

## **LOCAL ORGANIC FOOD SOURCES**

### **ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ISSUE PROFILE**

Community Action for a Renewed Environment (CARE)  
Environmental Sustainability for the Salina Community

**Issue:** Lack of local organic food sources for Salina

Buying from local sources lowers all our carbon footprints if it lowers the costs and pollution caused in the transportation of goods over long distances to the end consumer of the product.

#### **Background:**

Traditional mass production of food has become completely dependent on pesticides and chemicals, known to have negative impacts on local ecosystems as well as impacting water supplies in surrounding communities and those downstream of large production operations. In the 1950s production and use of chemicals such as DDT became widespread. In some instances, the chemicals impacted entire food chains causing many species of animals (birds especially) to suffer and in some cases almost became extinct. Organic agriculture is an ecological production management system that promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles, and soil biological activity. It is based on minimal use of off-farm inputs and on management practices that restore, maintain, and enhance ecological harmony.

#### **Standards:**

The U.S. EPA-established National Organic Program (NOP) is a marketing program housed within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service, the agency that sets marketing standards. The NOP mission is to develop and implement national standards that govern the marketing of agricultural products as organically produced, to facilitate commerce in fresh and processed food that is organically produced, and to assure consumers that such products meet consistent standards.

The Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 requires the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to establish a national list of allowed and prohibited substances, which identifies synthetic substances that may be used, and the non-synthetic substances that cannot be used, in organic production and handling operations. Some of the requirements prohibit antibiotics in organic meat and poultry, and require 100% organic feed for organic livestock.

#### **Community-specific indicators:**

##### What does the data say?

There is no community data on purchases, use, or need for organic food products.

##### Who is affected?

Potential impact from limited access to organic food may be increased incidence of cancer, chemical sensitization, or allergies. Limited access can be caused by lack of adequate local production and/or availability to consumers for many reasons. Gardening is one of the nation's most popular pastimes, with immediate and long-term health benefits, but not everyone has the physical capability or a suitable space to grow one's own garden or orchard. Salina has a very modest community garden program in one area near the edge of town, which has traditionally had a waiting list for space every year. More of Salina's dollars could stay in the community if more food was produced locally. Those on limited incomes typically have the least access to local, organic food.

##### What are the environmental conditions?

In Salina, the goods and work of the Prairieland Market needs to be known to many more citizens. The farmers' markets of spring and summer need greater exposure. Consumers need to be more

aware of exactly what Certified USDA Organic means to them. Consumers need to become acquainted with local farmers and their practices and products. Access to healthy food and a healthy environment in a community of farm sustainability is the goal.

After WWII, chemical industries could concentrate more on developing and selling their products to the agriculture industry. Use of the very effective DDT was relied on heavily until deadly secondary effects were seen. Studies documenting harmful effects began. In 1962, Rachel Carson in her book, *Silent Spring*, sounded the alarm that these wildly proliferating chemicals used as pesticides were harmful. One particular hazard was the effect on the eggs of such birds as eagles, ospreys, and pelicans. The egg shells of these species were so thin that they cracked and no young were born. This was caused by the indiscriminate use of DDT in sprays for the control of insects. The populations of the birds were in a downfall.

Carson's warnings were heard and in 1964 the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) was amended to broaden the concern for safety. FIFRA was amended again in 1972 to require registration of pesticides and in 1970, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provided the framework to set tolerances and permissible levels of pesticide in food.

It is an ongoing vigilance of research and testing through the long chain of producing, transporting, and selling food products to the public. It is an ongoing tracking of diseases and their causes that show many cases of higher incidents of some diseases when exposed to toxic chemicals, including pesticides.

In 1987, the General Accounting Office of the U.S. Congress found that most of the 50,000 pesticide products registered for use had not been fully tested and evaluated, according to the then-current testing requirements. At that time, only 20% of the 600 active pesticide ingredients had even been given a preliminary assessment.

