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Life-Changing Fitness and Nutrition

Changing Your Food Choices — Changing The World

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Many people choose to support local and organic farming because they think that it is the right thing to do. That's great! Some have a gut feeling that it's a great ideal to uphold, but that will only help them decide to support community supported agriculture and not encourage others. If we want the local/organic food movement to remain strong and be the norm rather than the exception, we need a larger audience. That can only happen if we have stronger and more precise arguments to convince others that choosing local and organic food is the right choice.

There are thousands, perhaps millions, of people who might support the local agriculture movement if they are given answers as to why they should support it. "It's just right" simply isn't enough to sway people's opinion to the point of making a change. Even people who do agree, when asked, need prompting to actually follow through. Keep in mind that the reasons for to make a change must be stronger than the reasons to keep the status quo.

Ensuring Our Food Supply

Many Americans are unaware that a tremendous amount of our food currently comes from abroad. What would happen if we were no longer in the favor of countries that supply our food? In an unfortunate world full of hostility, wouldn't it make sense to supply our own food to our own people?

This is most worrisome when we realize that shifting food production offshore could lead to the eventual loss of the ability to grow our own food. This reliance on other countries for food production is hurting local farmers, but so too is the increasing presence of large corporations in agriculture. These corporate "middlemen" are siphoning money out of the system and undermining a farmer's ability to make a living. How can a farmer stay in business if he/she cannot provide for his/her family? Would any of us continue with a job that keeps us impoverished?

Dwindling Sources of Oil and Increasing Pollution

The distance between where most food is grown and where it is consumed is astonishing. Transporting food requires an increasing amount of oil to power ships and trucks. This oil, in the form of gasoline, is a limited resource that cannot last forever. Besides the limited supply, using gasoline causes a significant amount of pollution.

Yes, there are some that still hold tight to the notion that pollution isn't harming our planet or our health, but I think that you'll agree that they are lying to themselves or lying to us. Who is going to pay for the cost of pollution? Should we add that to the cost of food? Should we charge a \$1.00 tax on a \$0.25 apple or should we limit the pollution it takes to get an apple to our homes?

Additionally, relying on countries that are hostile or potentially hostile towards us to supply oil is a dangerous proposition. Look at the current oil refinery fiasco. Think of what would happen if our oil supply was cut off; even temporarily. We think of fuel to heat our homes or run our cars, but would we have access to enough food?

Pesticides

Pesticides are also problems that can be avoided by supporting local organic agriculture. Pesticides are poisons that destroy life. Despite the fact that certain pesticides have been approved for safe use, the long-term effects are unknown. We shouldn't forget that DDT was approved for use and was later shown to have a serious detrimental effect on people and the environment.

The cumulative effects of individual chemical pesticides are also unknown. Chemicals are individually approved for safety. But what happens when one approved chemical is combined with another approved chemical? Take the drug Fen Phen for example. Both components were tested for safety separately and approved by the FDA. It wasn't until these products were combined that a life-threatening condition arose. Chemical pesticides are not necessary; organic methods have been used safely and effectively for centuries. The argument that chemical pesticides lead to larger crop volumes has not been established.

Genetic Modification

The issue of genetic modification is more complex. Genetic modification involves splicing a portion of DNA from one species of plant or animal and onto another. It is often said by promoters of GM that crossbreeding of species has been going on for centuries. However, it is completely inaccurate to equate natural methods of crossbreeding (allowing two plants to cohabitate until crossbreeding occurs) to DNA splicing. Natural crossbreeding is an evolutionary

phenomenon, while GM scientifically, suddenly, alters life. Natural processes will never occur when nature doesn't allow it.

The inherent problem is that our bodies evolve over thousands of years; not months. Introducing something new to our bodies and expecting it to instantly adapt is unreasonable, given what we know about evolution. Again, we don't know the long-term effects of GM foods. When we are affecting human health, why should we be so lax, particularly when we don't need GM foods. The argument that GM foods will allow us to feed the world is circular, because we have enough food already. It may not always go to the people that need it, but that is another issue.

An interesting, but important, sidebar to all this is that GM foods will allow companies to own certain species of plants. These plants will then naturally crossbreed with other plants until the line between who owns what is unclear. That will (and already has) create a huge problem as small farmer's lands are invaded by new species.

Is World Hunger Necessary?

Now, let's look at world hunger—a problem that supercedes all other concerns, because if people don't have enough to eat, nothing else matters. The reality is that there actually is enough food to feed everyone on earth. The problem is multifactorial, but I'll focus on the way the American system of agriculture caused and continues to propagate this condition.

As noted earlier, American agriculture is no longer in the hands of small farmers. The system is primarily in the hands of huge corporations. The government subsidizes the farming industry, but 90% of those subsidies go, not to the small farmer, but to major corporations. These subsidies dramatically bring down the cost of food. At first glance, that looks great: lower prices for food! Who doesn't want cheaper food? However, these low prices of food are the very reasons why people in the poorest countries are starving.

American companies can produce food extremely inexpensively because of these subsidies, and they do pass some of these savings on to the consumer. In this country, that system works somewhat successfully (leaving other negative factors out of the equation). However, in third world countries, the story is much different. American food comes to market and is far cheaper than food produced by the people of that country. Citizens of the country will obviously buy the least expensive product in pursuit of providing the most that they can for their families. This cuts off the income generated by the farmers of that country. They are completely unable to produce food cheap enough to be competitive with American companies, and are forced out of business.

Since agriculture is a huge portion of a third world country's economy, the entire financial system of the nation suffers. This situation has a trickle down effect to all trades and services because people have less money to spend. As the local economy suffers the average citizen becomes impoverished. Therefore, no matter how inexpensive food is, they have no money to buy it and

they starve. While this is happening, the farming industry of the country begins to lose touch with its lifelong history to provide sustenance to its people and the agricultural technology they have developed.

Correcting this problem is no easy task. We should do more than simply provide food for the world's hungry, which we do to some degree. We first need to help countries regain their ability to produce food. Once food is being grown, we need to pull our food companies out but slowly so as not to reduce the amount of available food too quickly. Then, until stability is established, we need to provide money to the people of the country in order to allow them to purchase the food that their country is producing. Simply providing food, does not allow an economy to recuperate and it does nothing to promote the resurgence of the agricultural system.

Support Local Family Farms and Live Healthier

Belonging to a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) group is a great addition to a healthy lifestyle.

Usually a CSA will provide members with a variety of fruits and vegetables on a regular basis and these can help you improve health and reduce the risk of disease. Fruits and vegetables contain nutrients, both known and unknown, that cannot be mimicked by the supplement industry, which is why supplements have not been shown to reduce the risk of disease. Aside from nutrients, fruits and vegetables can replace other highly caloric foods in the diet helping people achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

The take home message to this story is twofold. First, when promoting this concept to others you must provide concrete arguments to avoid making it seem just another hippy-like movement. Don't make it an all or none proposition. Instead, explain to people the very good reasons (like those provided here) to buy local produce when given the option. Second, local and organic farming works by ensuring safe and available food that contributes to a healthy lifestyle for you, your family and for all of us.