They should begin to understand and weigh the differences between a global, industrialized food system and a local, sustainable food system. They will also learn how Farmers Union, its farmer-members and member-owned cooperatives contribute to America’s local food system.

On the following pages you will find background information on these topics and lesson plans for grades 1-12. These lesson plans may be used in a series or as stand-alone activities to supplement your teachings.

Thank you for the time and energy you put into educating our youth.

All the best!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura Johnston Monchuk".

Laura Johnston Monchuk  
Director of Education  
National Farmers Union

# “Eat Fresh, Buy Local”

The concept of buying local is simply to buy food, goods or services produced, grown, or raised as close to your home as possible. With industrialization, our food is now grown and processed in fewer and fewer locations, meaning it has to travel further to reach the average consumer’s refrigerator. Although this method of production is considered efficient and economically profitable for large corporations, it can be harmful to consumers, the environment and rural communities.

## Food Miles, Resources and the Environment

“Food miles” refer to the distance a food item travels from the farm to your home. The food miles for items you buy in the grocery store tend to be 27 times higher than the food miles for goods bought from local sources. In the United States, the average grocery store’s produce travels nearly 1,500 miles between the farm where it was grown and your refrigerator.

Even though most Americans live about 60 miles from an apple orchard, the apples you typically buy at the grocery store travel 1,726 miles between the orchard and your house. That’s farther than driving from Portland, Maine, to Miami, Florida!

A tremendous amount of fossil fuel is used to transport foods such long distances. Combustion of these fuels releases carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide, particulate matter and other pollutants into the atmosphere, contributing to global climate change, acid rain, smog and air pollution. Even the refrigeration required to keep your fruits, vegetables, dairy products and meats from spoiling too soon burns up energy.

Food processors also use a large amount of paper and plastic packaging to keep food looking fresh for a longer period of time. This packaging eventually becomes waste that is difficult to reuse or recycle.

Aside from the environmental harm that can result from processing, packaging and transporting long-distance foods, the industrial farms on which these foods are often produced can be major sources of air and water pollution. Small, local farms tend to be run by farmers who live on their land and work hard to protect the air, soil and water.

## Health and Nutrition

Buying food from local farms means getting food when it’s at its prime. Fresh food from local farms is healthier than industrially farmed products because the food doesn’t spend days in trucks and on store shelves losing valuable nutrients.

Local food has less of an opportunity to wilt and rot whereas large-scale food manufacturers must go to extreme lengths to extend shelf-life since there is such a delay between harvest and consumption. Preservatives are commonly used to keep foods stable longer, and are potentially hazardous to human health. Industrially produced foods are also difficult to grow without pesticides, chemical fertilizers, antibiotics and growth hormones, all of which may be damaging to the environment and to human health.

Local foods from small farms usually undergo minimal processing, are produced in relatively small quantities, and are distributed within a few dozen miles of where they originate. Food produced on industrial farms, however, is distributed throughout the country and world, creating the potential for disease-carrying food from a single factory farm to spread rapidly throughout the entire country. The 2006 E coli outbreak is a good example of this, as contaminated spinach from a single region in California managed to sicken people in 26 states.

Products such as ground beef, which is pooled from hundreds of different animals, are of particular concern. The meat from a single diseased cow could end up contaminating hundreds of pounds of food distributed to thousands of people. Once such a product is on shelves, it is very difficult to determine where the contaminated meat came from. Preventing or controlling disease outbreaks in such a system is nearly impossible.



Hand in hand with buying local is eating seasonal produce. Find out what foods are in season in your area.

## Family Farms and Community

According to the USDA, the United States has lost over 5 million farms since 1935. Family farms are going out of business at break-neck speed, causing rural communities to deteriorate. The United States loses two acres of farmland each minute as cities and suburbs spread into the surrounding communities. By supporting local farms near suburban areas and around cities, you help keep farmers on the land, and, at the same time, preserve open spaces and counteract urban sprawl.

## Market Concentration

Consolidation of several large agribusiness firms has left a majority of the food supply in the hands of only a few corporations. Many of these agribusinesses are becoming “vertically integrated,” meaning one company owns all of the product stages, from production to retail.

