



North Coast Citizen * 19 October 2006

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We'd feel outraged ordering a hamburger and fries that turned out to be styrofoam under a colorful plastic shell. But perhaps we wouldn't notice if the plastic was added slowly to our food over a number of years.

That may have happened.

Nutrient loss in our food is amazing. In 1900, wheat was 90% protein. Now it's only 9%. Other fruits and vegetables show a 60-80% drop in minerals, vitamins, and other nutrients.

Maybe that's why we're so fat. Our hungry bodies stuffing in 10 slices of bread to get the nutrition they should get from a single slice.

Why is fake-food happening? Part is "yield-enhancing" growing methods - artificial fertilizers, irrigation, and timing. They merely dilute the nutrients plants are able to pull from the ground. They add water and mass, not nutrition. Easy to happen when we buy from someone we don't know who only cares about profit, when things are sold by weight, and when squeeze is put on farmers.

Fruit and vegetables are bred for esthetics and size. People buy them because they look good. Hard to tell how they'll taste when they're shrink-wrapped. Hard to tell how they'll feed you, when they're coated with taste-enhancements. There's real difference between small, juicy local strawberries and blueberries and super-sized, cardboard-tasting ones picked unripe enough to ship.

I heard a couple of people talking once about shopping at Mother Nature's. One asked why things cost more there. The other replied that in terms of health and nutrition it cost *less* to buy organic food than the diluted, out-dated, pesticide-contaminated food available "cheaper" at the big box outlets. You also

get fresh local meats, vegetables and fruits. Shelly's blueberries, Hank's strawberries, Jeff's lettuce and tomatoes, Brian's organic meat. You know the growers, they get a fair price. "Organic" doesn't guarantee high nutrient content, if the varieties are bad to begin with, but it's a sure first step.

Another talk recently with a local dairy farmer. Like many, his wife had to work off-farm because he could barely pay his farm employees. Nothing was left over for his family. He was part of the producer's coop, but apparently those "owners" have little say in what they're paid for their product. Interestingly, the farmer was adamant about shopping Costco to get lowest prices on food he bought.

Every pipe has two ends. If things are cheap coming out, it's a good guess what people are being paid at the other end is pretty nasty. How many family farms have been forced into bankruptcy in the last 20 years, squeezed by corporate "middlemen"?

Don't know about you, but I once had something sold through Costco. The publisher of Gary Braasch and my calendar kept us up to date on their experience. Costco, like all big boxes, is big. They set the rules. More-than-wholesale discounts. The publisher *at best* makes *very* little money. "But they might get into this huge market!!!" Publisher takes all the risk, all the losses if the local stores forget to put your product in the right location. Repeat deals with big boxes are uncommon for small producers. Obvious reasons. Why are farmers going out of business?

A visitor was once talking with me about our "cool box", which we have instead of a refrigerator. It doesn't, of course, keep leftovers as long. "But why would anyone want to eat old food?" she asked. Good point. But all you get, shipped around in the global "mega-distribution" world, is "old food."

The alternative? Buy locally. Help growers get a fair price. Cut out the middle-men. Know how food's grown. Taste it. Buy from someone you know and trust. Trust your tummy. Farmer's Markets. Join Community Supported Agriculture and get direct from a farmer. Grow your own.

Find varieties that do well in our micro-climates. Eat fresh. Learn and gather wildfoods. If you don't hunt or fish, find a friend who does. On staples like wheat or rice, keep asking the stores their nutrient content. Let them tell suppliers their customers are demanding the truth.

The issue of local food production is what CARE is working on in the county. And why we started the Coastal Food Ecology Center at Alder Creek Farm. Oregon Tilth, and The Organic Center are working on the issues of nutrient decline and ways to document the nutrient levels in foods so we know what we're getting.

We are what we eat. So eat well. Eat locally. Enjoy the abundance that grows right around us. Our spinach is safe.