

Co-op America Quarterly

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF BUILDING ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES

NO. 60 | SUMMER 2003

Good Food: *The Joy, Health, & Security of It*



Pro-Union Equals Pro-Justice

Thank you for your look at some of the opportunities we have to help build a better world through the simple activity of purchasing things we would buy anyway (*Making Trade Fair*, Spring 2003 CAQ). Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Buddhist teacher, has correctly pointed out that by consuming less, you can afford to pay the true cost of fairly produced food, goods, and services.

I did not, however, see in the "Labels To Look For" section that original symbol of fair trade, the union label. To the best of my knowledge, the union label—on everything from vehicles to clothing to paper—is still the only way to ensure we are not purchasing sweatshop products when we buy products made here in the US.

You could do a lot for fairness and equity in our own country by pointing this out to your readers. Also, do you use union printers for your materials?

Mark B. Naess, Grosse Pointe, MI

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Thank you for pointing out that purchasing items with the union label is another way we can encourage justice for workers. We feature this as one of the key labels to look for in our Guide to Ending Sweatshops. Co-op America does indeed use union printers.*

About That Starbucks Coffee ...

I read with interest your recent article about fair trade coffee (*Making Trade Fair*, Spring 2003 CAQ), and I was surprised and delighted to see Starbucks mentioned. I have been avoiding Starbucks, wanting to support only fair trade coffee vendors. However, sometimes Starbucks stores are the only ones around when I want a cup of coffee. Last Sunday, thinking it was now OK, I went to a Starbucks shop. I was informed that they only brew fair trade coffee on the first Wednesday of each month, but that I could buy fair trade beans if I desired. What a disappointment. They did not offer to brew me a cup of fair trade coffee, as mentioned in your article. I would encourage more pressure on Starbucks to offer much more fair trade coffee—imagine the impact a company of that size could have on the fair trade movement.

Betty Aten, San Luis Obispo, CA

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Thanks for your question, Betty. It is Starbucks' policy to brew a cup of fair trade coffee for any customer who asks for it.*



Contact Co-op America:
Let our editors know what you think!

We love to hear from our readers. Write to *Co-op America Quarterly*, 1612 K St. NW, Suite 600, Washington, DC 20006; call the editors at 202/872-5328; fax 202/331-8166; or e-mail editors@coopamerica.org.

Unfortunately, says Scott Codey of TransFair USA, news of this policy has not trickled down to all Starbucks outlets. If you return to that Starbucks, ask for the manager and explain to him/her that it is the company's policy to brew fair trade at a customer's request. You can also contact the corporate headquarters directly at 800/STARBUCK, www.starbucks.com.

Fair Trade for Canadians

I'm a Safeway shopper in Canada and want to know if you have another group acting to put the same request for fair trade coffee to them? I live in the burbs and have to travel downtown to get my coffee! I hate not having local choices that I feel good supporting. What can I do?

Maureen Mayer, via e-mail

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Even though you are in Canada, Maureen, you can still join our coffee campaign. Fill out comment cards at your local Safeway asking the company to pressure Procter & Gamble to offer fair trade coffee for Safeway customers. The postcards will reach Safeway management—together with those that our US members send—and you'll help put pressure on Safeway and Procter & Gamble to help world coffee farmers in crisis and bring fair trade coffee to your local stores.*

For now, you can find fair trade coffee retailers and mail-order outlets near you by contacting TransFair Canada, 888/663-FAIR (toll-free in Canada only), www.transfair.ca. And remember to ask your local independent grocery stores and cafés to carry fair trade coffee.

Fair Trade—More Important Than Ever

Making Trade Fair, Co-op America's Spring 2003 issue on fair trade, is an excellent resource for not only for consumers but for shop owners and teachers. As a professor, I'm always looking for precise, detailed, quality information to pass on to my students. This issue is all that and more! Thanks for the outstanding issue—it's especially important now when we are searching for ways to increase peace, justice, and understanding globally.

Kimberly Grimes, Fenwick Island, DE

Co-op America's mission is to harness economic power—the strength of consumers, investors, businesses, and the marketplace—to create a socially just and environmentally sustainable society. Co-op America is a national nonprofit membership organization celebrating 20 years of service to people and the planet.

Co-op America's programs are designed to:

1) Educate people about how to use their spending and investing power to bring the values of social justice and environmental sustainability into the economy, 2) Help socially and environmentally responsible businesses emerge and thrive, and 3) Pressure irresponsible companies to adopt socially and environmentally responsible practices.

Here's what you can do:

Reduce, reuse, recycle, and repair to conserve and protect the Earth's resources. Read *Co-op America Quarterly* magazine and our *Real Money* newsletter for sustainable living tips for you, your workplace, and your community.

Reallocate the purchases you make from irresponsible companies to socially and environmentally responsible businesses. Turn to Co-op America's *National Green Pages*™ to find green businesses. Use Co-op America's long distance phone and travel services.

Reinvest in the future through socially responsible investing. Turn to Co-op America's *Financial Planning Handbook* as your how-to guide. Use the financial services of Co-op America business members.

Restructure the way America does business. Turn to "Boycott Action News" in this publication for information on the worst offenders and how to demand that they change. Use our Web tool, ResponsibleShopper.org, to research corporate behavior—and use the e-mail function to tell them to improve.

Co-op America's programs are supported almost entirely by contributions from our members. Individual memberships begin at \$20, business memberships at \$60. All members receive our publications and access to our services. Business membership, pending approval, also includes a listing in Co-op America's *National Green Pages*™.

As a national nonprofit 501(c)(3) membership organization, all contributions to Co-op America are tax-deductible. We welcome your membership and contributions.

Co-op America

1612 K Street NW, Suite 600, Washington, DC 20006
800/58-GREEN • 202/872-5307
info@coopamerica.org

Visit our Web sites:

www.coopamerica.org • www.greenpages.org
www.socialinvest.org • www.woodwise.org
www.responsibleshopper.org • www.boycotts.org
www.shareholderaction.org • www.sweatshops.org
www.realmoney.org • www.communityinvest.org
www.ecopaperaction.org • www.fairtradeaction.org

Co-op America's Board of Directors

Liz Borkowski • Bená Burda • Henry & Edith Everett • Paul Freundlich • Elizabeth Glenshaw • Erin Gorman • Alisa Gravitz • Diane Keefe • Todd Larsen
Karen Masterson • Chris O'Brien

PUBLICATIONS STAFF

DIVISION DIRECTOR Dennis F. Greenia
EDITOR Tracy Fernandez Rysavy
ASSOCIATE EDITOR Chris Strohm
ASSISTANT EDITOR Andrew Korfhage
EDITORIAL ADVISERS Alisa Gravit, Denise Hamler
PROOFREADERS Liz Borkowski, Doug Pibel
GRAPHIC DESIGNER Jenny Thuillier
PUBLISHER Denise Hamler
ADVERTISING Denise Hamler, Rob Hanson

CO-OP AMERICA STAFF

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR Alisa Gravit
MANAGING DIRECTOR Todd Larsen
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT Justin Conway
PUBLIC EDUCATION AND MEDIA COORDINATOR Erica Anstey
PUBLIC EDUCATION AND MEDIA INTERN Smita Lal
STRATEGIC PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT MANAGER Erin Gorman

CONSUMER PROGRAMS

DIVISION DIRECTOR Denise Hamler
CONSUMER & BUSINESS OUTREACH COORDINATOR
 George Rutherford
CONSUMER OUTREACH INTERN Amanda Johnson
DEVELOPMENT MANAGER Eric Hesse
MARKETING COORDINATOR Amanda Romero
MARKETING/MEMBER SERVICES COORDINATOR
 Paula Wertheim

MEMBER SERVICES/OPERATIONS COORDINATOR Leslie Cobb
MEMBER SERVICES REPRESENTATIVE Talibah Morgan
DATA ENTRY SPECIALISTS Kitty Shenoy, Deanna Tilden
WOODWISE/PAPER DIRECTOR Frank Locantore
WOODWISE PROGRAM MANAGER Liz Borkowski

BUSINESS & INVESTING PROGRAMS

DIVISION DIRECTOR Fran Teplitz
MANAGING DIRECTOR Chris O'Brien
SPECIAL PROJECTS & ADVERTISING MANAGER Rob Hanson
BUSINESS PROGRAMS COORDINATOR John Marius
MEMBER INFORMATION COORDINATOR Jaime Albee
MEMBERSHIP & DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR Jeff Goldman
SHAREHOLDER ACTION NETWORK COORDINATOR
 Tracey Rembert

**SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE INVESTING RESEARCH
 COORDINATOR** Elizabeth Beauvais

SOLAR CATALYST PROGRAM CHIEF SCIENTIST Joe Garman
SOLAR CATALYST PROGRAM RESEARCH DIRECTOR
 Lester Greenman

TECHNOLOGY & INFORMATION SYSTEMS

DIVISION DIRECTOR Russ Gaskin
SENIOR APPLICATIONS DEVELOPER Bernadette Morales Gaskin
INFORMATION SYSTEMS COORDINATOR
 Kiko Alvarez-Calderon
SENIOR CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY RESEARCHER
 Connie Murtagh

FINANCE

DIRECTOR OF FINANCE & REVENUE Daphne Edwin
JUNIOR ACCOUNTANT Kristy Boland
ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE CLERK Jacqueline Petteway

FOUNDER/PRESIDENT EMERITUS Paul Freundlich

CO-OP AMERICA QUARTERLY (ISSN: 0885-9930) is free with Co-op America Individual Membership (\$20/year) or Business Membership (\$60/year). Back issues may be ordered for \$6 by calling 800/58-GREEN. We welcome requests to reprint articles; call 202/872-5307, ext. 5328.

