

# Taking Action—Getting More Involved

As a consumer, you have an important role to play in determining the future of our food system. Here are some ways you can get more involved and informed about the choices you make:

## ASK QUESTIONS AT THE FARMERS' MARKET



Some farmers use ecological practices but choose not to certify their farm as organic. By asking questions you can get to know the farmer and their production methods.

### Ask the farmer

- How do you control pests on your farm?
- How do you maintain soil fertility?
- What kind of housing do your animals have? Do they have access to the outdoors?
- How are your animals fed? On grain? On grass? Is their feed sourced from organic or on-farm sources?

Many farmers will be happy to talk to you about how they produce food, especially if you can find them at a not-so-busy time.

## FIND OUT ABOUT PURCHASING POLICIES AT YOUR GROCERY STORE

### Ask your grocery store manager

- Can the store stock local food when in season?
- What is the store's definition of local?
- How do you label local and Ontario products?
- What processed foods from Ontario do you carry?

To find Ontario products at the grocery store you can also look for the Foodland Ontario logo (for fruits and vegetables) and Homegrown Ontario logo (for meat). Remember, just because its local, doesn't mean it is ecologically produced.

## FIND YOUR LOCAL FOOD DIRECTORY

Many communities produce "Buy Local" guides. Check the Internet or ask your local public health department.

## FIND OUT WHICH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES ARE IN SEASON

[www.foodland.gov.on.ca/availability.htm](http://www.foodland.gov.on.ca/availability.htm) or [www.harvestcanada.com/seasonal.php](http://www.harvestcanada.com/seasonal.php)

## FIND YOUR CLOSEST FARMERS' MARKETS

These websites list many of the markets across Ontario: [www.farmersmarketsontario.com/markets.cfm](http://www.farmersmarketsontario.com/markets.cfm) or [www.harvestontario.com/fmo.html](http://www.harvestontario.com/fmo.html)

## INVEST IN COMMUNITY SHARED AGRICULTURE (CSAs)

Look for local farmers who run CSAs. In exchange for an investment up front, you will receive weekly boxes of produce all season long.

## BUY INTO A GOOD FOOD BOX

Some communities have programs that distribute boxes of fresh food – some are local or organic.

Order copies or send questions to [info@cban.ca](mailto:info@cban.ca)

For more information and complete references see [www.cban.ca/FoodChoices](http://www.cban.ca/FoodChoices)

### THIS BROCHURE WAS PRODUCED BY:

Canadian Biotechnology Action Network: [www.cban.ca](http://www.cban.ca)  
Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario: [www.efao.ca](http://www.efao.ca)  
National Farmers Union Ontario: [www.nfu.ca/on](http://www.nfu.ca/on)

### PRODUCED WITH SUPPORT FROM:

The Ontario Natural Food Co-op; The Ontario Trillium Foundation, an agency of the Government of Ontario; USC Canada [www.usc-canada.org](http://www.usc-canada.org)

Feel free to add your local contact details.  
An Avery 5160 label fits here!

# WHY YOUR FOOD CHOICES MATTER

## A Guide to Buying Local and Ecologically Grown Food



# Positive Choices for Positive Changes

This guide offers information about the **food choices** you can make to set a new, positive direction for the future of food and farming.

When consumers like you purchase ecologically grown food, produced by local farmers, you are:

- ▶ **Supporting** rural communities and keeping family farmers, with all their knowledge and experience, on the land
- ▶ **Reducing** the amount of pesticides in our soil and water
- ▶ **Reducing** the use of genetically engineered seeds
- ▶ **Enjoying** more nutritious, tastier food

## What's at Stake with the Choices We Make?

### FARMERS NEED OUR SUPPORT

Farmers in Canada now face the worst farm income crisis since the Depression. Did you know that many farmers take jobs off the farm to support their families? Farmer net income from the markets has been negative since 2002.

### WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Large global corporations that sell farm inputs such as seeds, pesticides and fertilizers constantly increase their prices. These high costs keep farmers in debt and, as major corporations

#### It is now impossible to find Ontario canned peaches on grocery store shelves:

in 2008 the province's last tender fruit canning factory closed due to competition from cheaper imports. Many Ontario farmers lost their market and were forced to rip up their orchards.

keep buying up smaller companies and getting bigger, there are fewer and fewer places where farmers can buy affordable supplies and sell their products for fair prices. For example, multinational companies Saputo and Parmalat, with the co-op Agropur, process 75% of the milk in Canada. And three companies (Loblaws, Sobeys and A&P/ Dominion) control 78% of Ontario's retail market.

