

LOCAL DIET

In 2005, freelance writer and radio producer Amy Jo Ehman wrote to us from Saskatoon with a novel idea. "Let me do an article about my pledge to eat nothing but Saskatchewan-grown foods for a year," she suggested. Now here, we reasoned, was some food for thought: Consider the vast amounts of fossil fuels used to truck food from the farm to the supermarket. Consider the extent to which nutrition can suffer on the journey. Consider that local food keeps local farmers in business. It's enough to make you rethink how you buy your food.

In April 2006, we published Amy's musings in an item called "Eat Locally" and followed with an update in October. She and her husband were quite pleased with her efforts, noting, "We have discovered that every food group (except chocolate!) is grown or raised locally. We are eating better and feeling better for it."

About the same time, a B.C. couple named Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon, was working on a similar idea. Their advantage was a catchy title: *The 100-Mile Diet*. Their book, which chronicled their vow to consume only food that was sourced a hundred miles or less from their home, appeared in 2007 and shot into the best-sellers' list. There were other books: *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* by novelist Barbara Kingsolver and *The Omnivore's Dilemma* by Michael Pollan. Collectively, they caused a buzz that is still gaining momentum today.

No one knows this better than Ann Burnham, who opened a market beside her family farm just west of Cobourg, Ontario, in 1994. From the start, the goal was to sell their own harvest of sweet corn, berries, apples and more recently, peas and beans. Today, the Burnham Family Farm Market sells lots of other seasonal produce, too—all sourced as close to home as possible—and has its own bakery. Every item bears a label, saying who grew it and where the farm is located. Sales are



DREAMSTIME

SEZ WHO?

Just when you thought local food was a motherhood issue that no one could fault, along comes Pierre Durocher, a geography professor at the University of Toronto. During a CBC-Radio interview last October, he said he admires its good intentions, but believes "the local food movement does more harm than good."

His beef? "Only 11 percent of the energy used in agriculture is spent on shipping." The rest, he claimed, is borne in the cost of production, which can more than offset any savings in transportation. "For example," he reasons, "It takes just as much energy to store our apple crop in the off-season as it does to ship fresh apples from Argentina." Likewise, Durocher suggests it's better to grow and ship vegetables from developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa than it is to keep the lights and the heat going in Canadian greenhouses. "The least we can do is support farmers in the Third World."

Durocher summed it all up by saying, "I think the whole local food thing is more about anti-globalization than anything else."

soaring. "Everyone's talking about the local diet," Ann reports. Indeed, she says it's the hook that has helped propel the business well beyond her initial expectations. "Come August harvest season, we are unbelievably busy."

There's a bigger picture here and you need only refer again to economist Jeff Rubin (see also pages 40 and 59) to realize that the local trend just might be with us for a long time. "It's just a matter of economic forces," he told us, relaying his theory that as oil prices climb in the future (and they're about to skyrocket, he says), it will no longer

make financial sense to ship food from farms halfway across the world. "The future looks bright for local food simply because it doesn't have to go as far to get to markets."

Even now, with supermarkets still brimming with imported foodstuffs, there's already a version of the Burnham store in most every town these days; meanwhile, farmers' markets are booming after years in stagnation. Chic restaurants have scratched exotic swordfish from their menus in favour of local farm-raised trout. And the message hasn't been lost on the big grocery chains, several of which have made local sourcing part of their marketing plans. You know a trend has legs when the big boys latch onto it.

As for Amy Jo, she has since given herself a new challenge. "Every day, I want to eat something picked by our own hands." That's another story. In fact, it's Trend No.#9. See page 58.🌱

TOM CRUICKSHANK

FUTURE WATCH

- Average distance that a typical carrot travels to reach the dinner table: 2,957 km
- Place of origin of potatoes at a Metro supermarket in Cobourg, Ontario, November 2009: Bradford, Ontario (That's local.)
- Place of origin of packaged lettuce at a Metro supermarket in Cobourg, Ontario, November 2009: Monterey, California (That's definitely not local.)
- Place of origin of apples at a Metro supermarket in Cobourg, Ontario, November 2009: Washington, USA (That's bizarre, considering there's a commercial orchard across the highway.)
- No. of farmers' markets in Toronto, 1989: 3
- No. of farmers' markets in Toronto, 2009: 35
- New words that have entered the language, thanks to the local food movement: "locavore," "food miles"