To change your address or to receive information on membership or Co-op America Business Network services, call 202/872-5307 or e-mail info@coopamerica.org.

CO-OP AMERICA QUARTERLY is printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper with soy-based inks.

Co-op America

1612 K St. NW, #600, Washington, DC 20006
 800/58-GREEN • fax 202/331-8166

Copyright 2002. *Green Pages* is a trademark of the Co-op America Foundation. Used under authorization.

From Co-op America's Executive Director

In Cooperation 4
Food Choices for Change, by Alisa Gravit

Feature Section

Good Food

Organic Valley



Introduction 5

Consumer Strategies for Good Food 8
What you can do to support a sustainable food economy.

- Find the Best Food in Your Community 8
- Maximize Your Time and Money 9
- Grow Your Own Food 9
- Look for the Labels. 9
- Eat Lower on the Food Chain 10
- Join the Slow Food Movement 10
- Patronize Green Restaurants 10
- Help Low-Income Families
 Access Good Food. 11
- Support Healthy Food in Schools 11

- Support Organic Standards 11
- Support GM Labeling 12
- A Sweet Treat: Co-op America Business Members
 Partner for Sustainable Chocolate 12
- Invest Your Money Wisely 12
- Educate and Organize 13
- Dinner Co-ops 13

Veggie Power 14
Why eating less meat is important for the planet's survival.

Food for Living 15
How three groups are using healthy food in innovative ways to bring people together.

- Secrets of Salsa 15
- Food in the Salinas Valley 16
- Iroquois White Corn 17



Food Choices for Change

Most of us feel our relationship with food is rather personal. We have our own likes, dislikes, joys and private agonies.

For me, it's the joy of a home-cooked meal shared with friends ... the fear of pesticides ... the first taste of fresh peaches in the summer ... the enormous effort to provide nutritious meals for my family (or the aching guilt of not doing it) ... the fun of going to the local farmers' market on Saturday morning ... the heartbreak of knowing that millions of people don't have enough ... happy childhood memories of coming home to the delicious smells of supper cooking on the stove.

Yet, as personal as our experience with food is to each of us, corporations control much of the American diet and are working hard to increase their control and profit. Corporate policies dictate what we eat as a nation and how it is produced.

Throughout the last century and into this one, corporations have increasingly centralized food production, displaced family farms, introduced more fertilizers and pesticides, created inhumane conditions for farm workers and animals, and changed our vegetable- and grain-based diet to one high in meats, sweets, and processed chemical substitutes. Agribusiness's fertilizer-dependent crops are energy intensive—as is transporting corporate food from field to processing plant to dinner plate, often with hundreds of miles between each step. With less and less of the food we eat coming from within 100 miles of our homes, in these troubled times, it means we also face a food security threat.

Agribusiness' toll on the environment and on human health makes it one of the most destructive industries on our planet. And it has taken its toll on us in still another way. Too often, we no longer know which fruits and vegetables are in season or what they look like as they grow. We have lost sight of the partnership with nature required to raise healthy food today and to make

sure we also can grow it tomorrow.

Indeed, as part of the strategy to gain control of the American diet, corporations have taught us to devalue food—so they can deliver it to us tasteless, in wasteful “convenience” packages. Agribusiness has convinced us to spend less time growing, preparing, and enjoying food—so they can do it for us their way and reap the profits at our expense.

But it doesn't have to be that way! Every day, we have more and more choices for change when it comes to food. Turn the pages of this issue for practical tips and ideas that can help bring more healthy, delicious food to your table today, and help create a sustainable food system that nourishes our

Bring healthy, delicious food to your table today, and help create a sustainable food system for all the generations to come.

planet and its people for all the generations to come.

The game plan is straightforward. With each food purchase you make—at the grocery store, in restaurants, on the go—ask yourself two questions: Is the food organic, or is it conventionally grown with pesticides, fertilizers, antibiotics, and hormones? Is it locally grown, or is it brought to you through the corporate food giants? Every step you can take away from corporate, conventional food to organic, locally grown food gives you the twin rewards of healthier, more delicious food and a healthier, more sustainable food system.

Warning! The bite of that fresh, locally grown organic apple could be habit-forming. Take Jim Slama, for instance. He got hooked on organic food over 15 years ago. He became so passionate about it that he co-founded

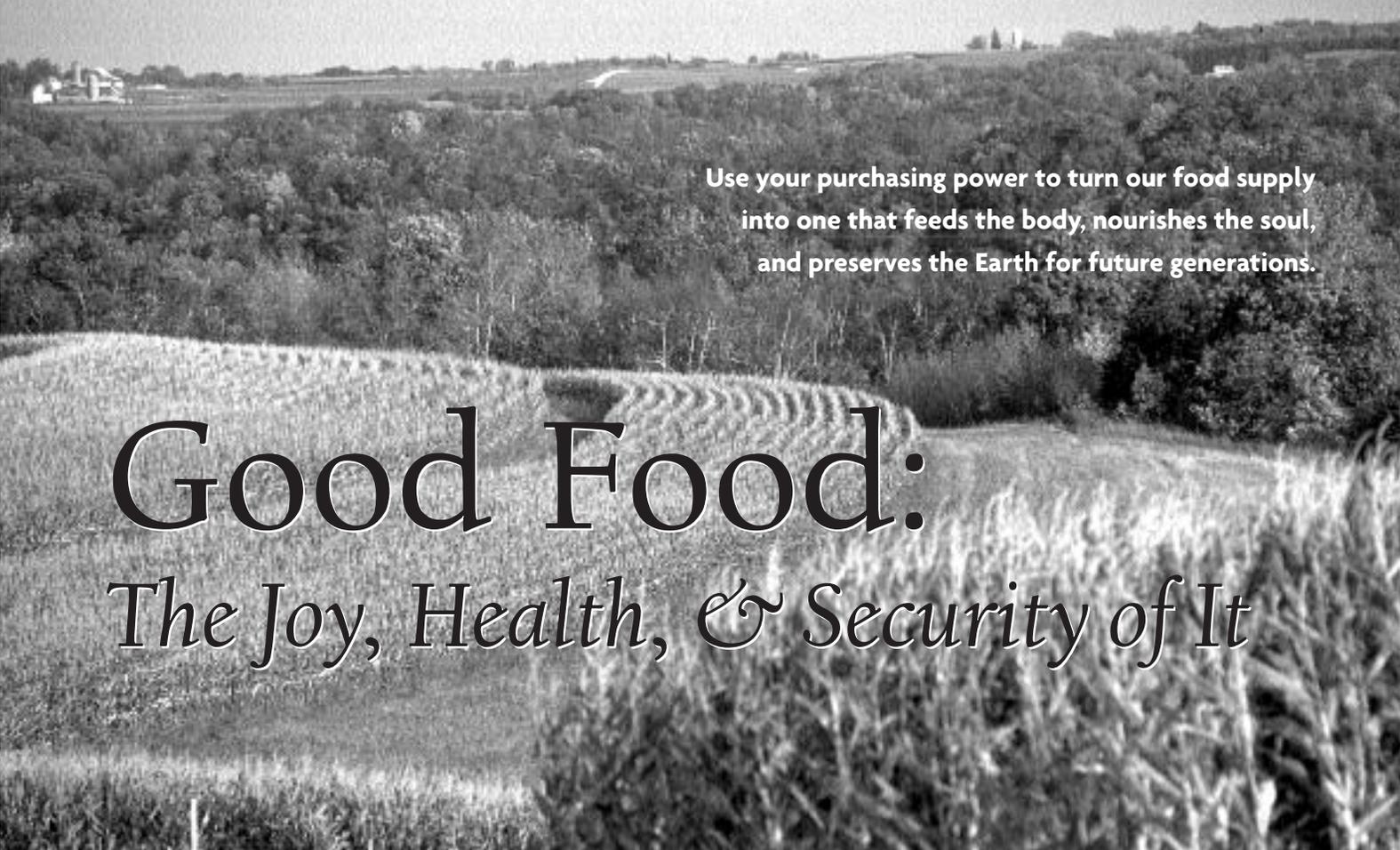
Conscious Choice[™], a Chicago-based news magazine, and Sustain[™], an advocacy organization. For Jim, first, it was the delicious discovery of organic food; next, it was sharing the information; then, it became advocacy. Now Jim is involved in a new project that will revolutionize food for Chicago and serve as a model nationwide. Having recently discovered that less than six percent of the organic food purchased in Chicago is grown nearby, he's become a key leader in creating a program to grow more organic food locally. Chicago's Mayor Daly got involved—and, in turn, he's put the city behind it. Step by step, we can all help expand organic food production and bring it closer to home.

At the heart of the move to a healthier food system is each of us reclaiming the importance of food in our lives and changing the way we grow and buy food. Every time we can eat lower on the food chain, buy organic, and support local agriculture, we expand the market for healthy food, create jobs, restore the environment, and move closer to the goal of healthy food available for all.

