

SLO Food
by Hillary Mizia

You may be familiar with the Italian-based Slow Food movement. Started in 1986 as a way to preserve eating and drinking from the “homogenization of modern fast food and life,” Slow Food has a global following. While certain aspects of Slow Food pertain here, this is not what I’m talking about when I say SLO food. I’m referring to “seasonal, local, organic:” SLO.

When I think about what food I’m going to buy or eat, I ask myself if it’s SLO. Seasonal comes first. Eating seasonally is something that has almost been removed from our eating consciousness, yet it’s a very simple way to get nutritious food at any given time of the year. If the food I’m about to eat does not naturally grow during the season in which I’m contemplating eating it, more than likely it has traveled long and far. On average food travels 1,500 miles to the grocery store shelf. This usually means it was picked before its prime to allow for easier handling when traveling, which results in lower nutritional value. It also means that a large amount of oil was used to ship the food to me . . . think organic apples from New Zealand in summertime.

Eating locally grown food often inherently means eating seasonally, which reduces its appetite for oil and will help increase the body’s intake of important seasonal nutritional needs . . . here I’m thinking of the vitamin C-loaded pepper harvest we had from our garden as the seasons recently turned. Local also means I’m supporting my local economy, which has many more paybacks than higher nutrition and less oil. A healthy local economy means a more stable community. A more stable community means I’ve found a place I want to live.

Finally, there’s organic. Organic is a method of growing food that embraces caring for the planet and the people handling the food . . . usually. While certified organic food producers may use practices easier on the planet, it does not necessarily mean all is well. I use the “certified organic” label as a basic guide to picking something if seasonal and local are not viable options. That said, organic when combined with seasonal and local, is ideal.

As you look for the certified organic label, you will come across a myriad of eco-labels. Many of these become obsolete when you connect with your local providers and learn first-hand what they are doing. Certain commodities, such as coffee, however, are hard to come by locally, and understanding the labels becomes important. To learn more about various labels and what is important to you in your purchasing decisions, check out www.eco-labels.org.

Exploring SLO food is an invigorating experience. Learning what is in season lends a new perspective to the land on which we live. As we get more in touch with the food we put into our bodies, we become more connected to where that food came from, how it was grown, and who grew it. Suddenly we have a deeper sense of place. By getting connected through SLO food, we connect with our neighbors and our communities on a level that deepens our relationships and satisfies our souls as well as our stomachs.

Summertime and early fall are wonderful for Coloradoans looking to find SLO food. With over 90 farmer's markets statewide, it's easy to get to know your food. During the colder months, use the Be Local Coupon Book from the Rocky Mountain Sustainable Living Association (www.SustainableLivingAssociation.org). It's a very comprehensive local guide to food in Northern Colorado, and can be found at many local merchants. One of my favorite ways to know what is SLO: find a restaurant that supports SLO year round. In Fort Collins: Café Ardour; in Boulder: The Kitchen; and in Denver: Potager.

As you explore these avenues for finding SLO food, talk with the farmers, producers and sellers about how your food is grown, raised, slaughtered, handled, prepared, etc. It's a great time to find out who is following practices that are important to you, even if they're not certified as such. Then use your dollars to show that you care. Eat SLO, be local, live well.