The volume of chemicals needed to be tested and re-evaluated is enormous. In addition, synergistic reactions of two or more pesticides or other environmental agents are known to exist, but are difficult to evaluate. The list of health hazards and environmental disruptions pointing to agricultural practices is long. Some other countries do not have the pesticide regulations that we do and we import their foods.

Toxic substances used in agricultural practices have been shown to have negative effects on soils, flora, fauna, and people. We do not need exact qualifiers and quantifiers to see that we and the environment are affected adversely by excessive or, in some cases, any use of pesticides or fertilizers.

Not only is it important for our citizens to have ready access to a variety of organic foods for health reasons, but the support of organic food producers is important as well. Soil deprived of essential microorganisms through use of excess fertilizers and pesticides become plain "dirt" and need added nutrients to grow crops.

#### What are the contributing factors and behaviors of the community?

Consumers have long been accustomed to food that "looks" perfect—no blemishes, few "bad spots," discoloration, etc. because of the controlled environment in which these products are grown with standardized fertilizer and pesticide practices, selected and bred-for genetic strains of plants, and some genetically engineered plants. These practices have led to the production of very "standardized" products, especially produce that the consumer now associates with "high quality." Consumers can often be seen in stores "picking over" these nearly "perfect looking" products, further supporting the issue of consumer-driven demand for produce that looks perfect.

### How does the community protect itself?

Citizens should be informed about opportunities for purchasing local foods. The Salina Food Policy Council puts out a printed guide of 23 local producers that practice sustainable food production. Not all producers in this guide are certified organic. But consumers and producers in the Salina area have developed a gauge for environmental quality:

- Certified organic (5 star)
- Not certified organic, but adheres to organic practices and is in transition to becoming certified organic (4 star)
- Sustainable production methods with no use of synthetic chemicals, antibiotics, growth promoters or hormones, or animal byproducts in feed; animals can move about freely (3 star)

In addition, the Prairieland Food Cooperative carries organic foods from about 15 local producers as well as many organic products from producers and manufacturers out of the area. A short phone survey indicated that they have three ratings for their organically produced food: “5 star” is for certified organic producers; “4 star” is for producers in the process of getting certified; and “3 star” producers use sustainable practices, no hormones or antibiotics, and follow most of the standards for organic food production. They have certified organic beef producers for beef, breads, and legumes; one 4-star producer; and 10 to 12 “3 star” producers of produce, honey, dairy, beef, pork, chicken, bison, and other products carried in their market throughout the year.

In addition, there are CSA or “community-supported agriculture” operations in the Salina area, according to the “Guide to Buying Local Food in North Central Kansas” pamphlet. The consumer pays the farmer monthly, in advance, or a portion up front and the remainder during the season. The farmer agrees to meet the production goals to supply produce or meat.

### **DATA:**

[http://www.ota.com/organic/us\\_standards.html?printable=1](http://www.ota.com/organic/us_standards.html?printable=1)

<http://www.ota.com/defintion/quickoverview.html?printable=1>

“Guide to Buying Local Food in North Central Kansas” pamphlet:

[http://www.wannabhealthy.com/SFPC/sfpc\\_pdf/FoodGuide053105.pdf](http://www.wannabhealthy.com/SFPC/sfpc_pdf/FoodGuide053105.pdf)

“A Toxic Substances Primer,” League of Women Voters Education Fund, 1979

“Seeds of Tomorrow,” League of Women Voters Education Fund, 1992

“Breaking the Pesticide Habit, Alternatives to 12 Hazardous Pesticides,” International Alliance For Sustainable Agriculture, 1987. In the Newman Center of the University of Minnesota.

“Scientists Are Closing in on an Inescapable Conclusion: Pesticides May be a Cause of Parkinson’s Disease,” by Robin Marantz Henig. ONEARTH published by Natural Resources Defense Council, Summer 2009.

“Graze Anatomy,” by Richard Manning. ONEARTH published by Natural Resources Defense Council, Spring 2009.

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