

Buying Local – What’s in it for YOU?

In these tough economic times, you may find you want to support local vendors and companies rather than send your money out of state. One way to ensure your money stays in North Carolina is to buy local, in-state products.

Buying local is not as hard as you’d image, and it can be done year-round. We’re talking about more than vegetables here. There are many different types of local products. North Carolina is the second-largest producer of Christmas trees and poinsettias in the nation. And that’s just the seasonal items. Our state has an overflowing bounty waiting for you!

It’s likely easier than you think to get started.

One way is to shop farmer’s markets: <http://www.farmersmarketonline.com/fm/NorthCarolina.htm> . These are areas that make it easy to shop for North Carolina food.

You can also consider joining a community supported agriculture group with a local farmer. This is a little different from visiting a farmer’s market. You invest with a farmer during the winter, when their start-up costs are high, and reap the benefits throughout the farming season. The Carolina Farm Stewardship Web site can make it easy for you to find local food (including meat), as well as CSAs at: <http://www.carolinafarmstewards.org/advanced.shtml> .

If you're more of a "fish person," then the local catch program is for you. The North Carolina aquariums have partnered with N.C. Sea Grant to create seasonal wallet cards describing what fish are commercially caught each season. Each card presents a different set of “Quality Counts” tips for selecting seasonal fresh seafood. For more information, visit the aquariums’ local catch Web site at: <http://www.ncaquariums.com/local-catch-north-carolina-seafood-availability> .

Another reason to buy locally is to protect our state’s forests. Invasive species, such as insects and diseases, can be brought into our area by people transporting firewood from other states into North Carolina. Using local firewood can help prevent the introduction of devastating invasive species into our forests while supporting local firewood vendors. To learn more about invasive species, check out the National Invasive Species Information Center at <http://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov> or the N.C. Division of Forest Resources Web site at <http://dfr.nc.gov> .

If you’re ready to get your hands dirty, picking your own food may be the answer. Here’s a great opportunity for you and your family to learn what fruits and vegetables are “in season.” A good place to get started is <http://www.pickyourown.org/> . Make the local farm your classroom.

Another great Web site is <http://www.ncfarmfresh.com/> , where you can find great information on N.C. Farm Fresh Farms, farmer’s markets and North Carolina nurseries and garden centers.

Below are some benefits of buying local -

- Fresher food – no shipping necessary. Food is picked or processed more recently compared to being shipped across the country.
- Smaller carbon footprint – less shipping means less fuel used, less packaging and less handling.
- Helps the local economy – local farmers spend money locally, and local farmers mean more green spaces and less development.

Are you ready to take the challenge and buy local? Perhaps it can be one of your New Year's resolutions. Help yourself, help the local economy and buy local!