Farmers also face barriers that prevent them from selling local produce to grocery stores. Because big grocery chains demand large quantities of food all year long, at cheap prices, they often reject local food in favour of food grown and processed in other countries.

### WHAT'S THE FUTURE OF FARMING IN ONTARIO?

- Less than 10% of Ontario farmers are under 35 years old.
- Farmers are less than 1% of Ontario's population.
- Ontario has just over one half of all of Canada's class 1 farmland (51%) but each year we lose some to urban sprawl.

### ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS ARE MOUNTING

By relying heavily on food produced with pesticides that harm our soil, water systems, beneficial insects and wildlife, we add to the risks already facing our planet.

What's more, food production around the world directly contributes at least 10% of the total greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming – and that's before food is transported across long distances. One major problem is that conventional farming uses large amounts of nitrogen fertilizers that not only take a lot of fossil fuel to produce but also release nitrous oxide, a powerful greenhouse gas.

## How Your Choices Solve Problems

### LOCAL EATING AND ECOLOGICAL FARMING



**What's the good news?** Solutions exist — and you can help promote them. By buying food that is grown by local farmers who use ecological practices you can help create a safer, more secure food system — one that will protect our environment, provide healthy food for all of us, and support the next generation of farmers in Ontario.

### What's Local?



Local food can be defined by distance (like the 100 mile diet) or by region (such as Eastern Ontario). You can also think of local food as building relationships with neighbouring farming areas.

However you define it, local buying gives you a closer connection with the people who grow your food, making it easier to find out about the farm practices used.

As well, when you purchase local food, you reduce the miles your food travels. Fewer “food miles” means less greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution. It also means fresher food.

**Remember:** local food is not necessarily organic, and organic food is not always local. So keep your eye out for the perfect combination: local food grown using organic or ecological practices.

# What's Ecological Farming?



**H**ealthy soil is fundamental to ecological farming. Healthy soil provides the basis for healthy crops and a balanced, resilient ecosystem. Soil that is rich in minerals and nutrients produces food that is also rich in those minerals and nutrients.

Ecological farmers deal with problem pests, weeds and plant diseases by harnessing their knowledge of relationships in the environment. This approach to farming is knowledge-intensive rather than technology-intensive.

PROBLEM	CONVENTIONAL APPROACH	ECOLOGICAL APPROACH
Plant disease	Apply chemical pesticides.	Rotate crops (plant different crops year to year) to reduce risk of infection. Use naturally disease resistant plant varieties. Build healthy soil for plant nutrition.
Insect pests eating crops	Apply chemical insecticides. Use plants genetically engineered to be toxic to insects (insect resistant).	Encourage a diverse insect community so insects can act as natural predators to crop pests. Breed insect resistant plant varieties. Use physical barriers over crops. Use natural control substances such as garlic spray.
Weed invasion of fields	Apply chemical herbicides. Use plants genetically engineered to withstand chemical herbicides (herbicide tolerant).	Rotate crops. Weed by hand or machine. Plant cover crops and winter crops to slow weeds.

Most family farms use a combination of conventional and ecological approaches.

# What's Organic Farming?



**O**rganic farmers only use the ecological approach and follow the specific organic practices stipulated in the Canadian organic standard. Certified organic farms are inspected every year by professional inspectors from independent certifying organizations to make sure that they are following the organic standard.

Among other requirements, the organic standard makes sure that certified organic farmers do not use:

- synthetic pesticides (including fungicides, insecticides and herbicides);
- synthetic fertilizers;
- genetically engineered seeds or animal feed;
- animal feed made with animal wastes or slaughter by-products;
- synthetic hormones, antibiotics or other animal drugs to stimulate growth or production of livestock;
- sewage sludge (recycled human waste) or waste from factory farms and biosolids (water waste from industry) on their land.

Canada has a new legally-binding national organic production standard and starting in 2009, you will see the new "Canada Organic" logo in Ontario stores along side other certification logos. The logo will also be put on organic food produced outside Canada.

### Did You Know?

To be labeled "organic", processed foods must have more than 95% organic ingredients – check the ingredients list to see which ones are organic.

