

## Locavorism

### 1. Basic questions

- (i) What moral considerations should we bring to bear on our food choices, as individuals?
- (ii) How should we organize ourselves socially and politically to produce and consume food in a way that is just?

Factors to consider (others??):

Human health & nutrition

Environmental impact, sustainability

Animal well-being

Fair labor practices

Global justice (global hunger, exploitation)

Cultural meanings, community

Aesthetic concerns

Prosperity

### 1. Locavorism: What is it?

- a) "...the idea that an ever-growing portion of our food supply should be produced in close proximity to the consumers who will eat it." (Desrochers and Shimizu 2012, 4; all references in parentheses below are to this book; those indicated *FES* are to Helena de Bres's article.)
- b) The idea that the food we eat should be indigenous to the region. (6)
- c) The attitude that "...local food is...desirable simply *because of its geographical origin* and is not more affordable, nutritious, safer, or better tasting than alternatives produced further away." (13)

Questions:

- Are these adequate definitions? How could they be improved?
- What is the most plausible/charitable version of locavorism?
  - Distinguish *radical* locavorism from *moderate* locavorism. (*FES*, 497)

Possibly:

- d) Consumers should choose to purchase food grown and processed locally, if the climate supports such crops, and should limit the food they purchase requiring significant transportation and energy expenditure.

### 2. Arguments in favor of locavorism:

Most seem to have the form:

- 1) Buying local food is better for \_\_\_\_\_ [the economy, the environment, our health, our community...], than buying non-local food.
- 2) We are morally required to do what is best for \_\_\_\_\_.

Conclusion: We are morally *required* to buy local food in preference to non-local food.

Note that even if premise (1) is true, the normative premise (2) is very strong: it says what we are *required* to do, not just what is *permissible* or *good* to do. None of the arguments seem to provide a basis for a radical locavorism that *requires* one to buy *only* local food *at all times*. Are there reasons to draw a more moderate conclusion?

Consider:

*Economic* (7, *FES* 500)

*Environmental* (7, *FES* 498-99)

*Security* (8)

*Political* (*FES* 505-506)

*Taste, Nutrition and Safety* (9, *FES* 499-500)

*Social* (6), *Agrarian* (*FES* 500-505)

### 3. Against Locavorism

Desrochers and Shimizu's main claims:

“If widely adopted, either voluntarily or through political mandates, *locavorism can only result in higher costs and increased poverty, greater food insecurity, less food safety, and much more significant environmental damage* than is presently the case.” (14)

“Only through greater technological advances, economies of scale and international trade can we achieve the locavores’ worthy goals of improving nutrition while diminishing the environmental impact of agricultural production.” (14)

“...buying or abstaining from buying local food should be a *shopping* decision, not a *moral* or *political* one.” (15)

“Getting the most for your hard-earned dollar is not only enlightened self-interest, but also the best way to create a better world.” (15)

What is “enlightened self-interest”? What is the relationship between morality and enlightened self-interest?

### III. A variety of arguments

*Prosperity argument:* “...all economically prosperous episodes in human history have been characterized to one degree or another by the expansion of a community’s food provisioning.” (18)

- Prosperity and economic growth depends on cities: they produce “concentrated markets for rural goods,” “technological innovations,” and capital for rural development (22).
- Urbanization is impossible without food imports (22).
- Urban food producers have been increasingly distant from urban centers due to increasing land value, better transportation and preservation technology and health reasons (24).

*Cultural Argument:* Humans have always traded foods and recipes, and this is how cultures have flourished. (6, 19, 25)

*Efficiency Argument:* Agricultural areas should be devoted to producing the food that their soil and climate best supports. (26)

*Health Argument:* “In the last two centuries...consumers went from shopping in “dry goods” stores to the “permanent summertime” produce sections of progressively larger supermarkets whose ever expanding range of offerings have become only safer, healthier, and considerably more affordable.” (29)

*Food Security Argument:* “Perhaps most remarkable...has been humanity’s capacity to nearly defeat famine and hunger.” (29)

*Critique of Suspicion:* “Historically, the push for greater agricultural self-sufficiency was never limited to political and military leaders bent on imperialistic pursuits, but also often included a fair number of romantic ideologues, politically connected nationalists, supporters of “good old” and “small is beautiful” ways...” (31)  
 ← note what they are asking: in whose interests is the recommendation that we should buy local food? What idea/symbol/meaning is being sold in addition to the food? (This critique of suspicion is also evident in the Introduction where they discuss the claim that “SOLE is essentially a fad promoted by bicoastal urban “agri-intellectuals” whose knowledge of and practical experience with food production is limited to the world of hobby gardening...” (9))

*Historical argument:* Buy/grow local food has been tried before and was not successful. (35-40) “...the fact remains that none of [the past attempts] lasted once more people had more options available to them. (39)

#### Questions:

1) De Bres says that “you need to ask yourself some questions about your own values, attachments, and priorities.” (506). Are there particular values, etc. such that, if you adopt them, you should be a moderate locavore? Which ones?

2) Desrochers and Shimizu seem to suggest that they agree with locavores on the moral and political objectives and simply disagree on how to achieve them. Do you agree? Are there moral and/or political differences too?

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24.03 Good Food: The Ethics and Politics of Food Choices  
Spring 2017

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