

Eating Green Means Saving Green

By-Leslie C. Wood

We all have to eat. However, while the economy is on what seems to be an endless downward trajectory and food prices are on what seems to be an endless upward trajectory, we're all wondering how we are going to afford our weekly grocery bills. Well, believe it or not, there are things that you can do that will not only reduce your grocery bill dramatically, but help save the planet, and support your local framers – all at the same time.

Cooking from scratch

The first thing to do is to learn how to cook from scratch. That's right, cooking from scratch – that activity that requires you to be in the kitchen for more time than it takes to set the microwave on six minutes to heat up a frozen dinner. The reason: Cooking from scratch is the cheapest (and best) way to eat and it's fun. However, If the concept of cooking from scratch, well makes you scratch, then gather up a few of your friends (at least one of them must know how to cook), invest in a bottle of wine, pick a recipe that you all agree on, and have a cooking party. This will not only save you money, but you will get to spend a fun afternoon with your 'buds', and all of you will go home with a delicious dinner, and hopefully a few helpful cooking tips.

Support your local framers and go green

Instead of going to your local grocery store to buy fruits and vegetables, shop at your local farmers' market. Considering that New Jersey is, after all, the Garden State, there's quite a few farmers' markets to choose from so you won't have to drive all over the state to find one. The reason: the fruits and vegetables at farmer's markets are not only cheaper, but are much fresher than those in grocery stores, and most farmers who sell at these markets practice agricultural methods that are either natural or organic, so it's healthy as well. And, again, this is an activity that you can do with friends as while you're purchasing your fruits and vegetables you can discuss what it is that you're going to cook (from scratch) at your next cooking party!

Besides, farmers' markets eliminate unnecessary food travel and improve local food security. They also use less packaging than shipped or processed foods, which means less energy wasted. In addition, shopping at local farmer markets supports New Jersey farmers, so in a nut shell, it's a win-win situation. Note: if for some odd reason you don't know where these markets are located, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture has a web site <http://www.state.nj.us/jerseyfresh/searches/urban.htm> with all of the details.

Getting in touch with your inner green thumb

Anther good way to eat green and save green is to grow your own herbs as herbs like parsley, basil, and rosemary are not only incredibly easy to grow and maintain, they don't need a big backyard or a greenhouse to thrive. A simple sunny windowsill will do. By doing this you'll not only save money, you'll be giving your recipes way more flavor than if you use dried herbs from the grocery store, and you will be dramatically reducing your environmental footprint, as processing these herbs uses a lot more energy than growing them yourself.

Picking it yourself

Now, comes the really fun part. Gather up a few friends this weekend and go to a 'u-pick it' farm in your area. This is not only a huge money saver, it's a great way to stock up on

cannable or freezable produce. And, again, the Garden State has quite a few to 'pick' from. If you don't know where they are, go to the *Pick Your Own* web site at <http://www.pickyourown.org/NJ.htm> to find out the locations. And, you can easily find out which fruits and vegetables are in season as fruits and vegetables in season are the least expensive. To see what produce is in season near you, go to <http://www.sustainabletable.org/shop/eatseasonal> and click on your state. And, if you're still not convinced, consider this: no one is making new farmland in this country so once a farm is gone, well it's gone -- forever.

Buy less meat and help save the planet

For all of you meat lovers out there, I have one thing to say: if you must eat meat (and I know that you must), buy less of it as it is not only expensive, it comes with a costly impact on the planet. So, at the very least you can save some of your hard earned money by opting to buy a whole chicken rather than a package of skinless, boneless chicken breasts as a whole chicken costs a lot less.

Make some bread for you and your wallet

If you're really inventive you can make your own bread, as it is not only simple to do it will save you a huge amount of money. With the invention of the bread making machine, all you have to do is add the ingredients, select from a list of options (loaf size, crust, etc.) and press the 'Start' button. And, bread making machines allow you to make several loaves of fresh, warm bread each and every day as the actual bread making process is automatic. In other words, no kneading or dough-watching necessary.

Being eco-friendly in the food department will not only reduce your grocery bill, but will dramatically reduce your impact on our planet as eco-friendly food is food grown, gathered, and harvested near it's point of use, and it doesn't get any closer than your local farm or for that matter your own windowsill.

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