



## Chasing the flavor and reclaiming local food

The first Thanksgiving, a communal feast of the seasonal and local, epitomized the tenets of the Slow Food movement. How many Thanksgiving dinners over the last 100 years can lay claim to the same?

As of September, the cost of shipping a box of broccoli from California to the East Coast had grown from \$3 to \$10 in one year, according to the panel speaking about “Relocalizing Food” at Slow Food Nation in San Francisco. Clearly, continuing to ship food long distances is not sustainable. The “market,” while not fulfilling Alan Greenspan’s long-held expectations, is sure to be the determining factor as more and more people seek out fresh and seasonal produce from their local markets (double entendre intended).

“California is exporting water to New York in the form of tomatoes!” said Michael Pollan, author of *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* and *In Defense of Food*. “We can’t afford to burn so much fuel in feeding ourselves when we don’t have to.”

And why would we once we’ve been reintroduced to the taste of food that is truly fresh and in season? My father, visiting from Ohio during the height of our tomato season this summer, exclaimed when served a simple tomato salad, “Tomatoes don’t taste like this in Ohio!” Actually, they probably do, but not those from the major supermarket at which he and his wife shop.

“Fossilized food” is what Gary Nabhan, founder of Renewing America’s Food Traditions Alliance, calls the fruits and vegetables that most people buy because they are grown with oil-based fertilizers and then transported around America to supermarkets in gas-guzzling trucks.

To relocalize our food supply will require policy changes at the national level since, currently, the food system supports “Big Ag” at the expense of mid- and small-scale farming, making the price of industrial food artificially cheap. “The game is rigged,” said Pollan. “We need to level the playing field.”

Along with policy changes, such as those being called for in the areas of animal husbandry and human antibiotics, local relationships between farmers and purchasers will need to be rebuilt. And, because some products just can’t be grown in certain areas, but we’d be loathe to live without them — like chocolate, tea and coffee — we’ll need “fair trade” between regions, what Slow Food founder Carlo Petrini calls “virtuous globalization.”

“Spending just \$5–10 a week on local food can make a big difference to the local economy,” said Pollan. “It’s not all or nothing.”

Coupling the looming energy and water crises with people re-learning the pleasures of eating local, seasonal food can’t help but result in

positive change, believes the panel. People will begin “chasing the flavor” rather than the lowest price, said Dan Barker of the renowned Blue Hill Restaurant in New York, which raises most of the food it serves on its own farm.

My dad thinks Barker is right — at least when it comes to tomatoes!

Wishing you a convivial Thanksgiving meal this month that captures the flavors of our county — and honors our local farmers.

*Written by Sheri Cardo, SLT public relations and marketing officer.*