So here's a recipe for health and well-being: Set aside a Saturday sometime soon; go to the local farmers' market or food co-op; get some fresh, local organic produce; and invite your friends and family over for the fun of preparing the meal. After lavishing time and attention in the preparation of your food, break bread together, laugh, and tell lots of stories. Especially tell the wonderful and true story about how people are getting together everywhere to eat, drink, and be merry—and build a more just and sustainable future together.

Here's to the joy of fresh food cooking in the kitchen,

Alisa Gravitz, Executive Director



Use your purchasing power to turn our food supply into one that feeds the body, nourishes the soul, and preserves the Earth for future generations.

Good Food:

The Joy, Health, & Security of It

Photo: courtesy of Organic Valley

AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR, POET, AND FARMER WENDELL BERRY ONCE WROTE, “HOW WE EAT DETERMINES TO A CONSIDERABLE EXTENT HOW THE WORLD IS USED.” IN OTHER WORDS, THE CHOICES WE MAKE ABOUT THE FOOD WE EAT HAVE FAR-REACHING EFFECTS.

Most of the food available at your average mainstream supermarket was grown in the globalized, large-scale food economy. For example, ten percent of all money spent in the US on food goes into the coffers of tobacco giant Philip Morris (now Altria), according to the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. The name of the game for corporations that are involved in large agribusinesses is increasing production and profits. To that end, corporations are directly responsible for soil-eroding monocropping, heavy toxic pesticide application, planting genetically modified crops, and other farming practices that can boost production, but also may harm human health or the environment. Because 160,000 industrial farms control 61 percent of the food sales in the US, agribusiness has the economic power to pressure small farmers to bow to its methods or get off the land.

However, small farmers, organic producers, and consumers around the world are fighting back. These groups are at the forefront of a movement for a healthier food systems that put people over profits; emphasizes local, organic food; and supports small farmers.

By taking care to purchase sustainably produced food that is both organic and locally grown, you can be part of this movement for a secure, safe, sustainable food economy—one that nourishes the body, heals the Earth, and keeps land healthy for future generations. This issue of *Co-op America*

Quarterly provides you with suggestions, tips, and strategies for using your money to support a sustainable food economy. Let's start with why. ...

WHY ORGANIC?

As our readers well know, part of eating sustainably means buying organic. Current US national organic standards prohibit the use of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, antibiotics, genetic engineering, irradiation, sewage sludge, artificial ingredients, and other practices. The benefits of going organic are numerous—both for your family's health and the planet's.

BETTER FOR THE EARTH The combination of conventional and corporate agriculture practices is the worst possible mix for the environment, says Kathy Lawrence, executive director of the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture.

For example, each spring and summer a “dead zone” the size of New Jersey forms in the Gulf of Mexico. The dead zone is a low-oxygen area created by nutrient runoff from non-organic farms and wastewater from sewage treatment plants and rural septic tanks. The nutrients are mostly fertilizer washed from farms in the 31 states and parts of Canada that drain into the Mississippi River. A small percentage of the runoff comes from lawns, but the majority is from agriculture.

The nutrients create algae, which die and decompose, sucking oxygen out of the water, killing bottom-dwelling

Good Food:

The Joy, Health, & Security of It

organisms, and driving away fish. In 2002, the dead zone exceeded 8,500 square miles.

Organic farming, however, minimizes the use of environmentally harmful chemicals and practices. Jeff and Pam Riesgraf own the Full Circle Dairy Farm, an organic farm in Jordan, MN. The Riesgrafs farm about 300 acres, mainly producing organic milk and soybeans. Soil runoff from the farm empties into the Mississippi River and eventually ends up in the Gulf of Mexico.

In 2000, the Riesgrafs completed a two-year study of sediment runoff on their farm. They found that their runoff and chemical levels were much lower than that from conventional farms.

During one heavy rainstorm, for example, a 25-acre section of Riesgrafs' farm with the steepest slope lost 53 pounds of topsoil per acre. A 25-acre section of a conventional farm in the same watershed lost an average of 6.5 tons of topsoil per acre during the same storm.

Riesgraf credits organic farming and environmentally friendly practices, such as crop rotation and rotational grazing, for limiting soil runoff and chemical levels on his farm.

BETTER FOR YOUR HEALTH By definition, organic food is free from chemicals and preservatives, several of which can be harmful to human health.

For example, US consumers can experience up to 70 daily exposures to persistent organic pollutants (POPs) through their diets due to pesticide use in conventional farming, according to the Pesticide Action Network North America (PANNA). Exposure to POPs has been linked to cancer, immune system suppression, nervous system disorders, reproductive damage, and hormone disruption.

In addition to the increased presence of chemicals, the concentration of our food supply in the hands of large corporations has resulted in the proliferation of unhealthy, processed foods. "While the industrialization of the food supply progresses, we are witnessing an explosion in human health risks and a significant decrease in the nutritional value of our meals," states an essay from *Fatal Harvest: The Tragedy of Industrial Agriculture* (Island Press, 2002).

Our children suffer when access to healthy, nutritious food is limited. The Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention estimate that a little over 20 percent of the nation's public and private schools sold fast foods in 2000. With schools, stores, and some parents making processed, fatty foods so available to kids, child obesity rates have skyrocketed. According to the Surgeon General's 2001 report on obesity, 13 percent of children and adolescents were overweight in 1999—almost twice as many children and nearly three times as many adolescents as in 1980.

BETTER FOR COMMUNITIES OF COLOR Studies also show that low-income people and communities of color have the worst access to nutritious food and often bear the health consequences of living next to factory farms. Research conducted by the University of North Carolina documented the disproportionate placement of confined animal feeding operations, or factory farms, in poor and non-white communities. Health studies have linked living near factory farms to adverse health conditions, such as respiratory, neurological, behavioral, and mood problems.

WHY LOCAL?

A sustainable food system places special emphasis on buying locally produced food, for the following reasons:

REDUCED TRANSPORTATION COSTS The average plate of food in the US has traveled around 1,300 miles from source to table, according to Cynthia Barstow in *The Eco-Foods Guide* (New Society Publishers, 2002). A key benefit to buying locally produced food is that it dramatically reduces the distance food travels, which means local foods use far less energy and fossil fuel, and produce far less pollution and fewer greenhouse gases than corporate food shipped across long distances.

Much of the transportation of food across state and local borders is unnecessary. In 1998, for example, Britain imported almost 175,000 metric tons of bread—and it wasn't because they didn't have the ingredients to make bread on their own. That same year, the UK exported nearly the same amount, around 150,000 metric tons.

This kind of simultaneous importing and exporting is on the rise in many countries other than the UK, according to Helena Norberg Hodge, Todd Merrifield, and Steven Gorelick, authors of *Bringing the Food Economy Home* (Kumarian Press, 2002). And, they say, "for the most part, this excessive transport benefits only a few large-scale agribusinesses and speculators, which take advantage of government subsidies, exchange rate swings, and price differentials to shift foods from country to country in search of the highest profits."

LESS WASTE Since local foods are often bought and consumed fresh, they also use less packaging, processing, and refrigeration—and, therefore, less energy. Fresh peas, for example, require only

All photos: Getty Images



40 percent of the energy expended for a frozen carton of peas, and only 25 percent of an aluminum can of peas,” say Norberg Hodge, Merrifield, and Gorelick.

MORE SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENT FARMERS Buying locally also directly supports small family farmers, who are often the best stewards of the land. Many small family farmers who aren’t organic employ environmentally beneficial techniques like Integrated Pest Management, a system of farming that works to greatly minimize the use of chemical pesticides.

Unfortunately, small family farmers have been the hardest hit by corporate agribusiness practices. In the last 10 years, the prices paid to farmers for food has dramatically dropped, contributing to a record loss of family and independent farms and increasing rural poverty, says Kathy Ozer, executive director of the National Family Farm Coalition. During the same time period, she adds, consumer food prices have risen, meaning that huge profits are being pocketed by corporations rather than going to local farms and communities.

Studies show that the average income for an independent farmer has decreased 32 percent since the 1950s. For every dollar a consumer spends on food, family farmers now receive 10 cents or less, compared to as much as 70 cents just a few decades ago.

ENHANCED SECURITY Support for local farmers doesn’t just help local economies—a decentralized, diversified food system can be a major impediment to terrorist attacks on our food supply, says Mark Winnie, executive director of the Hartford Food System Network in Connecticut.

“With more of our food supply produced by fewer and larger farms that are increasingly concentrated in a couple of major agricultural regions, we may very well have increased our vulnerability rather than our security,” Winnie wrote in a recent essay. “On the other hand, a large number of smaller farms, diversified by size and type of production and scattered generously throughout all regions of the United States, stands as a prudent bulwark against a catastrophic assault on our nation’s food supply.”

HEALTHIER FOOD IN SEASON Buying locally produced food often means buying whatever is ripe at a given moment. There are definite advantages to eating with the seasons. The sooner you eat something after it’s been harvested, the more nutritious it is. Says Cynthia Barstow in *The Eco-Foods Guide*, “Studies show a deep decline in nutritional value from the moment produce is plucked from the field. If you eat it within 24 hours, you get significantly more vitamins and phytochemicals.”

