

Global effects on local food



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Think Globally, Act Locally: Analysis of a Simple Breakfast

Rural Indiana towns boast small, family-run diners where a Hoosier breakfast often consists of local eggs, ham and sausage, hash browns and a pair of fresh-baked biscuits. While most of these items are sourced from local farms, the bottomless cup of coffee was most likely sourced from Columbia or Brazil (Statista, 2019). Such an elaborate breakfast, though, is often reserved for leisurely weekend mornings. To explore the ethical sourcing of an everyday breakfast, I will consider five components from one of my own simple breakfasts: oatmeal with chia seeds and blueberries, and coffee with creamer. I will analyze aspects of my meal's sourcing, the economic and ecological perspectives, and the global impact.

My food choices begin in the local grocery store, but it would be incorrect to assume my healthier options are more local than a Hoosier breakfast. My Quaker oatmeal is grown and processed almost 400 miles away in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, which is then shipped via truck to Indianapolis (Strautman, 2005). While other grain crops deplete the soil, oats add nutrients and use less fertilizers and chemicals (Eller, 2017). Chia seeds are cultivated and shipped from the southwestern United States using organic farming methods (AgriFarming, 2019). Since Indiana is the 12th leading blueberry producer in the country, these are locally grown and shipped short distances (Bertone, 2017). However, these can only grow June through August in Indiana, so blueberries purchased in the spring and fall ship from warmer states and those purchased November through March have been shipped nearly 4,000 miles from South America (U. S. Highbush Blueberry Council, 2019). Thirty-five percent of blueberry shipments come from South America by ship and

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the rest from train and truck in “ controlled atmosphere” cargo containers (Mulderij, 2018, and Hapag-Lloyd, 2019). Much controversy exists regarding the assessment of coffee sourcing, so I will condense my analysis by pointing out half of my coffee is produced on Starbucks certified Fair Trade farms and the rest comes from inexpensive single-serve pods (Craves, 2015). These coffees are most likely shipped from Columbia or Brazil as they are the two largest coffee producers for the U. S. (Statista, 2019). My Nestle’ “ creamer” is, in fact, not cream at all but a category deemed foodstuff manufactured in Glendale, California (Urban, 2018). Because it consists primarily of fats and oils, it does not require refrigeration for shipping and is packaged in recyclable plastic bottles. Despite the grocery chain Meijer’s efforts with their ‘ Home Grown’ advertising, my simple breakfast highlights how many of my food choices are not locally sourced but travel many miles to arrive on my table (Hart, 2011).

Sometimes the opportunity to purchase local is not possible due to climate, so it is important to consider food choices that use sustainable practices or use less or recyclable packaging (Jonathan, 2010). Oatmeal is a better choice than corn-based cereals for both health and agricultural reasons, but I could reduce packaging waste by purchasing the bulk cannister instead of the single-serve packets. Since I live in a climate that supports blueberries, I have planted bushes, but have yet to yield a crop that can replace my meager consumption. Purchasing from our city’s farmers market would support the local economy and reduce the fuel burned in shipping (Small, 2019). I grow my own bean sprouts and have discovered I could grow chia seeds in a small pot in a similar manner; this would relieve the environment

of the pollution caused by the shipping and packaging plus foods grown at home often use less or none of the pesticides and fertilizers used in large farms. Though I cannot grow coffee and already choose brands that insist they use sustainable practices, I could choose bagged coffee instead of single-serve pods to reduce my consumption of non-recyclable materials. Learning that my coffee creamer is a fat-based whitener has pointed out that our household should cease purchasing it because the energy used in producing, packaging, and consuming it does not offer an equal value of health benefits. Making a few adjustments in some of my food choices could benefit local farmers and the environment as well as my family's health.

At first glance the efforts of my household may seem to make little global impact but reviewing the average U. S. household's consumption of meat and production of food waste underscores the importance of our choices. Statistics show the average American consumed 222 pounds of meat in 2018 (Maynard, 2018). In my household alone, that would total 1, 110 pounds of meat per year. Our choice to consume less meat reduces the amount of livestock raised on large farms, their use of aquifers and the risk of waste contaminants in local waterways. A bulk of household waste consists of food and its packaging; landfills contain 7% food waste and a combined 55% of paper, plastics, and glass (Trefil and Hazen, 2018, p. 435). By choosing local products, sorting recyclables, and reducing food waste, we contribute less to landfills than similar households; in an average week, our trash bins hold half the waste (sometimes one quarter) and twice the recycling of our neighbors. Reducing what ends up in landfills is crucial to our environment as U. S.

landfills emit “ a significant source of methane, which has 21x the global warming potential of CO₂ ” (Oberfield, 2015).

Though a meal may be simple, it may pose unintended consequences through its production and shipping that risk the environment on local and global levels. The NRDC explains “ that the smog-forming emissions from importing fruits and vegetables are equivalent to the annual emissions from 1.5 million cars” (Jonathon, 2010). Choosing foods grown locally reduces this pollution which contributes to global warming. It cannot be assumed that a neighborhood grocery store sources produce locally; a thorough examination of one’s food choices can highlight opportunities to make food choices with less unintended consequences. Our daily food decisions add up and taking a moment to consider where each food component came from and the energy it took to produce and ship it can help reduce negative impacts on our global environment. In the end, the occasional Hoosier breakfast may not be a poor food choice if it supports local, sustainable sources.

Resources

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