

Bringing It Home

When a consumer goes into the supermarket to load up their basket with fruits and vegetables, amongst other items, little thought is given to where those products are grown. Shoppers typically look for the best price, either conventionally grown or organic, and then make their choices. Most shoppers don't stop to look at where the product is grown or how far it traveled to get there.

With the globalization of our food supplies, we are seeing more seasonal crops on a year-round basis. Peaches used to be an anticipated season each year when I was a kid; now we can find peaches, and most other stone fruits, year-round on the grocery shelves. Along with blueberries and strawberries, we consumers are spoiled in having once seasonal choices now year round.

And now we are moving into more convenience items in the produce aisle. Not only are we seeing complete salad packages (with dressing and other items like croutons), complete meals are being packaged for dinner using fresh vegetables grown in our local fields, and including a protein. Consumers are looking for simplicity in their meal preparations and local producers and processors are responding!

We are fortunate that there is an abundance of fresh berries, veggies, and leafy greens grown in our area, and that the local grocery shelves are stocked with items that traveled only a few miles to get there. This is the best possible outcome of 'eat local' anyone could ever find!

Yet, there are items that we don't grow in Monterey County that we must travel farther to make it onto our grocery shelves. This can't be avoided as weather and climate play a big part in where crops are grown, as well as seasons of the year. While we may locally produce our veggies and fruits nearly year-round due to the moderate climate we all enjoy, other regions must deal with more drastic seasonal fluctuations and the annual cycle of growing stone fruits, grains, and other staple crops.

Consumers have choices beyond what our grandparents could have ever imagined. I remember as a kid going to the small town grocer with my grandmother as she shopped for dinner items, one or two days at a time. It was a big deal when the first ears of corn came in, or the first blueberries showed up on the shelves. We actually looked forward to those seasonal fruits and veggies as a treat!

Now, we are confronted with so many choices it's almost impossible to plan for a meal with a special item and not find it on the grocery shelf, no matter the season. We, as consumers, have trained our supermarkets into providing the widest set of choices ever, simply because we can demand fruit year round from all areas of the world. Our global economy has turned the seasonal expectations inside out and the newest generation of consumers has never experienced a grocery shelf filled with choices year-round.

But back to the emphasis on local; the trend from the foodies is to have local fruits and veggies available as a way to minimize our impacts due to transportation and other energy consumption. But in reality, during the winter months, local fruits and veggies in New York come from our Salinas Valley, as well as the Imperial Valley, as these are the only regions producing during those months. So local is a relative term when it comes to seasonality of crops.

Whether you shop at a farmers market, big chain supermarket, or local grocery store, you are most likely purchasing products produced here in the Salinas Valley. We remain one of the most significant growing regions in the world and local residents enjoy the benefits of this local bounty. Safely produced, under the strictest of all food safety measures, and at an affordable price, we are blessed with a multitude of local choices on a daily basis.

Local farmers have been doing this for decades and have continued to renew their local resources to continue this bountiful production of fruits and vegetables. Everyone is looking to eat healthier these days, and Salinas Valley farmers are the ones providing that healthy diet, locally.