

# NORTH COUNTRY REGIONAL FOODS INITIATIVE

## Fact Sheet 3: Potential Community Impacts of Regional Foods



Photo by D. Hilchey

### Potential Community Impacts of Adirondack-North Country Regional Foods

There is considerable information available from organizations around the country which tout the benefits of local foods over long-hauled or imported food—including superior nutrition and reduced impact on the environment. However, this information is sometimes exaggerated or not based on scientific facts. For example, very little research has been conducted to demonstrate nutritional superiority of locally produced food over long-hauled or imported food. From existing research, here's what we are confident in stating about the potential benefits of local foods produced in the Adirondack-North Country Region:

1. Some sectors of Adirondack-North Country agriculture have significantly high “economic multipliers.” The income multiplier for the dairy processing sector is, for example, over 2.5. This means for every dollar of income generated by the export of dairy products outside the region another \$1.50 is generated elsewhere in the regional economy (Bills, 1996). However, Adirondack-North Country farm products sold *within* the region (not exported) have a different type of impact. In effect these products are replacing some which were formerly brought in from outside the region (e.g., a head of cabbage). See #2.
2. Buying any locally produced products such as food contributes to the regional economy since much of the profits and some of the input dollars (for purchases such as feed, seed, and fertilizer) stay in the region and may replace inputs produced outside the region. Buying locally produced products is a community economic development strategy sometimes referred to as “import substitution” or “plugging economic leaks” (Bellows, 2001).
3. The potential exists for local produce to be fresher and more nutritious than imported or long-hauled produce. However, this depends on how well the farm products are handled (e.g., immediately removing field heat). Following best management practices in post-harvest handling local farmers can reduce the loss of water soluble nutrients such as Vitamins B and C (Yahia, 2001). The result can be fresh fruits and vegetables which have longer shelf life than long-hauled or imported produce. Therefore, fresh regional food may be an excellent value since there is less waste. (<http://video.aol.com/video-detail/small-scale-postharvest-handling-practices-hort-crops-part-1/2396612065>); retrieved 3.31.08.
4. By providing sales opportunities at low cost and low risk farmers' markets help small farmers in the region stay in business, which in turn, helps sustain some acreage of working landscapes and pastoral countryside. (Hilchey, 1995)

5. By bringing Adirondack-North Country residents together, farmers' markets and harvest festivals enhance opportunities for social interaction and help farmers and residents learn about each others' interests and needs. (Lyson, 2004).

### **Local Agriculture Contributes a Wide Range of Social, Economic, and Environmental Benefits to the Adirondack North Country Region**

In a 2004 study that included focus groups of New York State farmers and non-farmers attitudes toward agriculture Cornell researchers found that residents were able to articulate a wide range of benefits that agriculture contributes to their communities (Hilchey, 2008). See Table 1, below:

**Table 1. Focus Group Study Results**

<b>BENEFIT THEME CATEGORY</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Social/Cultural (143 Comments)</b>	
Contribute to community & quality of life	25%
Promote public awareness of importance of ag.	17%
Maintains important heritage/tradition/work ethic	22%
Provides high-quality & local food	29%
Contributes to local food security and safety	7%
	100%
<b>Environmental (94 Comments)</b>	
Provides aesthetic benefits & open space	60%
Agriculture consistent with environmental ethic & wildlife	31%
Agriculture is a clean industry	10%
	100%
<b>Economic (71 Comments)</b>	
Provides employment	41%
Supports economy (including local)	38%
Provides tourism benefits & opportunities	13%
Contributes taxes & public services	8%
	100%
<b>Other/uninterpretable/adverse impacts (30 Comments)</b>	
<b>Total Comments</b>	<b>338</b>

### **Resources Focusing on the Community Impacts of Regional Foods**

The following websites offer a sample of publications and tool kits which provide more details on the impacts and benefits of local food and agriculture. However, refer to the above caveats about non-scientific claims of benefits.

[www.adirondackharvest.com](http://www.adirondackharvest.com)

[www.foodroutes.org/toolsforaction.jsp](http://www.foodroutes.org/toolsforaction.jsp)

[www.gardenshare.org](http://www.gardenshare.org)

[www.harvesteating.com](http://www.harvesteating.com)

[www.locovores.com](http://www.locovores.com)

[www.oxfamamerica.org/resources/files/Food\\_and\\_Farm\\_Toolkit.pdf](http://www.oxfamamerica.org/resources/files/Food_and_Farm_Toolkit.pdf)

[www.sitestories.com/chefsafield](http://www.sitestories.com/chefsafield)

## Citations

- Bellows, A.C. and Hamm, M.W. 2001. Local autonomy and sustainable development: Testing import substitution in more localized food systems. *Agriculture and Human Values*. Springer Netherlands. Volume 18, Number 3 / September, 2001. pp. 271-284.
- Bills, N. 1996. Economic Multipliers and the New York State Economy. *Policy Issues in Rural Land Use*. Vol 9 no. 2 December, 1996. Department of Agricultural, Resource, and Managerial Economics, Cornell University.
- Hilchey, D., Lyson, T.A, and Gillespie, G.W. 1995. *Farmers' Markets and Local Economic Development: Entrepreneurship, Small Business Incubation and Job Creation in the Rural Northeast*. Farming Alternatives Program: Community Agriculture Development Bulletin Series.
- Lyson, T.A. 2004. *Civic Agriculture: Reconnecting Farm, Food, and Community*. (Civil Society: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives Series). Medford, Massachusetts: Tufts University Press. 2004.
- Yahia E.M., Contreras-Padilla M., and Gonzalez-Aguilar G. 2001. Ascorbic Acid Content in Relation to Ascorbic Acid Oxidase Activity and Polyamine Content in Tomato and Bell Pepper Fruits During Development, Maturation and Senescence, *Lebensmittel-Wissenschaft und-Technologie*, Volume 34, November 2001.

---

**Prepared by Duncan Hilchey, Community and Rural Development Institute, Cornell University v 4.10.08**

Funding for the North Country Regional Foods Initiative is from the U.S. Department of Commerce through the Economic Development Administration University Center designated for New York State at Cornell University and hosted by Cornell's Community and Rural Development Institute (CaRDI). For more information on CaRDI, contact Rod Howe, 607-255-2170, rlh13@cornell.edu or visit [www.oed.cornell.edu](http://www.oed.cornell.edu). To learn more about the North Country Regional Foods Initiative Project, contact Katherine Lang at (315) 379-9192 x261, or Heidi Mouillesseaux-Kunzman at (607) 255-0417.

