

Want A Strong, Resilient, Local Food System? Tag, You Are It!

by Matt Drewno

A local food economy is about more than just supporting your local farmer — it's about changing consumption habits, managing local resources sustainably, protecting our ecologies and increasing access to local organic food. Ask yourself, how could we feed ourselves if we could not import food? The answer I come up with is: tag, you are it!

We need more local farmers who understand sustainability as a holistic concept. Currently the UN says we have less than 55 years of soil remaining. Because of erosion caused by mechanized tillage, we are losing soil at 18-40 times the rate it is being created. We don't just need more farms, we need more farms that truly understand sustainability.

The US is only 5% of the global population, yet consumes 25% of its resources. It is next to impossible to sustain a truly local food system for a city like Los Angeles, with over 7,000 people per square mile, if we continue to consume as most Americans do. We need to define what a local food system looks like in each of our communities and include the health of our soil, water and ecosystems in the process. We need to make farming, gardening and consumer decisions which reflect an ethic of conservation.

During World Wars I and II, the Victory Gardens movement demonstrated the effectiveness of localizing the food system through home and community gardening. A strong home and community gardening culture increases access to local food, brings people together, saves money and enhances community health. We need to understand that there is no food security if our neighbor is hungry and no food sovereignty if people lack the access to grow their own food sustainably. Community resilience is not something you can buy!

Biointensive Agriculture can microscale the human footprint of agriculture, minimize water, fertilizer and energy use, while increasing yields, growing soil and sequestering carbon. It's a technique, which can be used by both farmers and gardeners in any climate and to grow soil and strengthen our local food system.

Land and resources need to be made accessible and affordable to small organic farmers,



photo: Victory Gardens for Peace

and incentives need to be created for consumers and farmers to keep food local. Farmer's Markets and direct marketing models such as the CSA Model (Community Supported Agriculture) nurture the relationship between small farmers and consumers.

In a resilient local food system, independent and locally managed cooperatives store and preserve our food. This includes canning facilities, fermenters, cold storage, dry storage and facilities to protect grain and root crops. Local facilities can transform community waste into compost to restore soil nutrients on our farms.

Poverty is on the rise and will require increasing local food bank capacity to distribute food to those who cannot afford it. Local media efforts should highlight these efforts and encourage the transformation. Opportunities for celebration, community service, volunteerism and compassion are an essential component of all local food economies.

The challenges we face are the opportunities we've been asking for. A strong home and community gardening culture, an increase in small scale farmers and networks of local cooperatives can help the transformation of scarcity into abundance. As we work towards a more just, local food system, we must understand that our most important resource is people. By making this a joyful and inclusive process, we can develop the integrity and commitment necessary to sustain this effort. This process of community transformation is our responsibility and the change is up to us — What kind of future do you want to create?

Matt Drewno runs the Victory Gardens for Peace Initiative, a project of Ecology Action - a 501(c)(3) non-profit helping individuals worldwide empower themselves to grow healthy food while conserving resources and building soil. For more information contact Info@Victorygardensforpeace.com or visit www.growbiointensive.org.

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