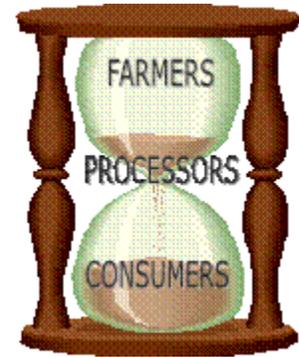
Consolidation and vertical integration concentrate the majority of market power with a few companies, and farmers have less ability to exert independence in the marketplace and end up with a smaller percentage of the food dollar.

## What NFU is Doing

- National Farmers Union has been studying the impacts of agricultural concentration over the last decade. According to these studies, concentration has increased dramatically in every agricultural market *except* for ethanol, in which farmer-owned cooperatives are flourishing thanks to public policy incentives. NFU supports policies that provide such incentives and increase market competition.
- Farmers Union believes consumers deserve the right to know where their food comes from and U.S. farmers have the right to distinguish their high quality products from imported ones. NFU has been leading the fight to enact mandatory country-of-origin labeling. In the 2002 Farm Bill, Congress passed a law requiring mandatory country-of-origin labeling (or COOL) for agricultural products. Five years later, that law still has not been implemented by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Farmers Union was at the forefront of the fight to pass COOL. Now it is leading the charge for its implementation.
- NFU has been a vocal advocate for farm-fresh products for families. In November 2006, NFU urged the U.S. Department of Agriculture to increase coordination and purchasing of fresh fruits and vegetables from farmers markets and seasonal vendors as part of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), a program that safeguards the health of low-income women and children who are at nutritional risk.
- NFU has created [www.e-cooperatives.com](http://www.e-cooperatives.com) to help farmers and their cooperatives connect with consumers online.
- NFU also works closely with Association of Family Farms to help farmers provide source-verified, farm-fresh foods that many consumers are demanding.

## What You Can Do

- Join Farmers Union’s fight for mandatory country-of-origin labeling, so you can know where your food is coming from.
- Check out what seasonal foods you can buy in your area.
- Buy food directly from your local farmer at a farm stand or a farmers market. Or have your family join a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) group and get a farm share.
- Encourage your local grocery store to stock food from local farmers.



The global food system is like an hour glass in which commodities produced by thousands of farmers must pass through the narrow part of the glass through the few firms that control the processing of the commodities before the food is distributed to millions of people in this and other countries.

# For more information:

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**National Farmers Union** ([www.nfu.org](http://www.nfu.org)) Check with the National Farmers Union or with your own state Farmers Union to learn more about value-added, sustainable ag, and/or cooperative food, fuel and fiber initiatives. Invite a guest speaker from Farmers Union or another organization to talk more about this topic. Ask your Farmers Union staff for suggestions.

**Slow Food USA** ([www.slowfoodusa.org](http://www.slowfoodusa.org)) is a non-profit educational organization dedicated to land stewardship and ecologically sound food production, to supporting and celebrating the food traditions of North America, and to living a slower and more harmonious life.

**Food Routes** ([www.foodroutes.org](http://www.foodroutes.org)) includes information on the benefits of buying locally and directs consumers to local food sources.

**Locavores** ([www.locavores.com](http://www.locavores.com)) provides tips on eating food grown within 100 miles of your home.

**Heritage Foods USA** ([www.heritagefoodsusa.com](http://www.heritagefoodsusa.com)) sells mail-order “traceable” products from small farms—maple syrup, pole caught tuna, grassfed American Kobe beef—whose labels provide every detail about their production and processing.

**Local Harvest** ([www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org)) offers a definitive and reliable nationwide directory of CSAs, farmers markets, family farms, and other local food sources.

**Sustainable Table** ([www.sustainabletable.org](http://www.sustainabletable.org)) offers an introduction to the sustainable food movement and the issues surrounding it, plus resources for further investigation (the links for “Introduction to Sustainability” and “The Issues” are good places to start.) Watch the [Harvest Eating](#) video podcast to learn about shopping and eating seasonally.

***Slow Food: Collected Thoughts on Taste, Tradition, and the Honest Pleasures of Food***, 2001, ed. Carlo Petrini, Chelsea Green Publishing Company, Vermont.



## Mix It Up!

Studies have shown that high school and junior high students need a change of activity every 15 minutes in order to remain interested and focused. This time frame drops even lower for younger children.