The many benefits of eating local vegetables and fruit

Meena Parameswaran, Registered Dietitian/ Public Health Nutritionist

Eating locally is good for the health of adults and children. When you choose food that is grown locally, you also support the community, local economy, environment and local farmers.

Benefits for Adults:

According to Statistics Canada about 60% of adults in Leeds Grenville and Lanark do not eat enough vegetables and fruit each day. Buying food that is locally grown may help you to eat more fresh vegetables and fruit- which are good for the health of you and your family. When you connect with local growers you can find out how to best prepare, store and use different kinds of foods. Local food doesn’t travel long distances, so it is fresher and tastier. “In season” food grown in your community was probably picked in the past few days.

When people know more about their food and where it comes from, they often make better food choices. People who eat local food are more likely to eat more homemade meals and turn less to prepackaged convenience foods. Foods prepared from scratch are often lower in sodium and unhealthy fats, and include more whole grains which add up to a more wholesome diet.

Benefits for Children:

Talking to children about where food comes from connects them to the food supply. Many children think that food only comes from a grocery store. Take your children to a farm or farmer’s market so they can see where food comes from. Get the kids involved in preparing food for the family. If kids take part in the selection and cooking of foods, they are more likely to eat it. Also, make the effort to eat together as often as possible. Talk about the food you’re eating. How does it taste? Where do you think it comes from? Allow children the chance to grow their own food, pick a food from a farmer’s market and meet the farmer who grew the food. Children are more likely to enjoy eating fruits and vegetables if they have some input and understanding of where it has come from and have helped to prepare it.

Benefits for the community:

When you buy directly from local growers, you are creating a direct link between those who grow the food and those who eat it. The local economy also gets a boost when you buy locally produced food, because dollars are kept within your community along with local jobs and local agriculture, which can strengthen the local economy.

Benefits for the environment:

Imported food can travel over a thousand kilometers to get to the store, which burns up a great deal of fossil fuel- contributing to pollution. Food that is grown and sold locally travels a much shorter distance. Local farms are usually smaller and most use more sustainable methods which are better for the environment.
Benefits to farms and farmers: When you buy local food directly from the producers they receive a higher percentage of your food dollar. This means that farm families can better afford to stay on the farm. Farmland will only survive as long as farmers can afford to grow food. By buying locally you help contribute to preserving the land needed to keep our community’s food secure.

If you buy local foods when available, everyone benefits— you, your family, the community, economy and environment.

For free resources and more information about local foods in Leeds, Grenville, and Lanark, please call the Health Action Line at 1-800-660-5853 (613-345-5685). Also, visit our website at www.healthunit.org/nutrition.