



BUYING LOCALLY GROWN AND EATING SEASONALLY IN ARIZONA

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More and more consumers are choosing to buy locally produced foods. Health and environment conscious consumers believe locally grown foods are healthier, fresher, and taste better, while buying locally also helps communities by stimulating local economies and protecting the environment. This article outlines the benefits of buying locally grown food and eating seasonally in Arizona.

What is Local Food?

The term “local food” does not have a universally accepted definition for the geographic component of what “local” means. A 2008 national survey found that over 70% of consumers surveyed described “local” as “made or produced within 50 miles of their homes”, while another approximately 20% described “local” as “made or produced in my state.” [1]

According to the definition adopted by the U.S. Congress in the 2008 Food, Conservation, and Energy Act, the total distance that a product can be transported and still be considered a “locally or regionally produced agricultural food product” is less than 400 miles from its origin. [2] Thus, a definition of “local” may depend on within a radius, a county, a state and region. And a district’s definition of local may change depending on the season, product and special events. [3]

Why Buy Locally Grown Food?

Buying and eating locally grown foods is associated with better nutrition and health, supporting the local economy, and protecting the environment. Several factors, such as nutritional qualities, growing methods used, ripeness at harvest, post-harvest handling, processing and packaging, and distance transported, affect the quality of food produced locally or on farms in Arizona. The following are some reasons to consider buying locally grown foods.

Better nutrition and well-being

Fruits and vegetables provide key nutrients (e.g., carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins, and minerals), dietary fiber, and protective substances (e.g., antioxidants) that contribute to health and general well-being. They are associated with reducing the risk factors of many chronic diseases and weight control. MyPlate, which is based on The Dietary Guidelines for Americans (the Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of Health and Human Services) recommends: “*Make half your plate, fruits and vegetables. Choose red, orange, and dark-green vegetables like tomatoes, sweet potatoes, and broccoli, along with other vegetables for your meals. Add fruit to meals as part of main or side dishes or as dessert.*” [4]

Variety: When different produce is available throughout the year, it encourages consumers to try a variety of fruits and vegetables. The variety of fruits and vegetables provides many vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and fibers. Eating a variety of foods from the rest of five food groups (grain, dairy, and protein foods – meat, poultry, seafood, beans and peas, eggs, processed soy products, nuts, and seeds) helps you meet your needs for different nutrients. Nutrients commonly found in foods from one group may not be present in high amounts in another. That is why eating a variety of foods is important. Eating a variety of foods is one of the best things you can do to prevent and control many health problems, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and some types of cancer. It is the way to a healthier, nutritious diet.

Farmers producing for a local and direct market such as a farmers' market or local restaurant are more likely to place a higher value on plant varieties that are more nutritious, unique, and tasty, instead of yield – how many pounds, bushels, are harvested per acre and can withstand long-distance transport. As an example of increased local variety, grass-fed beef from small farms is becoming popular at local farmers' markets and grocery stores, and contains higher amounts of "good" cholesterol, vitamins A and E, and antioxidants than do factory grain-fed beef, while containing lower amounts of fat.

Freshness: Locally grown produce at a farm stand, farmers' market or grocery store tends to be fresher, because it is picked at the peak of its quality and nutritional value. On the other hand, fruits and vegetables grown thousands of miles away are often harvested as early as possible in order to reduce damages during long-distance transportation. Total vitamin C content of several different fruits and vegetables, including tomatoes, red peppers, and peaches, has been shown to be higher when these are picked ripe. Delay between harvest and consumption results in losses of flavor and nutritional potential. [5] The fresher the produce, the better it tastes, which makes eating fruits and vegetables more appealing.

Quality: Fruits and vegetables for the fresh market are generally harvested by hand. Mechanical harvesting methods used in mass production have potential to damage more and can result in nutrient losses. Maintaining nutritional quality after fruits and vegetables are harvested requires careful handling, particularly with delicate items like berries and tomatoes. Once produce is separated from its source of nutrients (tree, plant, or vine), it undergoes higher rates of respiration, resulting in moisture loss, quality and nutrient degradation, and spoilage.

Building the local economy

Buying local, seasonal produce at the grocery store, farm stand, or farmers' market positively affects the area's economy, while providing a source of income for local farmers. Unlike large industrial farms, small family farms are more likely to spend their money locally by purchasing farming supplies (seeds, machinery, etc.) within their communities. When small

farms grow, process, and distribute their foods locally, that generates jobs and stimulates local economies.