# Making Your Choice About Genetically Engineered Foods



**A**s a consumer you also have important choices to make about genetically engineered (GE) foods.

### WHAT IS GENETIC ENGINEERING?

Unlike conventional breeding which relies on, and is constrained by, the existing reproductive systems of plants and animals, genetic engineering takes genes from organisms such as bacteria or plants and inserts them directly into the cells of other, often unrelated species. GE is also commonly called genetic modification or GM.

### Did You Know?

Monsanto is the largest seed corporation in the world and almost 90% of the world's acres of GE are planted with Monsanto's seeds.

### WHY IS GENETIC ENGINEERING PROHIBITED IN ORGANIC FARMING?

Genetic engineering and organics are two different visions for farming.

Genetically engineered plants are new species created in laboratories that could never be produced in nature. Because large corporations produce GE seeds for profit, they are patented (privately owned) and companies can sue farmers for using the seeds without their authorization.

Organic farmers reject genetic engineering as unnecessary and highly risky. They also reject corporate control over seeds. Instead, organic farmers work with the diversity that nature already offers and save and exchange seeds and knowledge.

### ARE GENETICALLY ENGINEERED FOODS SAFE TO EAT?

All GE foods on the market have been approved for safe eating by Health Canada. However Health Canada does not conduct independent tests but relies on privately owned data submitted by the companies applying for product approval.

Because the Canadian government has not set up a "post-market surveillance" system to monitor long-term health impacts and because there is no mandatory labeling of GE foods, our government has no way to find or track health

effects, if any occur. (More than 40 countries around the world have labeling laws.)

### WHAT GE FOODS ARE WE EATING?

Many consumers believe that GE foods are everywhere but this is only true in processed foods. You will not find any GE vegetables at your local farmers' markets for example. You may have heard the estimation that up to 70% of processed foods could contain GE ingredients – because the three major GE crops of soy, canola and corn are widely used as ingredients.

The Canadian government has approved over 50 varieties of 12 different GE foods. Eight GE foods are currently on the market in Canada.

Four GE crops – corn, canola, soy and sugarbeet – are grown in Canada. (GE sugarbeet - the type used for processing into sugar - came on the market in 2008 and is grown in a few counties in Ontario.)

GE cotton, papaya and squash are grown in the US and can be imported into Canada. Bovine Growth Hormone (BGH) was never approved for

use in Canada but some imported milk products from the US may have been produced with BGH, though it is being phased out. Other crops like GE tomatoes and potatoes are not currently grown anywhere in the world.

86% of the world's GE crops are planted in only four countries: U.S. (50%), Argentina and Brazil (30%), Canada (6%).

### Is There a Way to Avoid Eating Genetically Engineered Foods?

1. Eating organic food is one way you can avoid GE food because GE is prohibited in organic farming. (This also applies to organic dairy, eggs and meat because animals in organic farming are not fed GE grains.)
2. You can avoid eating processed foods with corn, canola and soy ingredients. Check the table on this page for the full list of GE foods.
3. You can buy food directly from a farmer who does not plant GE seeds or use GE crops for feeding animals.

### GM CROPS GROWN IN CANADA

CROP	TRAIT	WHERE ON THE SHELVES
1. Corn	Insect resistant, herbicide tolerant	Corn flakes • Corn chips • Cornstarch • Corn syrup • Corn oil and other corn ingredients in processed foods • Sweeteners like glucose and fructose • Eggs, milk and meat
2. Canola	Herbicide tolerant	Canola oil • Eggs, milk and meat
3. Soy	Herbicide tolerant	Soy oil • Soy protein • Soy lecithin • Tofu • Soy beverages • Soy puddings • Eggs, milk and meat
4. Sugar beet	Herbicide tolerant	Sugar

Check [www.cban.ca/gmfoods](http://www.cban.ca/gmfoods) for updates

### GM FOODS IMPORTED TO CANADA

FOOD	GROWN	WHERE ON THE SHELVES
5. Cottonseed oil	U.S.	Cottonseed oil • Vegetable oil in processed foods such as potato chips
6. Papaya	U.S. (Hawaii)	Papaya in fruit juices and other processed foods
7. Squash	U.S.	Some zucchini • Yellow crookneck and straightneck squash
8. Milk products (Bovine Growth Hormone)	U.S.	Milk solids and powder • Frozen desserts with dairy • Imported mixed drinks with milk ingredients

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