Many advocates of eating food in season say the food simply tastes better, as well.

WHEN YOU CAN’T HAVE IT BOTH WAYS

The healthiest, most sustainable food is organic and locally grown; the worst for both human health and the environment is corporate, conventional food. But what happens when you need to make a choice? For various

reasons, you may not always be able to buy food that is both organic and locally grown. You’ll be faced with deciding between organic food sold by corporations and transported across large distances, or locally grown food that may have been sprayed with pesticides. Which is best?

Experts are divided over the question of buying local and sprayed versus organic and corporate. Ultimately, the choice is yours to make in accordance with your own personal values. The important thing to keep in mind is to be intentional about your food. Moving away from conventional, corporate food to either organic or local when you can’t have it both ways is an important step.

A FINAL NOTE

Wendell Berry, who lives on a farm in Kentucky, once wrote: “If we can’t know with final certainty what we are doing, then reason cautions us to be humble and patient, to keep the scale small, to be careful, to go slow.”

If we all take care to support locally produced, organic food whenever possible, then together we will build a food system that is safe, secure, and sustainable.

—Chris Strohm & Tracy F. Rysavy



TRUE TALES

How seven families saved their farms by going organic.

THE ORGANIC VALLEY FAMILY OF FARMS

The year was 1988, and independent family farmers were deep in the throes of a major crisis. In the rural rolling heartland of southwestern Wisconsin, seven produce farmers held a summit in a barn to discuss ways to keep from going out of business. They each had experience with organic farming and floated the idea of forming a cooperative of all-organic farms. No other US organic cooperatives existed at the time, but the farmers believed that option provided the best chance at carving out a market share through good environmental practices.

The farmers decided to take a chance, and the chance paid off. Big time.

The seven farmers formed the Coulee Region Organic Produce Pool, which one year later was renamed the Organic Valley Family of Farms. As the market for organic food boomed—growing now at about 20 percent per year—so did Organic Valley. Today, in its 15th year, Organic Valley is the largest organic cooperative in the world, made up of 519 independent farms and selling 130 organic foods in 17 states. In 2002, the cooperative achieved record sales of \$125 million and paid its farmers nearly double the price paid to conventional farmers, says Theresa Marquez, sales and marketing director.

Although Organic Valley was originally started as a cooperative of organic produce farmers, it quickly expanded in the early 1990s when organic dairy farmers asked to join. Recently, organic meat farmers have also come aboard. All the farmers in the cooperative use 100 percent certified organic techniques, and they often go above and beyond USDA organic standards, Marquez says. For some farmers, the move toward organic has meant the difference between surviving or going out of business. “Going organic saved our farm,” says Mike Gehl, whose Hartford, Wisconsin, farm has been in his family for 154 years and five generations.

—Chris Strohm
Contact: Organic Valley, 888/444-6455, www.organicvalley.com.

Good Food:

The Joy, Health, & Security of It

By being intentional about the food you purchase and eat, you can help build a safe, secure, and sustainable food system—where all people have enough to eat.

Consumer Strategies for Good Food

Getty Images



Farmers' markets are a great source for fresh, local food.

The Food Co-op



A customer shops at The Food Co-op in Port Townsend, WA.

AP/Wide World Photo



Activist Helen Johnson worked to start a community garden in south central Los Angeles in response to the Rodney King riots.

If we are what we eat, as the old saying goes, then we may want to be extra mindful of the food we put in our mouths. When each of us does the best we can to ensure the food we eat is organic and locally produced whenever possible, we keep our bodies healthy, our family-owned farms vital, and our environment protected. Below are eleven ways you can work together with farmers, consumers, and organizations across the US and around the world to build a safe, secure, sustainable food system.

1) FIND THE BEST FOOD IN YOUR COMMUNITY

From health food stores to farmers' markets to community supported agriculture programs, sources for sustainable food are available in many communities. Here are a few of the most popular options, along with details on how to find them:

Local food cooperatives. A food cooperative is a store or buying club that purchases bulk food, often from local and/or organic farmers, and then sells that food at cost. A co-op is democratically run by members who share the responsibility and labor of managing the store. The store is not run for profit, but to serve the needs of its members. The shelves are stocked with whatever the members have collectively decided to carry, so by joining, you'll have a say in bringing in the best food for you and your community.

For a national listing of co-ops, see www.coopdirectory.org or www.cooperativegrocer.coop. You can also consult *Co-op America's National Green Pages™* (see contact information on p. 17).

Farmers' markets. Most communities throughout the country have places where you can buy farm-fresh products. Check out a nearby farm stand or go to the weekly farmers' market in your area. The diversity and quality of produce available may surprise you. It's not just fruits and vegetables. Farmers' markets also may provide flowers, bread, cheese, honey, and other homemade products such as candles, quilts, and toys.

The US Agriculture Department maintains a comprehensive list of farmers' markets at www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/map.htm. The nonprofit Local Harvest also provides a national listing of farmers' markets on its Web site, www.localharvest.org.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs. Through CSA programs, community members buy shares in a local, often organic, farm before the harvest season starts. The farm provides produce to consumers, usually called "shareholders," each week from late spring through early fall. By pre-purchasing part of the season's harvest, CSA shareholders help cover a farm's yearly operating budget in advance, providing farmers with a stable income and a fair price for their produce. In return, shareholders get nutritious, locally grown food as soon as it's harvested. Many CSAs also hold special events for shareholders and provide opportunities for interested people to apprentice on the farm. CSAs encourage a vital connection between consumers, farmers, and the land.

To find a CSA in your area, check out www.csacenter.org or www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/csa, or call the Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association's CSA Line at 800/516-7797. You can also look up the Robyn Van En Center for CSA resources, 717/264-4141 x.3352, www.csacenter.org.

Health food stores. These stores sell organic food, and many carry locally produced foods as well.

To find an independent health food store near you, consult *Co-op America's National Green Pages™* (see contact information on p. 17).

2) MAXIMIZE YOUR TIME AND MONEY

The most common reason people give for not opting for healthier, more sustainable food choices is lack of time and money. But with a little effort, it is possible to develop a holistic approach to sustainable food that can be a joy, not a burden. Here are some suggestions:

Shift your budget. Sometimes, organic and local food costs more than the processed packaged foods in the store. However, you can switch at least some of your purchases to local, organic food without breaking the bank.

Keep track of your food costs. Keep your receipts and analyze your purchases. Determine how much you spend on food at the grocery store. Snack foods, single packaged foods, and prepared foods all cost top dollar. Also, add up the amount you spend on higher-cost foods at restaurants or convenience stores. Do this for one month.

At the end of the month, see if you can shift your spending to replace some of the high-cost foods with organic, local foods—and save money in the process.

Get the most out of your money. Buy sustainable food in bulk, when you can. (Split up a large bulk order among friends and share the savings.) Prepare simple dishes with fresh, unprocessed foods using as few ingredients as possible to keep meals healthy and costs down. Eat local food in season—it's often cheaper at the store because it doesn't have to be flown in from halfway around the world. Many CSA programs provide in-season, local produce at up to 50 percent less than what you'd pay at the store.

Use government programs. If your family has a low income, you might qualify for a government food assistance program. For example, the Hartford Food System uses the federal Farmers' Market Nutrition Program to give low-income people vouchers to buy from farmers' markets. Visit www.fns.usda.gov/wic/ to find similar programs near you.

Take one step at a time. You can change food consumption habits gradually, to make the shift in your routine and that of your family easier. Glynnis Hagar, a mother of two from Massachusetts, says her family has had much success with this approach. For starters, they chose to eliminate processed foods. Once that was accomplished, they started making a point to buy food grown by local farmers. As their next major step, she and her family plan to become vegetarians.

Get help in the kitchen. Preparing your own food gives you a connection to the food you eat. However, if you don't like or have the time to cook every day, think about forming or joining a dinner co-op (see p. 19). A dinner co-op is simply a group of friends who get together and take turns making meals for each other. You share cooking chores and build community at the same time.

Leftovers vs. "planned-overs" When you cook, fix enough of a main dish to last for several days. Just one night's worth of work can provide you with several easy meals. You might even try setting aside one day a week to cook all your meals for the rest of the week.

3) GROW YOUR OWN FOOD

Growing your own food, or participating in a community garden project, is a great way to get healthy food while connecting with your neighbors. Making gardening a community effort is also another way to get sustainable produce to low-wealth households.

LOOK FOR THE LABELS

For those products that simply aren't grown locally, such as coffee or chocolate, look out for brands that display the labels below. By looking for the label, you can ensure that your purchase is as responsible as possible.

USDA Certified Organic—The Organic Food Protection Act of 1990 directed the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) to develop a fixed set of standards that must be met by anyone using the "organic" label in the US. After a ten-year development process, including rounds of public comment, the USDA finally issued a set of organic standards, as well as one unified organic label, in December 2000. These standards prohibit the use of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, antibiotics, genetic engineering, irradiation, sewage sludge, artificial ingredients, and many other practices. The USDA has empowered several certifying organizations across the country to ensure compliance with the standards.

The USDA allows products that contain all organic ingredients to be labeled as "100% organic." Products that contain 95 to 100 percent organic ingredients can be labeled as "organic." Both types of products may display the USDA organic logo on their packaging.