An important component of economic development is creating relationships between producers/farmers and consumers. For example, when a customer is purchasing local meat, the customer may ask how the animals were fed, processed, what chemicals (if any) were used, or any other questions they may have. This creates the relationship that may encourage the customer to become a repeat buyer who trusts and buys local meat. [6]

Protecting the environment

Reducing the distance food has to travel from a field to a consumer is beneficial to our environment. In general, locally grown foods require much less fuel and energy to transport (by truck, rail or air). Local foods do not require special packaging to protect for traveling great distances. This may reduce the use of plastic bags and packaging, and helps reduce the waste associated with packaging. Fuels, packaging, and preservatives that may be applied to maintain freshness all have a negative impact on the environment.

When Can I Buy Local Foods Seasonally?

There are many places selling locally produced foods, including farmers' markets, small farms, and grocery stores. **LocalFresh.Info** is an interactive website that enhances connections between consumers and producers of local food. It was established in 2003 by the University of Arizona's Agricultural and Resource Economics Department as a service for Southwest farmers and ranchers wanting to do more direct marketing to local consumer. **LocalFresh.info** allows anyone to search for offerings of their favorite vegetables, flowers, honey, breads, eggs, meat and poultry within a specified distance of any zip code in Arizona. Users can view harvest calendars, maps and information of producers and markets in their area.



Some other websites that provide information about where to find local foods are listed below.

- **LocalFresh.Info** has an extensive and dynamic website to connect consumers and local growers. <http://localfresh.info/>
- **Arizona Farm Bureau** has a great website that shows which foods are grown locally in Arizona and offers links where the foods are sold. fillyourplate.org
- **Arizona Grown** offers information as to which foods are grown in Arizona. <http://arizonagrown.org/>
- **The Arizona Health Department** offers information on Arizona's farmers' markets. azdhs.gov/azwic/farmers_market

Grocery stores are now required to use County of Origin labels on their produce. These labels can help you find local foods. Also, some grocery stores may have local agricultural promotional marketing campaigns such as “support local farmers.” This helps you buy fresher, ripe produce when shopping at a local grocery store.

Contact local Extension agents for more information on which locally produced foods are available in your area. The University of Arizona, Cooperative Extension. <https://extension.arizona.edu/>



How can Local Foods Fit into a MyPlate?

Your local foods can be a part of healthy eating. See an example here of local foods that fit into the different food groups of MyPlate [7].

Vegetables: celery, corn, kale, lettuce, potatoes, pumpkin, tomatoes

Fruits: apples, dates, grapefruit, lemons, oranges, plums, watermelon

Grains: barley, cornmeal, farro, whole grain cornmeal, whole wheat

Meat and Beans: beef, chicken, lamb, lima beans, pinto beans, pole beans

Dairy: cheese, cottage cheese, milk, yogurt

Others: almonds, eggs, honey, olives, pecans, walnuts, wine

Easy Farmer’s Market Vegetable Casserole

Prep Time ≈ 20 Minutes

Cook Time: 30 Minutes

Total Time ≈ 50 Minutes

Cost Per Serving ≈ \$1.75

Ingredients for 4 servings:

- 1 cup shredded low-fat cheddar cheese
- 1 can condensed cream of chicken soup

- 1/3 cup low-fat buttermilk
- 2 cups diced, fresh raw vegetables, such as carrot, eggplant, bell pepper, onion, potato, squash, tomato
- 1 cup dried whole wheat pasta
- 4 tablespoons breadcrumbs
- Salt and pepper to taste

When buying your ingredients, choose local foods when available. Cheese, buttermilk, vegetables, and pasta are all things you can find grown/made in Arizona!

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F
2. Cook 1 cup of dried pasta according to package directions, drain and set aside
3. Place diced vegetables in a microwave safe dish with 2-3 tablespoons of water, microwave on high for 4-6 minutes, or until vegetables are soft (Cooking times may differ depending on the type of vegetables you choose. For more help, contact your local Cooperative Extension office [7.]) The University of Arizona, Cooperative Extension. <https://extension.arizona.edu/>)
4. Mix cooked pasta, cooked vegetables, shredded cheese, can of soup, and buttermilk in an 8x8 casserole dish
5. Top with breadcrumbs
6. Cover with oven safe lid or aluminum foil
7. Bake for thirty minutes until bubbly

Nutrition: (calculated using SuperTracker’s Food Tracker)

Makes 4 Servings

Calories ≈ 262 per serving

Grains: 27% of suggested daily intake

Vegetables: 24% of suggested daily intake

Dairy: 15% of suggested daily intake



Adapted from EFNEP’s “Create Your Own Casserole” Recipe [9]

DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know there are many apple orchards in Arizona, where you can pick your own apples? Apples are one of the easiest fruits to pick, which is a fun activity the whole family can enjoy together!



