

**U2L2A5** | Article “Debunking sustainable food myths”

**overview**

In this activity you will have complete the handout formatted for the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Practice Reading selection on “Debunking sustainable food myths” by Emma Gilchrist in preparation for the Grade 10 Literacy test. This activity will extend your knowledge of sustainability and food. One of the key inquire question in this article is why is making a food choice my responsibility?

**learning goal**

- To complete multiple choice and short answer question on an article about sustainable food myths.

**success criteria**

- Complete worksheet on article that has short answer and multiple-choice questions.

**Inquiry question**

- Why is making sustainable food choice my responsibility?

**Checklist**

- Briefly scan the entire selection
- Look at the questions before reading it
- Carefully read the entire article
- Reflect on the reason this article was written
- Reflect on the main idea and the supporting details
- Complete the multiple choice and written answers that are included

Article can be located through the Calgary Herald at: [www.canada.com/life/Debunking+sustainable+food+myths/2086662/story.html](http://www.canada.com/life/Debunking+sustainable+food+myths/2086662/story.html)





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**Multiple choice instructions**

**1.1** Compared to forty years ago, what percentage are Americans spending today of their income on food:

- a** 18 per cent
- b** 16 per cent
- c** 9 per cent
- d** 6 per cent

**1.2** Which statement does not support eating locally:

- a** Keeps money in the community
- b** Reduces greenhouse gas emissions
- c** Tends to taste better
- d** Large quantity of cheap food

**1.3** In paragraph five, the best meaning for the word “burgeoning” is:

- a** flourish
- b** snobbish
- c** poor
- d** friendly

**1.4** Which option best describes how the cost of cheap food trickles down is presented?

- a** chronologically
- b** by cause and effect
- c** as a problem and solution
- d** by similarities and differences

**1.5** Which province does this article refer to:

- a** Ontario
- b** Calgary
- c** Alberta
- d** Quebec

**1.6** Select from the list that best describes industrial beef

- a** Hormone free
- b** Finished on corn
- c** Range-fed
- d** Antibiotic free

**1.7** Where is it least likely to find sustainable foods:

- a** Directly from local producers
- b** Health food stores
- c** Farmers markets
- d** Local supermarkets





## Debunking sustainable food myths

BY EMMA GILCHRIST, CALGARY HERALD



There are plenty of local products at farmers' markets that aren't available elsewhere.

Food. It's one of just three basic human needs, yet we're spending a smaller and smaller portion of our income on what we eat.

Forty years ago, Americans spent 18 per cent of their income on food and only five to six per cent of their income on health care, according to David Suzuki's *Green Guide* (Greystone Books, \$19.95). Now Americans spend nine per cent of their income on food (the lowest proportion in the world) and 16 to 18 per cent of their income on health care. Canadian stats portray a similar trend in food spending.

It's with that in mind that we at *The Green Guide* find arguments against the sustainable food movement hard to swallow. And we're not the only ones.

In recent years, Michael Pollan has become a household name with his bestselling books *In Defense of Food* (Penguin, \$18.50) and *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (Penguin, \$20). In the past few months, the documentary *Food Inc.* has revolutionized the way North Americans view their food and the term "localwashing" -- used when a company tries to make their product look local when it's not -- has popped into our dialect.

All you need to do is visit a local farmers' market or catch a glimpse of Calgary's burgeoning Slow Food scene to know the local food movement in our city is alive and well.

Still, some people question the merit of paying more for food just because it's produced close to home or without the use of chemicals, antibiotics and hormones. Here, we address some common questions surrounding sustainable food.

### **What qualifies as sustainable food?**

Food choices are not black and white. Organic isn't always better. Local isn't always better.

"More than anything, it's about starting to pay attention," says Josh Laughren, director of communications at WWF Canada.

The environmental non-profit is launching a nationwide campaign today, called Localicious, which provides Canadians with tools, such as local buying guides, to make more informed choices.

"It's complicated," Laughren says. "People want simple, quick information. We've tried to resist that request for clearcut information."

Instead, WWF is suggesting consumers inform themselves as to what choices are available and to make the choices that work sense for them.