Products that contain 70 to 95 percent organic content can be labeled as "made with organic ingredients." These types of products may not use the USDA logo.

Fair Trade Certified™—This label appears on coffee, tea, and chocolate that has been certified as fair trade by the independent nonprofit TransFair USA. TransFair USA travels to producer sites at least once per year to ensure that workers are laboring under fair trade conditions, meaning they work in healthy, cooperative settings; receive a fair and living wage; and are encouraged to employ environmentally sustainable practices. In addition, the fair trade companies agree to operate under complete transparency, to educate consumers about fair trade, and to respect the cultural identity of their workers. For more information, contact TransFair USA, 510/663-5260, www.fairtradecertified.org.

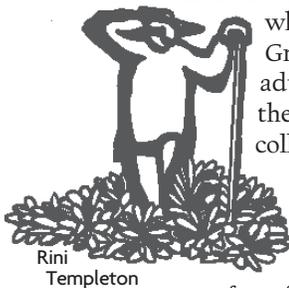
Other labels—Several nonprofits, such as the Rainforest Alliance and the Food Alliance, have their own special labels, which they place on food products that have been grown according to their own environmental and social criteria. If you spot something that looks like an eco-label on a food product, contact the certifying party and see if the standards it espouses are in line with your values. For an impartial view of the effectiveness of the eco-label, the nonprofit Consumers' Union has a Web site that provides a comprehensive evaluation of such labels at www.eco-labels.org.



Good Food:

The Joy, Health, & Security of It

For people living in South Central Los Angeles, the Vermont Square Community Garden is a place of comfort, food, and community. Neighbors started the garden in the early 1990s after the L.A. riots rocked their community. Instead of losing hope, neighbors pulled together and converted an abandoned trolley lane into two plots of land. Today, more than 30 gardeners tend to fruit trees, flowers, and vegetables at the garden, which has become a central community spot. Grandparents, grandchildren, teenagers, and adults are learning how to grow food on the land, and they are all sharing in their collective bounty.



Rini Templeton

Consider using heirloom seeds in your garden. How they differ from the seeds you commonly see sold in stores is this: Non-organic, store-bought produce is often grown from first-generation (F1) hybrid seeds. F1 hybrid seeds are bred in a lab to be genetically identical, a desirable trait for industrial farms interested in large crops of uniform, physically appealing plants suitable for shipping. Heirloom produce, on the other hand, is grown from seeds that are produced naturally through open pollination.

While you might find only one or two F1 hybrid varieties of tomato in the supermarket, there are over 2,700 heirloom varieties available, all differing in color, texture, and flavor. F1 hybrids are bred to look good and last long on store shelves, but experts say they cannot compare to heirloom produce when it comes to taste, diversity, and nutrition.

Resources: Seeds of Change  has an online gardening primer at www.seedsofchange.com, 888/762-7333. The company specializes in selling organic and heirloom seeds. For information on getting your garden started, contact the More Gardens! Coalition at www.moregardens.org for its book, *How to Make Your Garden Permanent*.

4) EAT LOWER ON THE FOOD CHAIN

Eating less meat makes a difference for the planet, for animals, and for your health. See “Veggie Power” on p. 20 for more information.

5) JOIN THE “SLOW FOOD” MOVEMENT

Slow Food is a movement and a nonprofit organization advocating mindfulness in food consumption. It’s about good food in all senses of the word—good food that boasts superior taste and quality, and good food that holds maximum benefits for human health and the environment.

Started in Italy in 1986, Slow Food now boasts 65,000 members in 45 countries around the world. Members gather to learn about the joys of heirloom foods, to taste locally produced wine, to attend a seminar on choosing the most flavorful brands of olive oil, or to advocate for the preservation of “endangered” foods.

If it sounds a little vague, that’s because Slow Food is many things to many participants. Says chef and cookbook author Deborah Madison in an essay in *Slow Food*

(Chelsea Green Publishing , 2002): “To the gastronome, Slow Food may have to do with artisanal foods and wine. To the person seeking a tempo of life that is more in step with life’s natural rhythms, unlike America’s present fast-paced model, Slow Food offers a sympathetic response. For those whose concerns run to the historical aspects of food, traditional methods of cheese making might be of particular interest. ... If your concerns are with the politics of social change, you may find yourself in harmony with Slow Food’s commitment to land stewardship and food that’s grown by sound and sustainable methods.”

What all participants share is a view of “the kitchen and the table as centers of pleasure, culture, and community,” and a wish to eschew fast, tasteless food for food that pleases the palate and nurtures the Earth.

Contact Slow Food USA, 877/SLOW-FOOD, www.slowfood.com.

6) PATRONIZE GREEN RESTAURANTS

When Joy Pierson and Bart Potenza started the Candle Café  in New York City, they envisioned a warm, friendly restaurant that would prove you could be healthy and eat well, too. For 17 years, the Candle Café (originally called The Healthy Candle) has served organic, vegan cuisine—with many ingredients sourced from local farmers.

Though their customers rave about the food they serve, Pierson and Potenza choose not to rest on their green laurels. They’re always working to make their restaurant even greener.

Last year, the Candle Café joined the Green Restaurant Association  (GRA), a membership organization of ecologically responsible eateries across the US. The Green Restaurant Association requires that its member restaurants commit to adopting green practices in at least four of 11 areas per year of membership, from serving sustainable food, to using recycled and tree-free paper products like napkins and take-out containers, to creating zero-waste systems. GRA provides its members with ongoing technical assistance as they strive to be more eco-conscious.



The Food Co-op

Dining at local green restaurants, like the café attached to The Food Co-op  in Port Townsend, WA, is a great way to enjoy healthy food, bolster your local economy, and benefit the planet.

FIND IT IN THE GREEN PAGES™

To find sustainable food businesses—many in your area—consult Co-op America's *National Green Pages*™. This directory of green businesses is available for \$10.95 by calling 800/58-GREEN or free online at www.greenpages.org. The *Green Pages*™ is also available free with a Co-op America membership, which includes *Co-op America Quarterly*, *Real Money*, the *Financial Planning Handbook*, and support for our popular programs that work to create a just and sustainable economy. Join us!

After joining GRA, the Candle Café installed energy-efficient lighting. And, since their tables and chairs are growing worn after many years in business, Potenza and Pierson are looking into buying new ones from a company that makes furniture from recycled shipping pallets.

By patronizing local, green restaurants whenever you eat out, you can keep the money you spend circulating in your community, while supporting restaurants that contribute to a sustainable food economy.

The Green Restaurant Association has a list of its member restaurants. Visit www.dinegreen.com or call 858/452-7378. You can also find local green restaurants in Co-op America's *National Green Pages*™ (see box on this page). Look for *The Candle Café Cookbook* in stores this July.

7) HELP LOW-INCOME FAMILIES ACCESS GOOD FOOD

As you are taking care of your food needs, consider helping others who are less fortunate. Organizations that help with community food needs include food banks, shelters, food pantries, religious organizations, brown bag clubs, and many other grassroots anti-hunger efforts. These organizations provide millions of pounds of supplemental food at the local level for our nation's poor and hungry. Organize a fundraiser for your local food pantry or shelter, or help them raise money to buy shares

in a CSA. You can also donate locally produced food to pantries so all members of your community can have wholesome food.

Religious organizations have traditionally played a strong role in feeding the hungry in their communities. Ask your place of worship to consider donating land for community gardens in low-income areas; buying shares in a CSA and giving the produce to needy families; or conducting a locally produced, organic food drive.

Most organizations that are working on connecting low-income areas with sustainable food are based at the local level, says Kai Siedenburg of the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC). The CFSC has links to several of these local groups on its Web site, and it is currently working in partnership with World Hunger Year to develop a national database, which Siedenburg says will be available later this year. (For an example of how one community pairs low-income neighborhoods with CSAs, see "From the Ground Up," p. 24.)

For more information, contact CFSC at 310/822-5410, www.foodsecurity.org.

8) SUPPORT HEALTHY FOOD IN SCHOOLS

Children nationwide are experiencing an epidemic of obesity, part of which may be caused by the growing presence of high-fat, nutritionally impoverished food in schools. Forced to run on low budgets, some schools are slashing physical education programs, while signing "pouring" contracts with soft drink corporations that allow these companies to sell and promote their sugar-filled products on campus. In an increasing number of schools, says the Occidental College Urban and Environmental Policy Institute (UEPI), the food service department contracts out lunch to fast food chains such as McDonalds, Domino's, or Taco Bell. With their favorite high-fat fast foods, candy bars, and sodas available, many students aren't choosing the nutritious foods

SUPPORT ORGANIC STANDARDS

The market for organic food has grown steadily in the past few years. One challenge of this growth is that large corporations increasingly want a piece of the organic pie—and concern for their bottom line often trumps their concern for the planet.

"In the ongoing battle over the meaning of organic, agribusinesses prefer to define the term as narrowly as possible," say Helena Norberg Hodge, Todd Merrifield, and Steven Gorelick in *Bringing the Food Economy Home*. "Issues of nutritional value, waste, animal welfare, and environmental impact are largely outside this narrow focus."

