



BRIGHTON PEACE & ENVIRONMENT CENTRE

FOOD

Living in a city as compact as Brighton and Hove leaves little room for growing our own veggies, so most of us need to shop for food. The very best green and ethical way of food shopping is to support your local shops and favour produce that is local, seasonal and organic. Eat less meat, and if buying fish then choose sustainably fished, MSC certified, or organically farmed fish. When buying from further afield make sure produce is fairly traded.

Supermarkets

Due to consumer demand, supermarkets now stock more fair trade, organic and vegetarian produce, and avoid genetically modified (GM) foods - but there are still many problems with supermarkets.

They are responsible for local shops closing down, enormous food miles, over-packaging, and treating farmers and producers poorly. Of the supermarkets, *The Good Shopping Guide*, 2006 recommends **Co-op**, **M&S**, **Sainsbury's** and **Waitrose**.

Keep it Local

'Food miles' refer to the distance produce travels from farm to fork, and is related to greenhouse gas emissions which contribute to global warming.

Most food is transported by road and ship, but air-freighting is ever increasing. It is 200 times more polluting than by ship and 20 times more than by road. Annually, we import about 12.2 million tons of food and export 7.4 million tons. We export about 400,000 tons of milk and yet we also import a similar amount! Food production and processing also results in CO₂ emissions.

Favour Seasonal



Photo courtesy of Jessica Spengler

Eating fruit and veg which is in season throughout the year avoids the CO₂ emissions from hothouses and polytunnels, which can be as great as from air-freighting from abroad. For a list of vegetables that are in season visit www.eattheseasons.co.uk

Why Go Organic?

The side effects of modern, chemical-dependent agriculture are far too lengthy to go into in any detail here, but suffice to say they're really bad! Pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers pollute soil, air and waterways leading to poisoned rivers, poor soil fertility and erosion.

- The last 30 years of intensive farming have seen a drop in population and near extinction of many of our species of butterflies, reptiles and wild mammals, with a fall of up to 70% of wild birds in some areas
- Certain chemicals have been shown to build up in our bodies and some have been proved to cause cancer, with links to infertility
- Non-organic livestock are routinely fed a cocktail of hormones and antibiotics to increase yield, and these are passed directly to us through milk and meat. They are also largely fed on GM corn

With organic farming, soil quality has higher nutritional quality and this is managed by crop rotation and by using compost and manure to fortify soil. Far fewer chemical pesticides and fertilisers are used, and all genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are banned. Animals are free-range and given no routine antibiotics or growth-promoting drugs. These methods also result in greater biodiversity and wildlife on the farm and surrounding areas.

- An EU-funded investigation found that organic food has more nutritional value than non-organic
- A Defra study shows that producing food organically is typically 30% more energy-efficient than non-organic production, mainly due to not using nitrogen fertilisers
- Although more expensive, organic food may be cheaper to society in the long run, due to the expense of cleaning dangerous agro-chemicals from our waterways
- To tell if produce is organic, look out for the certifier's



mark and number. The **Soil Association** certifies 75% of organic food on sale in the UK

The Easy Way to Keep it Local, Seasonal and Organic

A good way to ensure that your food is local, seasonal and organic, is to order a veg box to be delivered from a local organic farm. The following distributors cover Brighton and Hove: **Ashurst Organics**, Plumpton, Tel: 01273 891219, and **Barcombe Nurseries**, Barcombe, Tel: 01273 400011.

Grow Your Own

If you want to grow your own fruit and vegetables and don't have a garden, maybe an allotment appeals to you. Contact Brighton & Hove City Council at www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/allotments or Tel: 01273 292225.

You can try growing your own in a window box. Good choices to start with are sweet peppers, chilli peppers, cherry tomatoes, aubergines, strawberries and herbs. To find out more about growing food in small spaces check out www.bbc.co.uk/gardening. Also check out your local library and garden centres. For local garden share schemes, visit www.transitionbrightonandhove.org.

Avoid Wasting Food

Each year Britain throws away a third of all food grown for consumption.

- **Buy Little and More Often** - This is a good way to avoid buying more food than you need. It can also cut down on car use and shopping in supermarkets and is more likely to support the local economy
- **Plan the Week's Shopping** - Estimate how many meals you're likely to need and only buy things on special offer if you actually need them. Keep an eye on the freshness of your food and eat in order of priority. 'Best Before' dates are very conservative - trust your own senses of sight, smell and touch to see if food is still good despite its allocated date code
- **Use Leftovers** - Save money and reduce waste by leftovers to take to work the next day; add them to the next night's dinner or turn them into soup. Compost inedible leftovers and vegetable peelings or feed them to a wormery - www.wigglywiggers.co.uk. These can be suitable for even very small spaces

People versus Planet

Buying food which is local, seasonal and organic is the healthiest option for both our bodies and the planet. If you can't keep it local then make sure it is fairly traded. According to the UN, almost 20,000 people in Kenya and Ghana rely on organic trade with us for their livelihoods.

Buying UK organic food in season is undoubtedly more environmentally friendly, but buying foreign produce can produce a valuable income for farmers in the developing world.

Favour Fair Trade

Import tariffs and Western farm subsidies keep poor countries in poverty and encourage the exploitation of workers and the environment. The Fairtrade movement aims to empower these producers by encouraging them to form co-operatives or unions, and to remove the middle-men. Up-front payments and long-term contracts are given to avoid reliance on loans and enable forward planning. A premium is paid so producers and the environment are not abused. Look for the Fairtrade Mark or logo on products.



Avoid Genetically Modified (GM) Food

GM foods contain ingredients that have been modified using genetic materials and proteins from other sources. Currently, no GM crops are commercially grown in the UK. However, there are some GM ingredients from food produced with GM technology which don't have to be labelled, such as cheese produced with GM enzymes, and meat, milk and eggs from animals fed on GM feed. GM soya beans may be found in many different processed food items.

No proper human trials have been carried out, so we don't know if there are any potential health problems for humans. GM could threaten local plant varieties and help create monocultures.

What you can do right now.....

Order an organic veg box delivery or go one step further and grow your own salad on your window sill!

Resources & Further Information

'The Good Shopping Guide'
Ethical Marketing Group, 2006

'The Organic Directory' 2007-8
edited by Clive Litchfield - Green Books

www.foe.co.uk

www.greenpeace.org.uk

www.whysorganic.org

www.pan-uk.org
(for information on pesticide levels)