

# SHOULD WE BE EATING SEASONALLY AND LOCALLY?

The idea of eating food that's in season and produced locally is nothing new. Our ancestors would have relied on food that could be grown or **reared** in their local area throughout the year. As the seasons change, the conditions are naturally right for different foods, so crops like tomatoes, courgettes, cucumbers and runner beans are ready to be picked in the summer and apples, pears and root vegetables like pumpkins and potatoes are harvested in autumn. Certain types of meat and fish can also be seasonal because of natural cycles in animal behaviour, such as when they breed.



Nowadays, we have the technology available so that we can transport food from all over the world, and produce and store food so that it is available throughout the year. This means that we can pick up pretty much any food we like from the supermarket regardless of the season. In recent years, there has been a lot of debate over whether we should all go back to eating more seasonally and locally for a number of reasons, including health and the environment. However, food **supply chains** are extremely complicated and there are several issues to be considered.



## WHAT'S IN SEASON WHEN?

Eating seasonally means choosing foods that are naturally ready to be harvested at that time of year. **Love British Food**, the organisers of **British Food Fortnight**, have put together this list of foods that come into season at different times of the year in the UK.

Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
<p><b>Meat</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Beef Steaks</li> <li>Chicken</li> <li>Sausages</li> <li>Spring Lamb - Grills</li> </ul> <p><b>Vegetables</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asparagus</li> <li>Carrots</li> <li>Cauliflowers</li> <li>Celeriac</li> <li>Cucumbers</li> <li>Curly Kale</li> <li>Purple Sprouting Broccoli</li> <li>Savoy Cabbage</li> <li>Sorrel</li> <li>Spinach</li> <li>Spring Greens</li> <li>Spring Onion</li> <li>Watercress</li> </ul> <p><b>Fruit</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gooseberries</li> <li>Rhubarb</li> </ul> <p><b>Fish</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Crab</li> <li>Haddock</li> <li>John Dory</li> <li>Lobster</li> <li>Mackerel</li> <li>Monkfish</li> <li>Prawns</li> <li>Sea Bass</li> <li>Sea Salmon</li> <li>Trout</li> <li>Turbot</li> </ul>	<p><b>Meat</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Beef Steaks</li> <li>Burgers</li> <li>Chicken - Kebabs &amp; Grills</li> <li>Ham</li> <li>Lamb - Grills</li> <li>Pork Pies</li> <li>Pork Spare Ribs</li> <li>Saltmarsh Lamb</li> <li>Sausages</li> <li>Venison</li> </ul> <p><b>Vegetables</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Beetroot</li> <li>Broad Beans</li> <li>Carrots</li> <li>Cauliflowers</li> <li>Courgettes</li> <li>Cucumber</li> <li>Fennel</li> <li>Fresh Peas</li> <li>Garlic</li> <li>Green Beans</li> <li>Lettuce &amp; Salad Leaves</li> <li>New potatoes</li> <li>Radishes</li> <li>Runner Beans</li> <li>Sage</li> <li>Salad Onions</li> <li>Squash</li> <li>Tomatoes</li> <li>Watercress</li> </ul> <p><b>Fruit</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blueberries</li> <li>Currants - black, white and red</li> <li>Elderflower berries</li> <li>Greenagges</li> <li>Loganberries</li> <li>Plums</li> <li>Raspberries</li> <li>Strawberries</li> <li>Tayberries</li> </ul> <p><b>Fish</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Crab</li> <li>Pilchards</li> <li>Wild Salmon</li> </ul>	<p><b>Meat</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chicken</li> <li>Grouse</li> <li>Ham</li> <li>Heather-fed Lamb</li> <li>Pies</li> <li>Pork</li> <li>Roasts</li> <li>Sausages</li> <li>Venison</li> </ul> <p><b>Vegetables</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Field Mushrooms</li> <li>Lettuce</li> <li>Marrow</li> <li>Potatoes</li> <li>Pumpkin</li> <li>Rocket</li> <li>Squashes</li> <li>Sweetcorn</li> <li>Watercress</li> </ul> <p><b>Fruit</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apples</li> <li>Blackberries</li> <li>Dansons</li> <li>Elderberries</li> <li>Pears</li> <li>Plums</li> <li>Sloes</li> </ul> <p><b>Fish</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brill</li> <li>Dabs</li> <li>Dover Sole</li> <li>Flounders</li> <li>Oysters</li> <li>Skate</li> </ul>	<p><b>Meat</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Casseroles</li> <li>Chicken</li> <li>Gammon</li> <li>Goose</li> <li>Partridge</li> <li>Pheasant</li> <li>Pies</li> <li>Roasts</li> <li>Sausages</li> <li>Turkey</li> <li>Venison</li> <li>Wild Duck</li> </ul> <p><b>Vegetables</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bay Leaves</li> <li>Brussels Sprouts</li> <li>Cabbage</li> <li>Carrots</li> <li>Cauliflower</li> <li>Celeriac</li> <li>Curly Kale</li> <li>Fennel</li> <li>Leeks</li> <li>Parsnips</li> <li>Potatoes</li> <li>Red Cabbage</li> <li>Sweetcorn</li> <li>Turnips</li> </ul> <p><b>Fruit</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apples</li> <li>Pears</li> <li>Quince</li> </ul> <p><b>Fish</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grey Mullet</li> <li>Mussels</li> <li>Scallops</li> </ul>