In 1999, the original standards put forth by the USDA for public comment would have allowed foods to be labeled organic that contained genetically modified ingredients, were fertilized with chemical-laden municipal waste, and were sterilized through irradiation. Though large agribusinesses were highly in favor of these rules, thousands of consumers, farmers, and organic advocates sent the USDA comments demanding that organic standards not allow these processes. Fortunately, the organic standards currently in place do not allow irradiation, GMOs, or sewage sludge fertilizers.

However, large corporations haven't stopped trying to narrow organic standards. Recently, as Congress rushed to complete the 2003

federal spending bill, agribusinesses pressured a group of legislators to sneak in a one-sentence rider that could have struck a severe blow to US national organic standards. Section 771 of the bill would have allowed livestock producers to label their meat, poultry, and dairy products "organic" even if the animals were fed conventional feed. Current national standards mandate that meat labeled organic come from animals fed 100 percent organic feed. Section 771 was repealed, thanks to the efforts of concerned consumers, organizations, farmers, and representatives.

In addition, Senator Ted Stevens (R-AK), chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, tacked a measure onto the recently passed \$79 billion war-spending bill that directs the US Department of Agriculture to come up with a plan for certifying and labeling wild seafood as organic. Organic advocates argue that the organic label is intended to assure consumers that food products are grown in a chemical-free environment, and it's impossible to guarantee such an environment for wild fish that may eat and swim in polluted waters.

For more information and to stay informed about attacks on national organic standards, contact the Organic Trade Association at 413/774-7511, www.ota.com.

Good Food:

The Joy, Health, & Security of It

their growing bodies need.

The Community Food Security Coalition's (CFSC) National Farms to Schools Project is working to combat this trend by combining sustainable, healthy food choices with nutrition education in US schools. The CFSC provides schools with resources and technical assistance in bringing nutritious, locally grown fruits and vegetables into their lunch programs.

Concerned parents, teachers and school administrators, farmers, and school lunch coordinators have adapted the Farms to Schools program to suit their local growing seasons and needs. In California, for example, each of the 15 schools in the Santa Monica School District has a salad bar whose ingredients come entirely from local farmers' markets. (For an in-depth look on how another school brought students and farmers together, see "Food in the Salinas Valley" on p. 22.)

For more information on setting up a Farms to Schools program in your area, contact CFSC's Farms to Schools program, 310/822-5410, www.foodsecurity.org. You can also visit The National Gardening Association's site, www.kidsgardening.com, for a wealth of resources on bringing gardens into schools.

9) SUPPORT GM LABELING

Many sustainable food advocates urge caution when it comes to GM food, because current understanding of it



Jerred Lawson

Students in California's Salinas Valley visit an apple orchard and learn about sustainable agriculture.

is limited, and long-term health effects remain unknown.

One of the main health concerns surrounding GM foods is the potential for redistributing allergens from one organism to another. Because the transfer of genes between organisms causes the production of new proteins, food that might previously have been safe for a person with allergies could become dangerous. For example, University of Nebraska researchers found that soybeans engineered with genes from brazil nuts can produce fatal reactions in people with nut allergies.

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has loosely mandated that developers of GM foods label them as such "if consumers need to be informed about a safety issue." But with manufacturers themselves determining the risk involved on a case-by-case basis, consumers who wish to avoid GM foods are at present unable to do so.

GM crops can also cause a range of negative environmental impacts, damaging soil, altering insects, and impacting biodiversity. For example, crops genetically designed to withstand heavy pesticide and herbicide use encourage large applications of synthetic chemicals throughout the production process.

Some GM crops are designed to produce their own pesticides to protect them from insects. But with the pesticide produced over the life of the plant, some insects have developed resistance to GM pesticides, requiring stronger chemicals to kill these "super-pests."

Whether your concerns about GM food are related to health issues, environmental impacts, or other effects, it's virtually impossible to consciously avoid GM food products in the US without a labeling system in place. However, a diet based on organic, locally grown produce that limits processed food is the first step toward avoiding GM products. In addition, you can call your representatives and ask them to encourage the US to label products that contain GM ingredients.

To keep informed about developments in the US fight against GM foods, contact: The Alliance for Bio-Integrity, 641/472-5554, www.bio-integrity.org. The Campaign to Label Genetically Modified Foods, 425/771-4049, www.thecampaign.org.

10) INVEST YOUR MONEY WISELY

Investing your money in community development

A SWEET TREAT: Co-op America Business Members Partner for Sustainable Chocolate

Reports of poverty, slavery, and child labor on West African cocoa farms provide stark evidence of the need for more people to support sustainable cocoa trading. But since 70 percent of the world's cocoa is farmed in West Africa, it's difficult for US consumers to know under what conditions their chocolate is grown. That's why Equal Exchange , La Siembra , and Organic Valley  have formed an innovative partnership to make and market chocolate products that are certified both as fairly traded and organic. These certifications provide consumers with third-party assurance that the candy was produced in ways that both provide healthy wages and sustainable conditions for workers and steward the environment.

Just last year, the Canadian fair trade organization La Siembra and the US-based Equal Exchange launched their first cocoa products, using organic, fair trade cocoa from CONACADO (the National Confederation of Dominican Cocoa Producers). A 9,000-member farming cooperative based in the Dominican Republic, CONACADO was launched in 1988 to help small farmers find access to markets, and to emphasize organic and shade-grown production standards that protect Dominican forests.

La Siembra and Equal Exchange went on to partner with Organic Valley, an American cooperative of family farms, which supplies the milk for the chocolate products. The companies import organic and fair trade sugar from Paraguay.

"We're especially happy to offer our first fair trade product that will appeal to kids," says Rob Everts, co-director of Equal Exchange. "We're excited to demonstrate that it's possible to offer people a great product that consumers can feel good about."

Organic, fairly traded cocoa products, including chocolate bars and hot cocoa, can be purchased from both Equal Exchange and La Siembra.

—Andrew Korfhage

Contact: Equal Exchange, 781/830-0303, www.equalexchange.com.
La Siembra, 613/235-6122, www.lasiembra.com.

financial institutions can go a long way toward helping independent family farms and sustainable food projects. Simply opening a checking or savings account at a community development bank or credit union can have a profound impact.

Community development financial institutions provide loans and assistance to independent farms and food cooperatives. This critical help enables them to compete and expand, which grows the sustainable food market and helps build self-sufficient communities.

For example, Lea Clayton went to the Self-Help Credit Union in Durham, NC, to secure a loan to start an organic farm in rural Alamance County. Self-Help, which specializes in community development lending, provided Clayton with enough financing to buy 15 acres. Clayton now operates an organic community supported agriculture program from her farm, providing area residents with fresh, locally grown organic food. Several Self-Help employees also participate as shareholders in the CSA.

Resources: To get started with community investing, check out Co-op America's *Guide to Community Investing* and our *Financial Planning Handbook*. To order copies, call 800/58-GREEN.

11) EDUCATE AND ORGANIZE

Together, we can create a sustainable food system that supports farmers and protects the environment. Take time to share your views and ideas on food sustainability with

DINNER CO-OPS

When Kristi Bahrenburg of Hyattsville, MD, started a weekly playgroup among her friends with small children, she didn't realize how difficult arranging meeting times would be. Because of everyone's schedules, play quickly turned into work, as the busy moms tried to arrange their children's get-togethers around preschool, naptime, and other obligations. Finally, the group decided that dinnertime might work, as it was a time when everyone had to stop and relax anyway, and so Kristi's dinner co-op was born.

A dinner co-op consists of a group of friends who agree to share the responsibility of making meals for one another. For example, you and three other people might start a weekly dinner co-op. Group members take turns cooking a healthy dinner for each other once a week, choosing to gather in a member's home or have the cooks deliver meals directly to your residence. In other words, in return for one night's worth of cooking, you'll get three homemade meals served to you during the month.

Kristi's group, made up of four mothers with a total of five small children, gathers together for weekly shared dinners, cooked by that week's hostess. Kristi says the format works better than any restaurant could for keeping the moms relaxed and the children entertained.

"It's a wonderful break to be served high-quality, homemade food in a casual atmosphere where our kids can run around together before and after the meal," says Kristi. "They don't have to sit still like they would in a restaurant, so it's a lot less stressful. I also find my kids go to bed very willingly on dinner playgroup nights."

Anyone can start a dinner co-op, and the format for doing so is very flexible. Here are some suggestions for creating your own cuisine that builds community:

FIND PARTNERS—You can ask friends, co-workers, or neighbors to participate, or invite members through a community organization or place of worship.

Lisa Haney of Hilliard, OH, helped organize a daily dinner co-op with

FOOD FOR IRAQ

Prior to the war in Iraq, between 70 and 80 percent of Iraq's population were completely dependent on government food rations for survival. The infrastructure supporting this food distribution system has collapsed in the aftermath of the war, according to the nonprofit Stop Hunger Now, making food a critical need for the majority of Iraqis.

Stop Hunger Now has a program in place to provide food to hungry people in Iraq and in Iraqi refugee camps, in partnership with the Middle East Council of Churches and the Islamic Relief Agency. The groups are providing emergency food boxes at a cost of \$20 each. Each of these boxes will feed a family of four for four weeks.

You can help provide more of these boxes to hungry Iraqis by donating to Stop Hunger Now's 20-4-4 program. Contact Stop Hunger Now, 888/501-8440, www.stophungernow.org.

others, and take action in whatever ways you can. The more people who know about sustainable food, the more demand for it will arise, helping family farmers and food cooperatives remain economically viable.

