

## **Local Food, Farms, and Gardens: Fact and Fiction**

from *Growing a Garden City* by Jeremy N. Smith (<http://jeremynsmith.com>)

Fiction: Local food is too expensive.

Fact: Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm member Jodi Allison-Bunnell tracked the cost of her family's meals for five years. They included "nice local chickens and legs of lamb and wine," but cost less than the USDA "moderate" budget plan for comparable households.

Fiction: Local food is elitist.

Fact: In Missoula, Montana, where one in five city residents live in poverty, community gardeners include youth home residents and homeless shelter clients, first graders and single mothers. Local farms supply a food bank, soup kitchen, and special farmers' markets for low-income seniors, military veterans, and the developmentally disabled.

Fiction: Local food takes too much time.

Fact: Kim Markuson is a single mother of two and full-time student, but found fresh fruits and vegetables easy to incorporate into her diet through membership in a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm. "At first [they] gave us one or two bags of lettuce, so I would cut up all these different varieties of lettuce and mix them together," she says. "I made big salad and put it in Ziploc bags and it would keep fresh all week. Then at the peak of the season in August you got three or four bags packed with fresh veggies. You could feed a family of four for a week."

Fiction: Community farms and gardens require "California" weather.

Fact: In Missoula, Montana, the frost-free growing season averages fewer than 100 days, but seven neighborhood-based farms and community gardens provide satisfying food to feed a diverse population. Even Fairbanks, Alaska boasts a short but very abundant growing season.

Fiction: Local food is for "them," not "me."

Fact: Neighborhood-based farms and community gardens attract a far-ranging mix of area residents to purchase high-quality local organic food, rent a plot and grow their own vegetables, or "volunteer for veggies" by receiving free food in exchange for work. At these sites college students pursue graduate and undergraduate coursework in environmental studies; area children visit annually on field trips; and, in cooperation with the local youth drug court, troubled teenagers find a positive environment and professional therapy.

**Everyone can contribute.** Daily lunch scraps from the same elementary school attended by students arriving on field trips feed farm animals. Teen addicts joining in "farm therapy" not only support one another and fellow farm workers, but also organize and run a special mobile farmers' market for seniors who could not otherwise enjoy fresh local food. College students learning how to farm discover that they are role models and mentors to those same teens and essential suppliers to the individuals and families served by the area food bank, homeless shelter, and youth homes. Strangers participating in community gardens to grow their own food form unexpected new friendships and enlarge one another's sense of neighborhood.