

## Food of Thy Neighbors

It's true. I eat granola, make my own yogurt, prefer the woods to the suburbs, and like wearing hiking boots more than flip-flops. And it's also true that I drink a bit too much coffee, dislike yoga because it requires too little thinking and too much breathing, and love a good hamburger on the grill with grilled onions.

So I hope you don't get the impression that I'm some sort of granola-hippie-fanatic when I tell you about what my August is shaping up to be. With me so far? You'll give me a chance?

Okay.

Over the past year, the notion of eating a more healthy diet has crept into my shopping patterns. I shop at the grocery store closest to my house, which happens to specialize in organic, natural and locally-produced products. Sometimes I buy organic, sometimes just local, and sometimes I don't even notice.

This led me to begin what I am calling The 50 Mile Diet.

I am trying to eat only foods that are raised or grown within 50 miles of my home, a quarter mile from the border of Eden Prairie and Chanhassen. This was not a well thought-through decision, truth be told. This was more like an epiphany. If you press me for any good reason why the radius is 50 miles, I can only tell you that my 50th birthday is looming in the same way some school kids are considering the first day of school -- too soon yet I might deserve a new outfit for it.

Fifty miles.

What can you buy from within 50 miles of a suburb like this? I presumed that just about everything I needed to eat -- or should be eating -- would be available. We have farms all around yielding some of the best corn in the state, tomatoes whose blush rivals those of pinup girls lips from the forties, and -- if you want to know the truth -- ice cream from Minneapolis that rivals those guys out in Vermont.

Eating local. It matters to me, as Barbara Kingsolver writes in her latest book, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, to know the "provenance" of my food. What pesticides were applied to this zucchini? How much did it cost to bring that beautiful squash from the farm to my plate? I want to support the local economy, reduce the use of fossil fuels to get it to market, and simply eat the produce from my farm neighbor. I care about whether the hamburger that drips juice out of the bun was from an operation where

the animals lived shoulder to shoulder in a facility, or if they were allowed to graze naturally on grass.

Eating local is also about taste. All winter, I slice tomatoes onto my salad, tomatoes that come as two dull-red orbs under a cellophane wrapper. They are mealy, dry, and seem a distant relative to the ones sitting at the farm stand today. In fact, they have been flown into town from across the country. I have even been known to buy blueberries in January, the most expensive three ounces of berries you can imagine, with so little blueberry flavor -- but I buy them thinking, I need blueberries. Need?

What would happen if I bought what was in season in my region this August? This is my experiment.

As I said in the beginning, I'm no fanatic and there are foods that I'm not going without just to prove a point. Coffee for one. Also, I don't think my flour will come from local farms, and I'm certain my vanilla won't. So there are some exceptions, but I allow those exceptions when they don't impact my support of the local farmer.

I'm blogging this adventure at [www.50milediet.com](http://www.50milediet.com) if you're interested in the experience, the issues, as well as the fantastic ice cream, kefir, and chocolate you can buy locally.

If you're interested in an experiment of your own, check out Lakewinds Natural Foods (Chanhassen, Minnetonka and Anoka) who are starting their own "Eat Local Challenge" program on August 15th. Sign up to eat 3 meals a week from local products. This is a very reasonable challenge! Lakewinds defines "local" as products from our five-state region of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, North Dakota and South Dakota. Try it. If nothing else, you join me in paying attention to where our food is from and supporting the local economy along the way.

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