Wade Sirois, a local food proponent and owner of Infuse Catering and Forage: Farm to Fork Foods to Go, has a guideline that works for him: "Buy food you know from people you know."

Of course, that's not always possible when you live in a place like Alberta, but if you choose foods produced in a sustainable way close to home when you can, you're on the right track.

### **Why should I care where my food comes from?**

"There are lots of negative things that should drive you to eat locally, but there are lots of positive things, too," says Sirois.

A lot of top restaurants use local food these days--and it's not because it's in vogue. It's because fresh, local food tends to taste better.

Aside from providing quality, local agriculture preserves important farmland, keeps money in the community—and generally greatly reduces the greenhouse gas emissions related to food production and transportation.

#### **Why does local food cost more?**

"We are not fully understanding our food systems," Sirois says.

To produce large quantities of food cheaply, companies look for economies of scale, using chemicals to control weeds and pests instead of more labour- and space-intensive organic options and often packing animals into very crowded spaces.

The cost of this cheap food trickles down in many ways, including food safety issues (14 Americans die every day as a result of food-borne illness); increased use of antibiotics (more than half of all antibiotics used in North America are fed to livestock and 90 per cent are administered to make animals grow faster, not to treat infections); and water pollution (The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates agriculture is responsible for 70 per cent of the country's water pollution).

"These things have to be important to you in order to get past the price you pay," Sirois says. "We seem to have no problem paying \$50 for Internet each month and \$80, \$90, \$100 for a cellphone each month, so why do we want to pay the least possible for food?"

Indeed, when you head out shopping for clothes, do you look for the cheapest possible jeans?

"We can't seem to make the connection on a broad scale between food and health. Yes, we eat cheaply and poorly, but it adds to this incredible health expenditure on the other end," Sirois says.

All the while, 38 per cent of food for retail sale in Canada is wasted, according to a Statistics Canada report released in June.

"When we look at the cultures that value food the most, they come from a history of scarcity," Sirois says. "It's maybe our abundance that is to blame."

#### **Why is making sustainable food choices my responsibility?**

"Everyone eats. Food is the one thing that is applicable to everyone," Laughren says, explaining why WWF decided to venture into the food arena.

"If we're going to solve our sustainability issues, there's no question we need government to lead and we need business to take leadership, but none of that can happen if consumers don't make these choices as well," Laughren says. "When people lead, leaders follow."

### **We outsource our cars, electronics and call centres. Why not outsource food?**

"It comes down to security. Are you willing to rely on someone else to feed you? The second you control the food of a population, you control the population," Sirois says.

And right now, governments and companies largely have control of our food systems.

Choosing small, local producers enables us to wrest back some of that control, Sirois says.

"I don't think we'll ever reach the day when we'll feed ourselves (entirely) locally, but I think it's important to increase that percentage," he adds.

### **Why shop at a farmers' market when I can get the same products elsewhere for less?**

Sure, some farmers' markets allow vendors to carry food from elsewhere -- which speaks to the importance of diligent label-reading no matter where you are -- but there are plenty of local products at farmers' markets that aren't available elsewhere.

### **Is all Alberta beef the same?**

"The cow has to live three months in Alberta to be called Alberta beef," Sirois says.

"Usually that time is spent in a feedlot. What goes into that animal? How was it raised? And what do we get out of these animals?"

Industrial agriculture works on a pretty simple premise, Sirois says. "(They) try to get as much fat on a cow in a short amount of time and keep the cow alive at the same time."

That can be achieved by feeding cattle corn, linked to a particularly dangerous strain of E. coli.

Alternatively, choose beef that is hormone and antibiotic-free, range-fed and not finished on corn. Get it directly from local producers, at health food stores, farmers' markets and push for it at your local supermarket.

### Resources

- David Suzuki's Green Guide (Greystone, \$19.95)
- Slow Food Calgary ( [slowfoodcalgary.ca](http://slowfoodcalgary.ca))
- Dine Alberta ( [dinealberta.ca](http://dinealberta.ca))
- WWF Localicious ( [wwf.ca](http://wwf.ca))
- Find a listing of Calgary-area farmers' markets at [calgaryherald.com/greenguide](http://calgaryherald.com/greenguide)