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WIC Worksite Wellness Newsletter

Summer Sustenance: Why Eating Seasonally Matters

Summertime has officially arrived, and with it comes the bounty of seasonal summer produce like strawberries, peaches, watermelons, tomatoes, sweet corn and peppers. In recent years a movement promoting local foods and sustainable agriculture has taken off- from Michelle Obama’s organic vegetable garden to the USDA’s ‘Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food’ Initiative. With the largest WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program in the country, California houses over 400 WIC certified farmers markets that are helping to nourish these efforts by encouraging families to buy seasonal, healthy foods. So what’s the big fuss around eating seasonally and locally?

There is an abundance of health literature documenting the role of fruits and vegetables as part of a well-rounded, healthy diet. Fruits and vegetables are associated with reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease; preventing cancer; decreasing the development of diabetes; and helping to maintain and lose weight.

Adding to this body of knowledge, there is growing interest in the implications of how our foods are grown and raised, and where our foods come from. The local food movement begs the question- Is a conventional tomato imported from Mexico the same as an organic tomato grown in the Central Valley? Advocates of the local food movement argue that not all foods are created equal.

Supporters of eating seasonally and locally emphasize that one important reason to purchase foods from local farmers is that it

helps to stimulate your community’s economy. One report out of London calculated that for every dollar spent at local businesses, twice as much money is circulated back into the local economy. By this rationale, eating seasonally and locally is an investment in your community’s economy.

Further, when you purchase seasonal produce directly from the farmer your foods are the freshest. When produce is grown in nutrient-rich soil and obtained within a few hours of harvest the nutritional quality is the highest⁶.

Controversially, there is a debate over the claim that eating local foods helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other environmental pollutants. Proponents say local foods results in fewer “food miles”, while skeptics claim that this argument is inaccurate or that that “food miles” are an oversimplification of total energy

usage of the food chain.



In any case, engaging in the local food economy- by going to your weekly WIC certified farmers’ market to buy seasonal produce- brings you face to face with the farmers growing your food as well as the community you serve, both of which can promote a sense of community pride.

For more on this topic:

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John Taylor, J., Madrick, M., & Collin, S. (2005). *Trading Places: The local economic impact of street produce and farmers' markets*. The New Economics Foundation. Accessed on June 29, 2010 from: http://www.neweconomics.org/sites/neweconomics.org/files/Trading_Places.pdf.

Obamas to Plant Vegetable Garden at White House. (2009, March 19). *The New York Times*. Accessed on June 28, 2010 from: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/20/dining/20garden.html?ref=local_food.

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USDA. (2005, January). *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2005*. Accessed on June 28, 2010 from: http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/report/HTML/D6_SelectedFood.htm.

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Summer Recipe

This is a summer favorite. Vine-ripe tomatoes are starting to show up at the farmer's market. Try some of the heirloom tomato varieties if available.

Ingredients:

- 4 Large tomatoes
- A large handful of fresh basil leaves
- 1 minced garlic clove
- 1-2 Tablespoons Balsamic vinegar
- 2-3 Tablespoons Extra-virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste

Preparation:

1. Cut tomatoes into bite sized pieces. Put tomatoes in a bowl.
2. Roughly chop the basil leaves and add to tomatoes.
3. Mince the garlic clove and sprinkle over the bowl.
4. Pour a couple of tablespoons of balsamic vinegar and olive oil on top.
5. Dash with salt and pepper. Toss thoroughly and enjoy.

Serves approximately 4.

SEND US YOUR IDEAS & QUESTIONS



We want to know what worksite wellness ideas are working for your agency. We also want to hear your questions and concerns about implementing worksite wellness. Share your agency's successes and/or questions by emailing us at:

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