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Market Share

With all the recent talk and controversy about the Boyce Farmers' Market, I started thinking "What would life be like without a farmers' market?"

For me the farmers' market means so many things. First, it means that I have a choice to purchase locally grown and produced vegetables, fruit, meat and many other products; everything from cakes to carrots and jam to jewellery. Second, my food is fresher and healthier. There is more of a chance that my market-purchased food is grown using healthier farming practices as it often comes from smaller farms, rather than big factory farms. Buying local means that my food hasn't been transported from thousands of kilometres away. Finally, buying local at the farmers' market, means that I put money back into my local economy and my community.

When I purchase food at the market I make a choice to put a better product on my plate – and more importantly, a product that I know more about. I have a choice of organically grown produce, as well as meat and dairy products that are free-range or free-run. Buying direct from the farmer gives me an opportunity to find out more about the food I am eating. Knowing the farming methods used better ensures that it meets my health, environmental and personal preferences. Practices used in small, family-run farms often means that fewer chemicals, antibiotics, steroids and growth hormones (if any) are being deposited into the surrounding air, farmland and waterways, not to mention the product itself!

Buying local is also an easy way to reduce our carbon footprint. I'm sure you have heard that on average the food we eat has travelled more than 2000 kilometres from farm to dinner table, and it is usually transported in large trucks, resulting in large emissions. A weekly trip to the farmers' market is all it takes to save thousands of tonnes of CO₂ emissions every year.

And long delivery trips don't only equate to carbon emissions - produce grown thousands of miles away is often picked before it ripens, so it's never really *fresh*; and is usually preserved with chemicals or radiation. Buying local fresh fruits and vegetables increases the nutritional value of the produce (which increases as it ripens naturally). Not to mention that it simply tastes better.

Buying local is not only healthier for you and the environment; it can also be kinder to your budget. When you purchase local produce, often it is 'in season', in other words, when it is most abundant and therefore less expensive. Not to mention with the steadily climbing price of gas, costs at the supermarket are being driven up due to all the items transported from long distances. And crucially important from an economic development perspective, buying at the market is also a way of directly supporting the local economy. I have read that a dollar spent locally generates twice as much income for the local economy.

Making a trip once a week to the local farmers' market provides you with healthier, tastier food, reduces your carbon footprint, and saves you money. And from a holistic sense, what I would miss most about not having a farmers' market is the sense of community. The market is a place where you can speak directly with the craftspeople who make your goods; with the farmers who grow your food; or with the bakers who bake your bread. It is a meeting place and a greeting place. It abounds with community pride, and Fredericton and the surrounding areas are so much richer for its presence in the downtown each Saturday.

So if you've never thought about the importance of it before, and you are looking for ways to reduce your family's carbon footprint - the market is a great way to start!

Valerie Hillier lives in Fredericton and works for the Playhouse. She continually looks for ways to challenge herself and others to do more for the health of our planet. For many more 'green' tips visit www.greenmattersfredericton.com.