



# Importance of Supporting Local Produce

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The produce bought from grocery stores usually travels thousands of miles before reaching your home. Though this option offers convenience, it brings many environmental, social, and waste costs. About 30 percent of food in American grocery stores is thrown away annually and the transportation for the food creation chain accounts for nearly 20% of all emissions. Consumers should become more informed and try to bring a shift towards supporting local farmers and buying locally grown produce. This not only brings fresher food to the consumer while supporting local businesses, but also improves community bonds and reduces environmental impacts. I spoke with Terry Bell, the hard-working, community-focused owner of Great Valley Farms LLC to bring insight to the importance of supporting local produce.

## Fresher, Increased Quality Food

Local produce is often much fresher and more nutritious than the average food bought at a supermarket. Studies find that fruits and vegetables begin to lose nutrients as soon as they're harvested, so by the time produce must be shipped all the way to a grocery store it may have lost a lot of its nutritional value. Terry explained how they combat this at Great Valley Farms, "Produce can only be out for a certain amount of time...you spend so much time calculating it so that picking is done as close to the market date as possible.". Buying from the local farmers ensures you get the highest nutritional value as possible from your purchases. In addition, local farms grow produce organically in order to reduce consumers exposure to chemicals, "We do organically grown farming which means we are not certified, but we don't use pesticides, chemical fertilizers, any of that. So the maintenance, or the growing of the vegetables is a bit harder for us.", Terry explained how her farm goes the extra mile to ensure their produce is the best quality you can get. This is the same case for all farmers who grow organic with the best intent to provide consumers with superb products.

## Reduces Environmental Impact

Local agriculture also brings a reduction in environmental impacts through supporting environmentally friendly practices. A Stanford magazine commented on the environmental effects of the food industry, “The food industry is a major player in such environmental issues as deforestation, land-use change, water wastage and excess fertilizer run-off”. Local, organic agriculture uses land that's been around for years and stays away from the chemical fertilizers that deteriorate our waters, air, and overall environment. To add on, the commercial food industry leaves behind a large carbon footprint through the transportation of produce, “In the United States, produce is shipped an average of 1,500 miles from where it was produced to its final destination, burning fossil fuels all the way”. Local farmers don't have to ship their produce miles and miles from factory to factory to ensure their food reaches your plate. In addition, produce in grocery stores requires extensive packaging compared to that of local produce. Refined plastics and other materials are used which in turn end up in landfills slowly worsening the environmental state of our world. Buying local is a simple, easy way for you to support the movement towards a better environment.

## Supporting Local Community

Another attractive reason to buy local is the ability to support your local community. When consumers buy local, they not only support local farmers, but enhance the local economy and promote sustainable farming practices. When asked on the importance of supporting local farmers, Terry stated, “You're supporting a local farmer, which means you're supporting the people in your community. And you want them to keep on growing so that you have fresh produce.”. Giving back and supporting the community around you is extremely important to ensure the environment stays resilient and positive. In addition, these local farmers deserve to be supported by their community as they go through many hardships just to bring the produce to your plates. Terry explained to me how she wakes up extremely early to make it on time to market hours, “If it's summertime, then you're up at 2 o'clock in the morning.”. Supporting the local farmers is one way consumers can easily support the local community to allow it to thrive.

## Strengthening Community Connections

Buying local produce builds and strengthens the connections in our community. The farmers markets provide the perfect opportunity for consumers to meet the people who grow their food. As I spoke with Terry, I found she greatly valued the relationships she has gained from the markets, “And that's why I try to remember names of people, try to remember their back histories or the back stories.”. Terry, like many other local farmers, goes out of their way to make the markets a fun, welcoming environment to meet new people and form bonds with others. Terry added how the connections bring positives through a two-way street, “So it's an opportunity to connect with the community and have that feedback, and it feels good. I mean it feels good to know where your produce is going, and I hope it feels good for the customers to know where their produce is coming from, and that's kind of a sharing.”. Stronger community connections lead to more support for local farmers which improve the sustainability of the local food system.

Supporting the local farmers and buying local produce brings many benefits from reducing environmental impacts, building strong community bonds, and having increased quality foods. How

could you not want to make the switch? Come out to the local Arlington Farmers Markets to support our local produce vendors and make a positive impact on our community.