



nutrition

by Jamie Richards

Local, seasonal, organic! Is this just some kind of middle-class mantra... a lifestyle choice for those who can afford it which is rarely considered by those who can't?

The fact is that local, seasonal, organic pretty much was our lifestyle, rich or poor, until around 60 years ago. Then, in post-war Britain, science and intensive farming were embraced as the gateway to the future. This was seen as a way to rise from the misery of rationing and begin to prosper once more.

The nation began to be wowed by the wonders of modern food production and exotic fruits from around the world. Years rolled by and the wonders of processed food continued. This may be one of the worse confessions I'll ever make, but who can forget the joy of Angel Delight? Or, boil in the bag cod with parsley sauce, dried chicken chow mien with those crunchy noodles and their first trip to McDonalds? Not me! Never before had the human diet changed so drastically in such a short space of time. It has possibly also led to the most detrimental dietary changes in our history - ones we are only now beginning to fully understand.

So, what was so good about this local, seasonal and organic food of our yester years?

Local

Locally-grown and locally-eaten food is picked and eaten when ripe and at its nutritious best. 'Fresh' food sold in our supermarkets, on the other hand, is often picked long before it is ripe, transported from near and far, stored in a warehouse, then left on a supermarket shelf for days. I ask you, how 'fresh' is that?

Seasonal

Populations in Asia have a far better reputation for holding onto traditions than we do in the west. Chinese herbal doctors have followed a diet of the seasons for centuries now. This keeps our body healthy by aligning us with nature and eating foods that are naturally available in our own environment. Scientifically, we now know that force-growing crops at the wrong time of year creates a different nutrient profile to those that are seasonally grown. For me, this shows how easy it is to become separated from the seasons while seemingly eating a 'healthy' diet.

Organic

Many studies have shown that organically-grown foods are more nutrient dense than intensively-farmed ones. Chemically fertilized plants often look larger and lusher, but lush growth means more watery tissue and a growing susceptibility to disease. Because of this, the nutritive quality of the plant also

suffers. The use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers has long been a contentious issue. Pesticides protect plants from the surrounding environment, but is this a good thing? Organic plants are more exposed to the elements. With that comes stress and disease - by standing on their own two feet they develop an inner strength that exposure to these elements demands. This causes the organic plants to produce more protective and anti-stress compounds and we get the benefit of these compounds when we eat them! Chemically-enhanced plants often look particularly attractive but nutritionally they usually have only a feeble offering and really aren't fit for purpose.

As a nutritional therapist I use food to promote optimum health. My recommendations must be realistic and achievable and this is where the local, seasonal and organic idealism can fall down. In an ideal world we'd all have unlimited access to local, seasonal and organic food, and have the time and knowledge to cook and prepare it. We need the help and resources to re-establish this much needed connection between consumers, producers and the land our food comes from. The good news is that this help is now arriving in abundance. There has been a quiet food revolution going on that is challenging the way we shop and eat in this country. The Food for Life partnership is doing amazing work in schools across the country and the Making Local Food Work project is a great online resource.

What can you do? Why not check out your local farmers' market or speak to your greengrocer about what they have that's local and in season? You could join a community farm project or order a UK only vegetable box from one of the many locally-based companies. Get a seasonal cook book and learn how to make tasty, nutritious meals from the less popular winter vegetables. The Boxing Clever Cookbook by Jacqui Jones and Joan Wilmot has recipes like Swede in cider that are a real January treat in my home. A quick online search produces a wealth of allotment and garden sharing sites for those of you who want to grow your own. We're only limited by our imaginations. Start looking for new and healthier ways of eating. The rewards are truly delicious. ❤️

Jamie Richards is a nutritionist based in Bristol. He gives consultations throughout Europe as well as talks and workshops. His website can be viewed at www.jamierichards.co.uk