Resources: The National Family Farm Coalition serves as a clearinghouse for information about campaigns and grassroots organizations that support family farms. Contact the organization at 202/543-5675 or www.nffc.net. Farm Aid is an annual concert to raise money for rural America. To date, the organization has granted over \$15 million to more than 100 farm organizations, churches, and service agencies. Find out about upcoming concerts at 800/FARM-AID or www.farmaid.org/event.

—Research and writing by Andrew Korfhage, Chris O'Brien, Tracy Fernandez Rysavy, Chris Strohm.

other families after witnessing the success of mid-week church dinners. The four families now fill the remaining weeknights with shared food; each family selects one night a week to do the cooking for everybody else. The cooks deliver meals directly to participants' homes.

"We meet once a month and plan what to fix for the whole month," says Lisa, who started her co-op in 1999. "It's nice to be able to make others happy by bringing them dinner."

AGREE ON A STRUCTURE—If you have only a few participants, you can hold your co-op dinners at members' homes, like Kristi's group does. If you have too many to fit into one house, you may want to follow Lisa's example and have the cooks du jour deliver meals directly to participants. Then, decide how often you want to have co-op dinners—daily, once a week, monthly, or whatever suits member needs.

MAKE YOUR SHARED FOOD SUSTAINABLE—Dinner co-ops are a great way to minimize the time and work involved in making healthy, homemade meals. Have your dinner co-op commit to preparing meals with organic food from CSAs, food cooperatives, farmers' markets, and health food stores. Serve more fresh vegetables and whole grains. Buy items in bulk to minimize waste.

ENJOY GETTING TO KNOW OTHERS—Co-op participants report a satisfaction derived from helping others meet their needs. Kristi says her co-op has helped her see a whole new side of her friends: "One mother is from Shanghai, so we get really amazing, authentic Chinese foods. Another is from Croatia, so her cooking style also has a unique, regional flair, and I'm pretty obsessed with local, seasonal and organic food. It's rewarding, because we really have enjoyed getting to know each other better."



Getty Images

Good Food:

The Joy, Health, & Security of It

Eating less meat can play a significant role in creating a sustainable food economy—where everyone, everywhere has enough to eat.

Veggie Power

In 1969, 26-year-old Frances Moore Lappé sat among stacks of books in the UC Berkeley agriculture library, determined to answer the question, “Why hunger?” What she discovered stunned her.

After reading countless reports and books, she found that many led her to the same conclusion—the world produces more than enough food to meet the needs of every person on the planet. The burning question that drove her research soon evolved from “Why hunger?” to “Why hunger in a world of plenty?”

The answer prompted her to write what would become a classic book on vegetarianism, *Diet for a Small Planet*. In it, she catalogued how industrial meat production is significantly less efficient than

grain production. Thirty years later, we are still using up 40 percent of the world’s grain to produce a relatively small amount of meat. That grain, Lappé and others say, could go to better use directly feeding the hungry if those who have plenty chose to eat less meat.

The reasons for eating less meat are much the same today as they were in 1969, says Lappé in her new book, *Hope’s Edge: The Next Diet for a Small Planet* (2002, Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam). Every day, the world produces two pounds of grain per person, roughly 3,000 calories worth. This amount is more than enough to feed everyone on the planet, without even counting fruits, vegetables, and nuts. But one in six people still goes hungry. Worldwide, we are feeding almost half of our grain to livestock, but they return to us in meat only a small fraction of the nutrients we feed them. In addition, to produce 1,000 calories worth of steak today—about one pound—requires thousands of gallons of water and 45,000 fossil fuel calories, says Lappé.

By eating less meat or going vegetarian or vegan, we could help ensure that everyone, everywhere has enough to eat.

Here are more reasons why eating less meat can play a significant role in creating a sustainable food economy:

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT: In their book, *The Consumer’s Guide to Effective Environmental Choices* (1999, Three Rivers Press), the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) compared the planetary impacts of red meat, poultry, and pasta. They found that when compared to pasta production, red meat is responsible for 20 times the land use, 17 times the common water pollution from animal waste, five times the toxic water pollution and water use, and three times the greenhouse gas emissions. Poultry came surprisingly close to pasta in environmental impact in every category except common water pollution. (Because of animal waste, poultry produces 11 times the common water pollution of pasta, according to UCS.)

ANIMAL WELFARE: According to the US Department of Agriculture, the average American will eat around 1,100 animals in his or her lifetime. Unfortunately, the vast majority of these animals are raised in poor conditions. Animals live in overcrowded conditions, unable to move around freely, and they are often given loads of antibiotics and hormones. Many are subjected to inhumane practices, like the de-beaking of chickens or painful slaughter while they are still conscious.

HEALTH: When someone visits a doctor’s office with a heart condition, the first piece of advice s/he often receives is to limit red meat intake. For a healthy heart, the American Heart Association recommends a balanced diet of fruits, grains, and poultry or meat substitutes, as opposed to red meat. The AHA and the American Dietetic Association say that appropriately planned vegetarian diets are typically lower than nonvegetarian diets in total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol. And, says the AHA, “vegetarians appear in many studies to have a lower risk of obesity, coronary heart disease (which causes heart attacks), high blood pressure, diabetes mellitus, and some forms of cancer.”

In short, if everyone ate less meat or became a vegetarian or vegan, it would make a big difference for the environment, for human health, for animal welfare, and for ensuring that everyone has enough.

—Tracy Fernandez Rysavy

Getty Images



From family potlucks to town festivals, food has long been at the center of community activities. The following stories show how some groups are finding creative ways to bring food and people together.

Food for Living

Traditionally, food has been at the center of family life, community gatherings, and cultural and religious activities. Below are the stories of how three groups are using healthy food in innovative ways to bring people together.

Secrets of Salsa

When Angeles Segura was a child growing up in Guadalajara City, Mexico, freshly made salsa was a necessity in her family's kitchen. If it wasn't on the table, her father would be the first to question, "*¿Donde esta mi salsita?*" (Where is my salsa?)

Now an adult, Segura moved to California almost two years ago. She enrolled in an English class at the Anderson Valley Adult Center in Boonville shortly thereafter to learn the language that would help her reach out to the wider community. She had no idea she'd soon be helping to put out a cookbook that would reach thousands of people—and open doors for her inside her own hometown.

It all started when, during the twice-weekly English classes, the students—all women immigrants from different regions of Mexico—would bring in snacks to eat during breaks. Their snacks inevitably included a container of homemade salsa. The women started comparing and swapping recipes, soon inspiring their teacher, Kira Brennan, to figure out a way to use the diverse recipes as a classroom exercise.

Brennan encouraged the women to describe recipe ingredients and history in English. The variety of the recipes and the stories behind them amazed the English teacher—some of the salsas utilized traditional ingredients (tomatoes, jalapeños, and cilantro); others blended mangoes with oranges or cauliflower with potatoes. It didn't take long for Brennan to hit on the idea of making them into a book. The

women reacted to the idea with varied degrees of amusement and puzzlement.

"We couldn't believe anyone would be interested in a book about salsa," says Segura.

But Brennan persisted and brought a fistful of papers to Maria Goodwin, English editor, asking, "Can we make a book out of this?"

"I looked at her handful of recipes on salsa-stained napkins and scraps of torn binder paper and immediately set to work typing," says Goodwin. At Goodwin's suggestion, Brennan started approaching local businesses and individual donors, began collecting funds, and found a nearby printer. Community response was enthusiastic, and the *Secrets of Salsa* cookbook was born.

After several months of hard work, Brennan and her students debuted the cookbook, then a self-published, spiral-bound booklet, at a kick-off party at the Boonville Hotel. Attendees snapped up over 500 books in one afternoon. The bilingual cookbook features a brief bio of each woman contributor along with her recipe and a salsa rating (mild, medium, and hot), as well as suggestions for food pairings.

"I looked at her handful of recipes on salsa-stained napkins and scraps of torn binder paper and immediately set to work typing."

Just prior to the hotel celebration, the women formed an impromptu group called "Las Salsitas," who were to demonstrate salsa- and tortilla-making for the public



Mitch Mendosa

English students at the Anderson Valley Adult Center demonstrate how to make salsa and tortillas at a local fair.

Good Food:

The Joy, Health, & Security of It

who attended.

Anderson Valley Adult School coordinator Barbara Goodell says that, at first, the thought of speaking in public in an unfamiliar language was daunting for many of the women. “Most of the Mexican women are shy; they feel invisible in our community,” she says. “Creating the cookbook and working with others won them attention and put them in an unfamiliar spotlight, but it was beautiful to see how they blossomed as the book production progressed.”

Estela Jacinto delights in retelling the story of her experience at the hotel kick-off party. “I couldn’t believe all those people were looking at me,” she says, smiling. As she made tortillas by hand for the appreciative crowd, she says, “Suddenly, I was the star!”

The event also helped the women improve their English, says Jacinto. “When we were making salsa and tortillas in front of all those people, we got asked the same questions over and over from different people. So the more we answered, the more English we learned very fast,” she says. “At first I was so afraid to speak English, I would almost whisper, ‘Come and taste,’ but by the time the day was over, I was shouting, ‘COME AND TASTE!’”

