



A typical farm subscription, or CSA, share
photo by anna rabhan

ORGANIC FOOD

Buy Local for the Win

BY ANNA RABHAN

In a video about which produce items one should buy organic, Dr. Sanjay Gupta mentions that we're told to eat five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, but that if we do that, we're probably eating up to 10 different pesticides a day as well (www.youtube.com/watch?v=osQJLiktPw). He suggests that buying organic when possible can help reduce your exposure. The question then becomes whether it's better to buy organic in stores or to buy your organic foods locally, from farms, CSAs, farmers markets or natural markets. The issues to consider are cost, both financial and environmental, purity and quality.

When it comes to buying organic, most people's first thought is about the cost. While you may be aware that organic doesn't necessarily cost more than conventional (The Organic Adventurer: Eating farm fresh - EU, December 2010), what about the cost difference between buying organic in the store and buying it locally? A May 2012 comparison between the items in a local CSA share and the lowest-priced, organic equivalents available at Publix and Whole Foods showed the local bounty to be almost \$10 cheaper. And that didn't even account for the items in the local share for which an organic equivalent wasn't available in stores at the time (www.theorganicadventurer.com has the full comparison). So while it might seem that stores, with their volume purchasing power, would be able to offer organic produce cheaper, local producers don't generally have to pass the cost of packaging (the majority of organic produce at one store was individually shrink-wrapped!), storage and shipment on to their customers.

But there's another cost that, were it passed on to us

in terms of actual dollars, would make our food much more expensive than it is—the environmental cost, usually measured in terms of carbon dioxide equivalent. This is basically a measure of the emission of greenhouse gases an activity, such as shipping bell peppers from Mexico to a grocery store in Jacksonville, requires. There are all sorts of arguments about scale and how the impact of such emissions should be measured, but the bottom line is that more greenhouse gases are emitted getting those Mexican bell peppers to the Florida grocery store than are emitted for the bell pepper you might buy from a local producer. To illustrate, Mike Berners-Lee, author of *How Bad Are Bananas? The Carbon Footprint of Everything* and founder of a climate change consulting company, helped create a carbon footprint exhibit in 2011 (www.howbadarebananas.posterous.com). Part of that exhibit is a pint of strawberries with a tag saying that grown in season in one's own country, those strawberries "cost" 150 grams of CO₂e, while grown out of season or in a hot-house and flown in from another country, they "cost" 1.8 kg of CO₂e. An important point this demonstration brings up, of course, is that reducing greenhouse gas emissions by buying locally also means eating seasonally.

When the National Organic Program Standards went into effect in 2002, establishing the rules for what could be labeled USDA Certified Organic, there were 77 nonorganic substances approved for inclusion in certified foods. Now there are more than 250. Add to that the fact that the success of the organic food market has led to near domination of that market (and, some would argue, of the National Organic Standards Board, the body that approves or denies

WHERE TO BUY LOCAL ORGANIC FOOD

- This link to a list of farmers markets includes time, location, description and a helpful map link at the bottom: www.theorganicadventurer.com/jax-farmers-markets.
- CSAs and co-ops offer different characteristics. Researching local ones like www.kyvfarm.com and www.theveggiebin.com can help you decide which is right for you.
- Local cottage-industry food artisans can be found at farmers markets, festivals, community events and elsewhere. A few examples are raw, vegan chocolate by I Love My Life Chocolate (www.facebook.com/pages/I-Love-My-Life-Chocolate-Creative-Medicine); fresh, organic bread from Community Loaves, which also offers a CSA membership (www.facebook.com/communityloaves); and goat's milk, cheese and yogurt from Terk's Acres (www.terksacres.com).
- The Jacksonville area is fortunate to have many farms that, whether certified or not, use organic and/or sustainable practices, like Down to Earth Farm (www.downtoearthjax.wordpress.com). Start at www.localharvest.org and www.slowfoodfirstcoast.com to find farms.
- Local, independent markets like Grassroots Natural Market (www.thegrassrootsmarket.com) sometimes carry local organic products.



photo by anna rabhan

an ingredient's inclusion) by large corporations. Those facts lead many to charge that "organic" has strayed too far from its roots in natural, local, fresh ingredients. (For more on this topic, see Stephanie Strom's July *New York Times* piece, "Has 'Organic' Been Oversized?")

One way to avoid many ingredients you might not consider organic yourself is to eschew processed organic foods. But that won't keep you completely in the clear, since some of the "allowed substances" can be used on produce crops. This is where it helps to buy your organic produce locally. If you have a relationship with your farmer and you are able to have a conversation with him or her, then you can ask what inputs are used. That's not possible with produce you might buy in a store. Also, you're much more likely to find foods produced in the original organic spirit by shopping local, cottage-industry food artisans than you are by shopping the inner aisles of the

grocery store. That's because these artisans frequently refuse to use the preservatives and other substances allowed in mass-produced organic food. At least you can ask the person who made the chocolate, bread or other item you're considering buying what ingredients went into making it. Plus, buying local ensures that your dollars go to support your community.

