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## Eating SLO Only, or How I Took the Locavore Challenge By Katy Budge

The term “locavore,” has gained a lot of attention recently, especially fueled by high gas prices and the fact that most of our foodstuffs travel an average – an *average* – of 1500 miles before landing on our plates. Essentially, a “locavore” makes a commitment to eat only locally produced food, and therefore support local agriculture interests, so it seemed an interesting concept for someone like me, who has a weekly food column championing local chefs, restaurants, and food producers. Could I walk my own talk and eat only food produced in San Luis Obispo County? Perhaps more importantly, would it be possible for others to do as well?

Obviously, California is a veritable Garden of Eden of food, and the Central Coast is remarkably blessed with a diversity of agricultural resources, so I tried to give myself at least a bit of challenge. Eating locally would have been a pretty easy task for almost anybody in the height of summer, when fresh produce abounds in markets and backyard gardens, so I chose a less fruitful time – the six-and-a-half weeks of Lent from March 1 to April 16, 2006. In case you’re wondering, no, I’m not Catholic, so why Lent? Well, given the symbolism, why not?

My three touchstones of criteria were: organic, sustainably grown, and from San Luis Obispo County, but after that, I admittedly did allow some wiggle room. For example, I used condiments sold under local labels like Miss Oddette’s and Cahoots Catering, ate at locally-owned restaurants instead of national chains, used spices from a business as large as Spice Hunter and as small as Secret Garden, enjoyed handmade chocolates from Herrmann’s Chocolate Lab, brewed up locally roasted coffee in the mornings, and bought organic dairy products from Straus Dairy because the owner is a Cal Poly grad.

Hardcore locavores would certainly call this cheating, and I guess it was, but I wanted to try and develop an approach that would prove feasible for a broad range of people, not just someone with a career in food. Ultimately, the main goals were to keep my food dollars close to home and to make a conscious decision to support local businesses.

So did my “SLO Food Only” experiment work? To a degree that I must admit surprised even me, the answer is a resounding “Yes”! There were certainly some challenges, most of which occurred due to lack of planning. For example, small businesses aren’t open all the time and farmers’ markets don’t have ATM’s. Turns out it’s the little things like cash-on-hand and store hours that start looming large once you’ve removed yourself from the 24-hour, on-demand mindset. Other than that, I would say I definitely proved that San Luis Obispo County offers its residents a remarkably sustainable form of living, and a rather gourmet one at that!

I would hope that many of you would take the time to eat locally, if only for a day, a week, or whatever time frame you are able to commit to it. I’d be happy to offer information on sourcing foodstuffs, but your greatest resources are the vendors at farmers’ markets and often your own friends, neighbors, and colleagues. Whatever your approach, I urge you to support local businesses, especially farmers. The less your food travels and the less your food dollars travel, the more sustainable the Central Coast lifestyle becomes.