Since their first appearance, Las Salsitas have been in demand for events at local wineries and parties, and theirs is one of the most popular booths at the yearly Mendocino County Fair in Boonville.

Goodell and the Adult School teaching staff soon realized the value of using the cookbook as a complete project-based learning tool integrated into their program. The success of the book provided instant curriculum: monitoring book sales, planning for and buying salsa-making supplies, coordinating child care and transportation, securing commercial kitchen space—all of which demanded basic math and bookkeeping skills, as well as more intense English practice.

To the women’s delight, the book was published in hardcover format in 2002 by Chelsea Green Publishing^m. The spiral-bound version garnered even more acclaim by recently winning the western regional 13th Annual Tabasco Community Cookbook award.

The women have funneled revenues from the cookbook’s sales into a foundation establishing an “angel fund” for the express purpose of assisting immediate short-term needs of the Valley’s Latino population.

“We all learned from making the book—not just about salsa-making, but about mining our



The authors of the *Secrets of Salsa* cookbook.

community resources,” Goodell adds. “Diverse groups came together in a way no one could have envisioned when we first started.”

Student Laura Espinoza states that making the book and speaking in public, “makes us happy; we are proud of what we’ve accomplished, proud to share family recipes and part of our culture.”

Jacinto adds, “When we first met so many Anglos, we thought, well, they’re different people from us. But [this experience made us realize] we’re not so different. Everyone’s the same; we’re all equal.”

The Adult School recently received a grant to make a documentary on Las Salsitas. The filmmaking will also be added to next year’s curriculum, with students interviewing other members of the community to put together a complete picture of the salsa party.

—Stephanie MacLean

The *Secrets of Salsa* spiral-bound and hardcover cookbooks are available by phone (707/895-3774) or Web site (www.secretsofsalsa.com). E-mail inquiries to mgoodwin@mcn.org. You can also order the hardcover from Chelsea Green Publishing, 800/639-4099, www.chelseagreen.com.



Food in Salinas Valley

As an agriculture mecca that produces more than \$2 billion worth of food products annually, the Salinas Valley on California’s central coast is commonly referred to as “the salad bowl of the world.” Chances are good that the salad you ate the other day grew up in the region.

Because agriculture is so abundant in the region, Salinas Valley is rife with programs aimed at promoting farm-fresh, locally grown food. One area that has received particular emphasis is getting nutritious and healthy food into schools.

“There’s evidence that nutrition can play a positive role in learning,” says Jered Lawson, regional coordinator for the Community Alliance with Family Farmers in central California.

For example, the Monterey Bay Farmers' Market, which consists of about 80 farms, has developed a successful "farms to schools" program that forges ties between youth and local food.

Each year, the organization adopts a school and conducts a series of learning activities with fourth and fifth graders as part of the national "5 A Day" Program, which encourages people to eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day. That simple act reduces the risk for cancer, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, hypertension, and other chronic diseases.

Katie Barr, marketing manager for the farmers' market, says the program turns kids on to local, farm-fresh food while helping area farmers.

Through the program, youth play games at school like "vegetable bingo." Those who win receive gifts such as baskets of fresh fruits and vegetables, or coupons for the farmers' market. The program also teaches kids how to make their own pizza with farm-fresh vegetables. Additionally, youth learn how to prepare and eat foods they might never see at a supermarket, such as pluots (a cross between a plum and an apricot).

In science classes, kids collaborate with farmers to grow food. Farmers also donate plants to the school, which the students adopt. Once the produce is mature, the students take it to the farmers' market and sell it. Barr says the program helps young people understand where food comes from and how it reaches consumers. Additionally, when kids go to the farmers' market, they often bring family members along, which helps local farmers stay in business.

"I think it's just a win-win situation," Barr says. "It gets kids and their parents out to a farmers' market to look at the produce and buy

the produce, so hopefully we have customers for life. But it also gets the kids involved in growing and cooking their own food."

Lawson says state government grants are available to do food programs as part of the 5 A Day Program.

Salinas Valley is also home to innovative

Ag Against Hunger collects surplus vegetables and berries at shipping docks and redistributes them to food banks.

community food programs. One of the longest-running programs in the region redistributes food destined for waste to low-income people who need it the most. Called Ag Against Hunger, the program collects surplus vegetables and berries at shipping docks and redistributes them to food banks and charitable organizations.

The program distributes food throughout the three counties that make up Salinas Valley. It goes to seven food banks that serve about 175,000 people per month. Additionally, the California Emergency Food Link program takes much of the surplus food and distributes it to about two million people per month. Whatever is left over goes to charitable organizations in other states. The program has zero tolerance for dumping.

All in all, about 10 million pounds of food is reclaimed and redistributed per year through the program, for a total of about 90 million pounds of food since it was started.

No single organization is responsible for coordinating or developing food programs in the region. Rather, different organizations understand that promoting healthy, locally grown food is good for farmers, the economy, the environment, and people of all ages, says Lawson. He acknowledges that organizations in Salinas Valley need to do more to tie their programs together. But momentum exists for promoting local food, and he expects the number of programs to continue to grow, figuratively and literally.

—Chris Strohm

Iroquois White Corn

In the *Popul Vuh*, the creation stories of the Maya, corn is a central symbol of life. After several attempts to create people, the eight primordial gods of the sea and sky finally get it right through a mixture of blood, bones, and corn. In the same stories, the mythic "hero twins" plant corn out-



Students in the Salinas Valley connect with farmers in their region, learning about and gaining enthusiasm for fresh, local food.

Good Food:

The Joy, Health, & Security of It

side the house of their grandmother. If the corn withers and dies, they tell her, she will know that they have been killed.

From the Maya to the White Mountain Apache to the six tribes that now make up the Iroquois nation, many of the indigenous cultures of the Americas have an oral tradition in which corn plays a role. Today, the Iroquois are still adding to theirs.

In the 16th century, the newly formed Iroquois nation had an economy that was based mainly on corn. And not just any corn, but a special kind of white corn that has a unique, rich flavor.

Iroquois white corn is what is known as an “heirloom variety” of corn, meaning that instead of being grown from F1 hybrid seeds bred for longevity on store shelves, it grows from a variety of seed that was produced naturally and has been passed down through at least three generations. This rare form of corn has been with the Iroquois for more than 15 generations.

Experts say that F1 hybrids cannot compare to heirloom produce when it comes to taste,

“There’s nothing like the taste of Iroquois white corn. The corn you buy in the supermarket? It doesn’t come close.”

diversity, and nutritional quality. The same is true of this special type of corn, say Iroquois white corn aficionados.

“Ancient varieties of foods like Iroquois white corn are absorbed by the body slowly and have been found to be very useful in reducing and even reversing degenerative diseases, particularly the diabetes rampant among Native Americans,” says Dr. John Mohawk, Seneca Nation historian, university professor, and entrepreneur. Mohawk says that he’s known people who can’t eat store-bought corn because of allergies, but they have no problems eating the white corn.

So impassioned are Mohawk and his wife, Yvonne Dion-Buffalo, about preserving Iroquois white corn, that they’ve set up a corn hulling and milling operation in a small log cabin in the Cattaraugus woods that was once the home of Dr. Mohawk’s parents. They purchase the white corn from Native American farmers and make it into white corn hominy, tamal flour, and roast corn flour, all in partnership with the Bioneers

Restorative Development Initiative (RDI).

The corn isn’t just good for your health, says Mohawk: “There’s nothing like the taste of Iroquois white corn. The corn you buy in the supermarket? It doesn’t come close.”

The head chefs at many fine restaurants across the country agree. After sampling the white corn offered to them by RDI marketers, chefs at the White Dog Café in Philadelphia; Angelica Kitchen in New York City; Chez Panisse in Berkeley, CA; Rick Bayless’s Frontera Café in Chicago; and others added the corn to their menus. The corn’s “sweet, earthy aroma and flavor add a new dimension, yet an old-fashioned flavor to muffins, pancakes, savory herb stuffings, and creamy polentas,” Kevin Von Claus, executive chef at the White Dog Café told *Gourmet* magazine.

The Iroquois white corn project is also building bridges in Indian Country. During Colonial times, the French invaded the area now known as the Ganondagan Historical site, near Rochester, NY, and burned a reported one million bushels of white corn in an attempt to decimate the Iroquois. The project now supplies Ganondagan with that same traditional variety for special events.

In addition, project representatives make it part of their mission to provide Native American farmers with technical assistance and training in organic farming in order to continue the legacy of this treasured and unique heirloom corn.

—Tracy Fernandez Rysavy



Rini Templeton

Co-op America is a membership organization helping people to vote with their dollars for a better world. Membership includes a subscription to the *Co-op America Quarterly*, our *Real Money* newsletter, and the *National Green Pages*™.

MEMBERSHIPS. New and gift memberships are \$20. Renewals begin at \$25. Call (202)872-5307 for credit card orders, or send a check to the Membership Department of Co-op America at the address below.

GROUP DISCOUNTS. Bulk subscriptions for teachers, educators, and others are available. Write to the address below or call (202)872-5307 for information.

CO-OP AMERICA

building an economy for people and the planet

1612 K Street NW, Suite 600,

Washington, DC 20006

www.coopamerica.org

(202)872-5307 • fax: (202)331-8166