

Grow with extension

Local food systems



Lloyd Singleton

The weekly family Zoom call to Mom has proven to be a valued method of reminiscing with my relatives. With food systems on the brain, I contributed a childhood memory of the fall visits to “Apple Dora’s” just outside Wentzville, Missouri. Dora Smith sold fruits and vegetables from the shack on top of a wooded hill visible from US Highway 61. She grew the strawberries for summer, but hauled the apples from just across the river in Illinois each fall. Dora sold whatever local, seasonal produce was the best, including over 5000 bushels of apples during the fall season. It was always a treat to visit this iconic woman and her produce stand.

The mention of apples prompted my nephew to proclaim, “Oh, Mimi makes the best applesauce ever!” Mom quickly chimed in, “Yes, and the Lodi were the best for applesauce. Not too sweet and just tart enough.” Apple Dora’s (and a home garden) provided a solid footing in our family to appreciate local, seasonal food. The concept continues to makes sense to me and guides my food purchases to this day.

University of North Carolina Gillings School of Global Public Health explains that seasonal eating means acquiring and consuming foods that are picked or harvested at the same time of year they come to market. Local eating means consuming foods grown near the place they are sold. Seasonal food is sometimes local, but local food is always seasonal. Why eat seasonally and locally? Simply put: local, seasonal food often tastes better and can be better for you, your community and the regional economy.

Fruits and vegetables harvested locally and in season are fresher and often taste better. Over time, foods lose their nutritional value if they are not preserved or frozen. Seasonal food grown locally needs fewer preservatives, the chemicals added to foods to prevent spoiling.



Crisp, nutritious and delicious local food. [CONTRIBUTED PHOTO]

Also, fresh produce often is “waxed” to preserve shelf life. Local produce requires fewer – if any – of these substances, because the trip from farm to table is shorter. Eating seasonally and locally helps to support the farmers in your local economy and avoids the environmental impact of long-distance transport.

Food systems are in the news currently with concerns of food shortages and availability. Distribution systems on a global scale are not particularly nimble and resilient; we’re fortunate that our local food system is strong. Many local farms report strong direct to consumer sales offsetting many of the lost institutional and restaurant sales. For a current list of local farms and markets for consumer sales, visit our website <https://newhanover.ces.ncsu.edu/> and select the Local Foods tab.

Also locally, a group called the Cape Fear Food Council <https://www.capefearfoodcouncil.com/> is working to enhance communication and collaboration between food assistance providers during the COVID-19 pandemic response for those in need.

They offer food assistance resource guides and maps for New Hanover, Pender and Brunswick counties. Cooperative Extension is one of many partners in this group formed after Hurricane Florence revealed a lack of centralized communication that led to disjointed efforts and even gaps in service across the community.

My current seasonal, local version of Apple Dora’s is the weekly farm to fork produce box from Feast Down East <https://www.feastdowneast.org/> and Saturday drive-through at Wilmington Farmers Market <https://thewilmingtonfarmersmarket.com/>. I won’t be getting apples this spring, but I certainly enjoy the strawberries, carrots, turnips, fennel, radishes, onions, romaine, bok choy and more. I think you would too.

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