

# **Eat Your Way to the One Tonne Challenge**

**by Erin Harper**

Food is a key part of life which we all share, but across the globe our relationship with it differs immensely, from fast food to the slow food movement, from meat lovers pizza to vegan cuisine, from industrial agri-business to home grown salads. Salt Spring Island is taking on the Canadian One Tonne Challenge to reduce each individual's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by one Tonne (see the accompanying box to find out how to sign up). We have read in previous weeks about Transportation and Housing options, now learn why replacing one item at every meal with Local Organic food can save you half a Tonne a year.

The average North American, buying conventional groceries, contributes the equivalent of about 4.3 Tonnes of GHG a year in food purchases alone. Local organic food uses much less fossil fuel, we estimate about 90% less on average.(1) This is because conventional industrial agriculture uses a large amount of fossil fuels in every step from preparing the soil, planting, fertilizing, weeding, to making and spraying chemicals for pests, weeds and disease, harvesting, processing, and transport. Few of these costs are taken into account in the price of food. As one UK study (2) shows; if all the hidden costs were included, the price of a typical food basket would rise 3% if sourced from local organic and 16% if conventional industrial. These real costs are unaccounted for in the retail price and spread out to the general public through health care, environmental clean ups, and government subsidies.

Health care costs are huge due to air pollution (\$12 billion/yr), antibiotic resistance, food and water poisoning (\$64.5 million from Walkerton, Ontario water contamination alone), and increasing allergies. Known carcinogens are still used as pesticides on common crops such as tomatoes, potatoes, and grapes.(3)

We pay for the environmental clean-up costs from those untraceable sources of pesticides in our drinking water. We lose valuable natural resources through initiatives such as those that created the sea-lice infestation at the mouth of the Broughton Archipelago. Clean-up costs are not borne by responsible parties but by all taxpayers. We also pay for our choices through climate change, extreme weather damage and property damage and lost soil resulting from floods.

Farm subsidies (money paid by the public through government programs) are estimated at \$100,000 per conventional industrial farm job in Canada.(3) For example, chemical farmers pay no GST on fertilisers, pesticides and fuels which they rely so heavily on and which cause widespread damage. Regulatory subsidies allow conventional farms to pollute air, water, and soil with the clean up paid by taxpayers. Another example of how we subsidize an unsustainable system is the damage done to roads from long hauling by heavy-duty transport trucks. Road construction and repairs are paid through taxes not the trucking companies or farms who rely on them to make their profit.

## **Eat Your Way to the One Tonne Challenge**

Grow it, Buy it, Try it! Substitute even a portion of your purchases with locally grown organic food to make a dent in your contribution to greenhouse gases. There are many ways to do this:

Grow your own! Picking dinner from your yard is even more delightful when you taste the freshness and know the food you are eating is untainted by toxins and fossil fuels. There are many resources available to guide newbies, or to improve yields and extend harvest for experienced do-it-yourselfers. Local growers can be found swapping secrets at the monthly Island Natural Growers (ING) potluck/ farm tours held the first Wednesday of the month (4).

The annual Seedy Saturday in February is the perfect place to connect with other growers on Salt Spring and from the surrounding region, to trade or buy locally grown seeds, and to hear speakers or films on related topics. Other local sources of seeds, plants and information are: Salt Spring Seeds and the Seed Sanctuary, SSI Nursery, SS Global Worming, Seven Ravens Tree Nursery, The Plant Farm, Fraser's Thimble Farms, Foxglove Farm and Garden Supply, and the Salt Spring Garden Club. You can question, pester, or photograph local growers at the markets on Tuesday 10-2 in the United Church meadow or Saturday Market in the Park. There are also many good books available in local bookstores to help you grow food in most any conditions from small and rocky to cold and soggy.

Buying groceries from local organic growers is another great way to meet the One Tonne Challenge. This helps to keep Salt Spring farms in business, invests in local self-sufficiency, and supports neighbours. Island growers sell at markets, farm stands—some of which are listed in the Local Organic Food Guide mailed out this summer—and at the Growing Circle Food Cooperative. Other grocery stores, and restaurants, also feature local produce, bread, cheese, meat, wine and beer. Some Salt Spring growers offer Community Supported/Shared Agriculture (CSA) box programs where you can sign up for a weekly pick up (sometimes delivery) of freshly picked, in-season produce.

The simple act of choosing local organic food, whether grown yourself or by a local producer, can be a big boost to meeting the One Tonne Challenge. You don't have to overhaul your diet, just make substitutions where possible. The more you can choose local organic, the more you are investing in your health, the environment, your community and the future.

Footnotes:

(1) Salt Spring Island Energy Emissions Baseline Data Report, [www.islandstrust.bc.ca](http://www.islandstrust.bc.ca)

(2) The Real Cost of the British Food Basket (work in progress), Centre for Environment and Society, University of Essex 2004

(3) Real Food for a Change by Wayne Roberts, Rod MacRae, and Lori Stahlbrand. Random House, Toronto 1999.

(4) ING is a chapter of Canadian Organic Growers and welcome anyone to attend our regular farm tours, potlucks, speakers, and meetings. Contact Anne Macey for info 537-5511.