



## Eating Local Is No Stretch — Great Food Is Close At Hand

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By the Fourth of July, local food production is in full swing in Connecticut. Every time you shop at a farmers market instead of a supermarket, you are voting with your dollar for food that comes directly from local farms.

Farms such as Holcomb Farm in West Granby and Earthtone Farms in Windsor are the types of community farms that are forming the backbone of a movement to create a more stable and sustainable food system.

Eating locally not only has personal benefits, as you, the consumer, are getting food that is fresher and better-tasting; it also has environmental and economic benefits. According to information from Gov. Dannel P. Malloy's office, only 1 percent of state food dollars is spent on food grown in Connecticut. If that spending increased to 5 percent, it would generate \$600 million more for state farmers. By supporting local farmers you are helping strengthen the local economy and keep food dollars in the state.

With more than 100 farmers markets and more than 50 community-supported agriculture operations statewide, Connecticut residents have no shortage of access to fresh, local produce. There are even eight farmers markets within the state that are open year-round, including the Farmers' Market at Billings Forge in Hartford.

The Farmers' Market at Billings Forge is now the city's largest farmers market, operating year-round to bring fresh fruits, vegetables, dairy, breads, jams, coffee and more directly from farms to consumers. Billings Forge also has a community garden that is maintained and harvested by local volunteers and families. Produce from the garden is supplied to the farmers market as well as the Firebox Restaurant.

If you're looking to join community-supported agriculture, The Hartford Food System established an urban farm project called Grow Hartford. It operates from mid-July through the end of September. Members who purchase a share have access each week to more than 35 varieties of vegetables, flowers and herbs grown by the farm staff.

The local foods movement is growing in Connecticut and around the globe. In Senegal, women farmers are switching back to traditional and local varieties of fruit, including karkadè, pain de singe, tamarindo and ditakh that they process into value-added products, such as juices and jam. And in Kenya, farmers are being trained to grow local produce using local seed and fertilizer.

These are just a few examples of innovations discovered by researchers from Worldwatch Institute's Nourishing the Planet project. Researchers spent the past two years traveling to 25 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The innovations in sustainable agriculture they found are highlighted in the report State of the World 2011: Innovations that Nourish the Planet.

With global land, water, and energy resources reaching their limits, amid unprecedented population growth and climate change, awareness of where your food comes from is critical.

There is a growing realization that our food system is broken and that the way to restore it is through supporting sustainable local food initiatives, such as The Hartford Food System or the farmers market at Billings Forge. With an abundance of farmers markets, community-supported agriculture programs and community gardens in Hartford and surrounding areas, it is becoming easier to eat local.

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