Finally, buying organic food locally is better than buying it in stores for a host of fairly subjective reasons. The first is freshness. Organic produce shipped from far away was harvested much longer ago than what you can buy locally. That means that it isn't going to last as long once you get it home, which adds to the financial benefit argument for buying locally—you end up throwing away less spoiled food and, therefore, wasting less money. The second reason is variety. Stores deal in volume, so there's not a lot of room for variety. During the cost comparison research trip mentioned earlier, there was *one* variety of organic tomato available at the grocery store, whereas at the local farm or farmers market, you'd find several varieties of organic tomatoes in an astonishing array of colors and with a variety of properties. The final subjective measure of the superiority of local organic produce is taste. Hybrids can be organic, and you're quite likely to find those varieties in stores. The problem is that hybrids are selected for shipping durability and other factors important to stores dealing in large quantities of produce from distant lands. Taste is not always one of the factors considered, resulting in produce that can sometimes taste bland—not much better than conventional produce. Add storage, refrigeration and handling to that, and many would argue that local organic produce tastes noticeably better than store-bought organic produce.

All things considered, buying local organic food wins handily over store-bought, but do your own investigation. Visit the store and see what's available, and then try out a farmers market, co-op or CSA. Bon (organic) appetit!

Please email your questions, comments or suggestions to anna@eujacksonville.com.

Dirty Dozen Plus™

Buy these organic

- 1 Apples
- 2 Celery
- 3 Sweet bell peppers
- 4 Peaches
- 5 Strawberries
- 6 Nectarines – imported
- 7 Grapes
- 8 Spinach
- 9 Lettuce
- 10 Cucumbers
- 11 Blueberries – domestic
- 12 Potatoes

Plus

- + Green beans
- + Kale/Greens

+ May contain pesticide residues of special concern

Clean 15™ Lowest in Pesticide

- 1 Onions
- 2 Sweet Corn
- 3 Pineapples
- 4 Avocado
- 5 Cabbage
- 6 Sweet peas
- 7 Asparagus
- 8 Mangoes
- 9 Eggplant
- 10 Kiwi
- 11 Cantaloupe – domestic
- 12 Sweet potatoes
- 13 Grapefruit
- 14 Watermelon
- 15 Mushrooms

Advance registration required for all attendees coming to our dance activities

AUGUST 2012

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1 Zumba 7 pm (Jax Beach)	2 Waltz 6:15 pm (Jax Beach) Hustle 7:45 pm (Arlington)	3 Foxtrot 7 pm (Jax Beach) Members Practice Party 7:45 pm (Jax Beach)	4
5 Rumba 7 pm (Jax Beach) Foxtrot 7:45 pm (Arlington)	6 Foxtrot 6:15 pm (Jax Beach) Rumba 7:45 pm (Arlington)	7 Samba 6:15 pm (Jax Beach) Zumba 7 pm (Jax Beach)	8 Swing 6:15 pm (Jax Beach) Salsa 7:45 pm (Arlington)	9 Line Dance 7 pm (Arlington) Members Practice Party 7:45 pm (Arlington)	10
11 Tango 7 pm (Jax Beach) Waltz 7:45 pm (Arlington)	12 Rumba 6:15 pm (Jax Beach) Two Step 7:45 pm (Arlington)	13 Zumba 7 pm (Jax Beach)	14 Foxtrot 7:30 pm (Arlington) Followed by Outside Party	15	16
17 Swing 7 pm (Jax Beach) Paso Doble 7:45 pm (Arlington)	18 Tango 6:15 pm (Jax Beach) Cha Cha 7:45 pm (Arlington)	19 Hustle 6:15 pm (Jax Beach) Zumba 7 pm (Jax Beach)	20 Salsa 6:15 pm (Jax Beach) Foxtrot 7:45 pm (Arlington)	21 Merengue 7 pm (Jax Beach) Members Practice Party 7:45 pm (Jax Beach)	22
23 Cha Cha 7 pm (Jax Beach) Swing 7:45 pm (Arlington)	24 Rumba 6:15 pm (Jax Beach) Tango 7:45 pm (Arlington)	25 Zumba 7 pm (Jax Beach)	26 Waltz 6:15 pm (Jax Beach) Rumba 7:45 pm (Arlington)	27 Open Champagne Guest Party 7 pm (Arlington)	28

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