

Helpful Hints - Food

by Melissa Glen

Ethical eating

To be aware of the food chain and be more disciplined about what goes into our mouths is very important in order to minimise our negative impact on the planet. Ethical eating is a complicated issue that requires awareness of numerous factors, while also recognising that there are no hard and fast rules. Often it is virtually impossible to know that everything you eat has been ethically produced. However, important issues to consider include, factory farming, genetically modified crops, organic food, free-range eggs, vegetarianism and of particular importance in the context of global warming, ‘food miles’.

- ‘**Food miles**’ relates to the distance that a piece of food has travelled to arrive on your plate, and the method of transportation.
- ‘**Ghost acres**’ is the problem of vast tracts of land devoted to growing food (usually soy or corn) for factory-farmed animals. The costs of exploiting this land are not factored into the cost the consumer pays for the product.

What you can do:

- ④ **Buy locally and seasonally** to combat the negative impact of ‘food miles’ and ‘ghost acres’. *Think globally, act locally* – get to know your local neighbourhood by walking rather than driving, support local retailers not multinationals, and support local producers. Though keep in mind that depending on the methods used to grow the produce, buying locally may not always be the best option.
- ④ Use local **farmers’ markets** to buy your fruit, vegetables and meat where possible. To find out where and when your local farmers’ markets are held, contact your local council or visit the website of the Farmers’ Markets Association at www.farmersmarkets.org.au .
- ④ Use a **water filter** to remove impurities and chemicals from your tap water. It is far better for the environment to fill and take your own water bottle when you go out, rather than constantly buying bottled water.
- ④ Buy **organic** foods where you can, and buy your fruit and vegetables in season as much as possible. Organic fruit and vegetable are generally grown locally and in season because they cannot be transported very far and do not have the preservatives that conventional produce does.
- ④ Opt for **free-range eggs**, preferably certified organic ones.

- ② Ask if **seafood** has come from overseas and try to avoid long-lived or deep-sea species. The Australian Marine Conservation Society has produced a Sustainable Seafood Guide as well as a pocket guide and these can be ordered by calling 1800 066 299 or going to www.amcs.org.au .
- ② Buy **canned fish** with a blue logo on the can to show that it has been certified by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). For more information on ethical fishing practices and products go to www.msc.org .
- ② Check ingredients lists and avoid products that are excessively packaged or contain high levels of artificial colours, flavours and sugars.
- ② Avoid **genetically modified foods**. The most common products with genetically engineered (GE) ingredients come from imported canola, corn and soy products. Also try to avoid factory farmed animals, which may have been fed genetically modified foods. Greenpeace has created a list of companies that don't use GE ingredients at www.truefood.org.au .
- ② Make sure your coffee is **Fairtrade**. Fairtrade is a growing international movement to ensure that producers in poor countries receive adequate payment for their products. You can find out more about the fair trade campaign at the Fair Trade Association of Australia and New Zealand at www.fta.org.au .
- ② Ask for organic options at restaurants, supermarkets and other shops. The more we ask for them, the more likely retailers are to stock organic products.
- ② Instead of buying all of your fruit, vegetables and herbs, why not **grow your own**? A simple veggie patch near your house or herb garden on your windowsill can be a wonderful way to supplement your diet.
- ② Eat less meat and animal-based products, as it will make a huge difference to climate change.

(Material for this article sourced from "A Lighter Footprint" by Angela Crocombe)