



BUY LOCAL: THE LAKE COUNTY FOOD SYSTEM

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Local food systems offer many economic, environmental, and quality-of-life benefits that apply to businesses, residents, and Lake County as a whole. As consumers, residents benefit from having more opportunities to buy fresh produce to cook at home or eat at restaurants. Local entrepreneurs benefit from increased business opportunities, and our county as a whole benefits from stronger, more diverse local economies.

SUPPORTS LOCAL BUSINESS

Purchasing food grown, processed, distributed, and sold locally supports our neighbors and helps strengthen our local economies by employing people, generating income, and circulating dollars within our county. Every dollar given to a local farmer can be spent at other businesses owned by members of the community.

PROVIDES FRESH, HIGH-QUALITY FOOD

When produce travels only 10 to 25 miles from farm to table rather than across the country or the world, it takes less time and is much fresher when it arrives. Fruits and vegetables shipped from distant farms can spend up to two weeks in transit, while farmers market produce is often picked just a day or two prior. Minimizing transportation and processing increases the freshness, flavor, and nutrient retention of produce.

REDUCES FOOD MILES

The distance food travels from farm to plate -- referred to as "food miles" -- affects its impact on the environment. The average food item travels 1,500 miles, compared to the average locally produced item that travels only a fraction of that. Although food miles account for only 11 percent of the food system's greenhouse gas emissions, a reduction of food miles also reduces the impact that rising fuel costs have on food prices.

HELPS MANAGE WASTE

A food system can also be a waste management technique and energy producer. By promoting a "closed loop" food system, in which every stage of the food system is used as a resource, the region can divert food waste from our landfills. An estimated 41 percent of U.S. food waste goes to landfills, where it takes up space and releases methane. The nutrients lost when food is landfilled could be retained and reused by composting food scraps for use in local food production, home gardens, or landscaping, thereby reducing the need for fertilizers. Additionally, food waste can be integrated into animal feed or converted into renewable energy and fuel.

BUILDS SENSE OF COMMUNITY

The production and consumption of local foods can create a thriving culture, regional identity, and a sense of community heritage. For example, a Saturday farmers market is more than just a retail outlet to buy food. It also provides a social gathering spot for the community and allows people to meet the farmers who grow their food.

Benefits of Buying Local

- **Economic Potential:** Keeps Money in the State, Increases Farm Income and Jobs, and Supports Local Business
- **Improved Quality of Life:** Provides Fresh, High-Quality Food and Promotes a Sense of Community
- **Helps the Environment:** Reduces Food Miles and Gas Emissions, Helps Manage Waste, and Promotes the Preservation of Farmland



AN ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY IN LAKE COUNTY

Economists estimate that 90-95 percent of the \$48 billion worth of food consumed in Illinois – approximately \$14 billion of which is fruits and vegetables– is produced elsewhere, meaning that approximately \$46 billion leaves our state every year. In Lake County alone, over 88 percent of food dollars were spent outside of the county in 2009.

There is market demand for food that is grown and processed here by our own neighbors, which generates and circulates money within our state and region rather than sending it elsewhere. The multiplier effect of money spent on locally grown food in Illinois estimates that those food dollars circulate 1.4 to 2.6 times within the local economy, indicating that every dollar that goes toward local food purchases can double or triple the economic benefits to the local economy.

By that factor, if the unmet demand for fruits and vegetables in Lake County – estimated at approximately \$180 million– were

satisfied, then the benefits to the County’s economy as a whole could total \$468 million annually. This positive trend also influences labor income and jobs, as it is estimated that fruit and vegetable farms selling in local markets employ 13 full-time employees per every \$1 million in sales, versus three employees for entities that sell into global farm commodity markets. In other words, a dollar spent at the farmers market supports four times as many workers as a dollar spent at the supermarket. Farm income is also impacted by the choice of product. On a national scale, studies have shown that farm income and per acre net revenue for fresh market vegetables are five to 50 times greater than that for commodity crops.

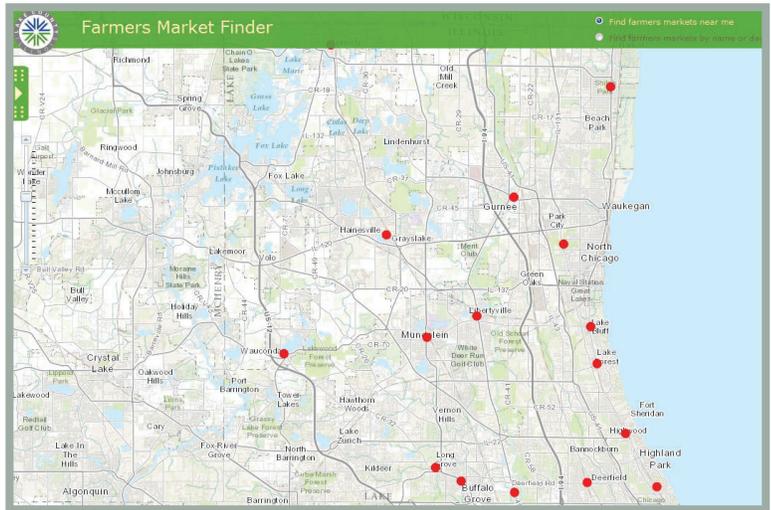
By supporting and strengthening the sustainable local food system, Lake County is poised to tap into the economic potential of increased jobs and production.



FIND A FARMERS MARKET

The Lake County GIS/Mapping Division recently launched a Farmers Market Finder. Go to maps.lakecountyil.gov/farmersmarket to find farmers markets in your area. To locate a farmers market, simply enter an address or day of the week in the search box, or use your current location. The farmers market(s) will then be highlighted on the map and relevant information about each farmers market displayed.

maps.lakecountyil.gov/farmersmarket



LAKE COUNTY TRENDS

Data from the Lake County 2007 Agricultural Census shows that the county is moving toward sustainable farming practices and more of a local food system. More than 20 percent of farms used conservation methods, and there were 12 organic farms totaling 90 acres. Additionally, Lake County has 13 farmers markets, and the county has seen a consistent rise in direct-to-consumer sales.

There is unmet demand for locally grown food in Lake County, as is the case throughout the metropolitan Chicago area and state-wide. According to one estimate, if Lake County consumers bought \$5 of food directly from local farms each week, local farms would earn an additional \$182 million. This annual demand for vegetables and fruits in Lake County demonstrates the great economic potential of local food production in Lake County.

18 North County Street, Waukegan IL
www.lakecountyil.gov

