

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the locavore movement, where people make an effort to eat from local food producers, has been growing in popularity. Marion Nestle, dietician and renowned food critic, advocates for the locavore movement simply because she “loves the taste of fresh food” (Smith and Mackinnon). Is better taste in food a good enough reason for communities to become a part of the locavore movement? Before adopting this new eating style, people should look at their accessibility to local produce and the effects of the locavore movement both on the environment and the economy.

Accessibility to locally produced food is an important factor to consider before attempting to switch to this diet. In his book *The End of Food*, author Paul Roberts claims that “80 percent of us [American citizens] live in large, densely populated urban areas, usually on the coast, and typically hundreds of miles, often thousands of miles, from the major centers of food production” (Roberts). The simple fact is that no matter how much somebody wants to eat local, if they are not within a few dozen miles of a food producer, becoming a locavore is not possible. People who live in cities and suburbs would have to travel hundreds of miles to get their food, and at that point the “local” part of the movement starts to lose meaning. A comic by Alex Hallat, called “Arctic Circle,” pokes fun at this. Two arctic animals are attempting to eat local, but their only option for food in their freezing climate is a supermarket (Hallat). While Hallat deals with the locavore movement in a joking manner with an extreme example, he places an important emphasis on the fact that eating from local producers simply is not possible for lots of people.

People should also consider the environmental effects of eating local before adopting this lifestyle. In her article “10 Reasons to Eat Local Food,” writer Jennifer Maiser claims that “eating local is better for air quality and pollution than eating organic” (Maiser). The miles that organic food travels creates lots of gas pollution, and eating from local producers would minimize this environmental cost. Eating local would reduce the travel distance for the food, and thus reduce the amount of pollutants that transport vehicles are emitting. However, in his article “On My Mind: The Locavore Myth,” writer James McWilliams refutes this point. He cites a study by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, which revealed that “transportation accounts for only 11% of food’s carbon footprint” (McWilliams). So much pollution is still released through cooking and producing this food. McWilliams also points out a flaw in the calculation of transport distance and argues that analysts should not measure food miles but rather they should measure product per gallon of gas (MacWilliams). A local producer who travels fifty miles to deliver fifty apples is just as efficient as a large company truck travelling two thousand miles to deliver two thousand apples (MacWilliams). Eating locally is superior in terms of the effects on the environment, but only marginally so. Their pollution output is only a tenth less than organic foods and still many pollutants are released from simply cooking these products.

The last issue that people must be cognizant of is the economic effects of eating local. In his article “The Rise of the ‘Locavore’: How the Strengthening Local Food Movement in Towns Across the U.S. Is Reshaping Farms and Food Retailing,” author Pallavi Gogoi points out that the local food movement has increased government subsidies of small farmers. Specifically, “\$2.3 billion was set aside this year [2009] for specialty crops . . . grown by . . . small, mostly organic farmers” (Gogoi). While it is

great that smaller farmers in America are getting more money, one must consider how switching to these producers affects other farmers around the world. When one farmer gains customers, another loses. McWilliams refers to a case in the U.K., where switching to local green beans “threatens the livelihood of 1.5 million sub-Saharan farmers” (McWilliams). Less fortunate people in developing countries often depend on markets in the U.S and Europe to provide them with income. This isn’t extra money, but rather subsistence money, often barely enough to help them survive. Switching to local food may benefit small farmers, but these are much more economically well off in comparison to farmers in Africa that depend on us. The international economic effects are too important to ignore, and switching to local food would only hurt people that are already suffering.

Ultimately, after investigating the accessibility as well as the environmental and economic effects of the locavore movement, it’s clear that switching to local foods would not be a wise decision. For most people, eating local simply isn’t possible. Urban and suburban dwellers would have to travel hundreds of miles to get food that is produced “locally,” which completely negates the only benefit of eating local: marginally less pollution. Eating local food may get more money flowing to small-time farmers, but more importantly takes away money from farmers in poor, developing countries. Nestle’s advocacy of local produce simply because she “loves the taste of fresh food” is not only selfish, but ignorant of the adverse economic effects that eating local has on millions of poor farmers.