Summary

Locally grown foods are healthier, fresher, and are better tasting than foods that have endured many miles of transport. Buying locally also helps communities by stimulating local economies and protecting the environment. Try a recipe that is easy and affordable using local produce! An Arizona seasonal produce availability calendar is included in the Appendix.

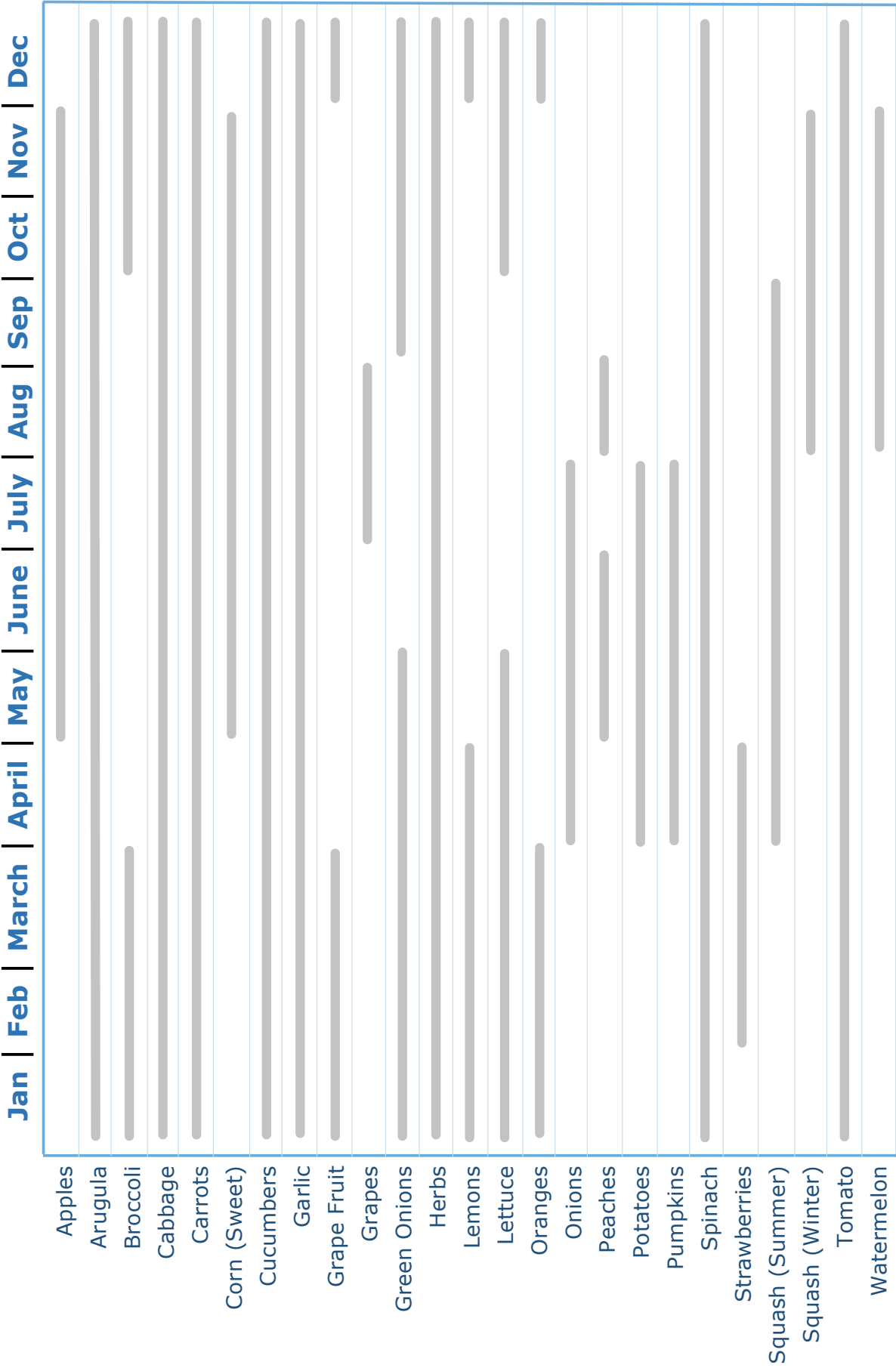
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Abstract

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Arizona Fruit and Vegetable availability Calendar



• Created using fillyourplate.org, arizonagrown.org, and localfresh.info



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