Source: Love British Food



## THE ISSUES TO CONSIDER

### ■ Environment

One of the biggest arguments in favour of eating seasonally and locally is that it can have huge benefits for the environment. Cutting down the distance that the food travels, which is called **'food miles'**, reduces the **greenhouse gases** emitted by transport such as boats, planes, trains and trucks. Growing and storing food out of season can also involve the use of artificial light and temperature-controlled environments, which also create carbon emissions. If food is produced locally and doesn't need to travel far, it may also require less packaging and less chemicals, plus less food is likely to be wasted, which is all good news for the environment.



However, others point out that very little food is transported by air, which has the biggest **carbon footprint**. Most food that comes from other countries is transported by boat, which is much more carbon-efficient. In fact, 80% of the carbon that's produced because of food production comes from trucks. So, moving food around the UK can have a bigger effect on the environment than bringing it from another country and transporting 'local' food can be responsible for carbon emissions too.



Many people argue that the type of food we're eating is more important than the distance it's travelled. This is because most of the emissions from food come from the way the land is used and how the food is produced. For example, producing 100g of beef can cause up to 100 times more carbon emissions than producing 100g of peas or beans. So, making changes to our diets, such as reducing the amount of meat we eat, could benefit the environment more than simply eating local, seasonal food.



### ■ Health

Local, seasonal food is usually picked when it's perfectly ripe, which means it contains more vitamins and minerals than food that's harvested early and then transported over long distances. Local, seasonal food is often grown with fewer chemicals, which is better for our health, and freshly picked food usually tastes better than food that's been stored for a long time, too.

It could also be argued that having a selection of food that's brought in from around the world provides a wider range of vitamins and minerals because it gives customers a much bigger selection. In some places, it might be difficult for people to get all of the nutrients they need if they rely only on local, seasonal food.





## Choice

Some people say that when we only have the choice of food that's in season locally, we have a greater connection to nature and the changing seasons. Having more limited choices might mean that our diets become more suitable for the season. For example, in summer, fruits and vegetables with a high water content (such as tomatoes and strawberries) are in season and these foods help us to keep cool and stay hydrated. As the weather turns colder in autumn, hearty fruit and vegetables (such as potatoes, pumpkins and squash) come into season and help to fill us up and keep us warm. However, this limited choice could be difficult for



Pumpkin soup fills us up and keeps us warm when the weather turns colder

people who are used to having a huge selection of foods to choose from at the supermarket. Some foods, like mangoes, pineapples and avocados, need warm temperatures to grow, so they're extremely difficult to produce in the UK. Picky eaters, or people with specific dietary requirements might struggle to find food they like or are able to eat. Also, there may be food shortages if a particular area wasn't suitable for growing certain crops or there was a bad year and local crops failed to grow.



Avocados were first sold in the UK in the 1960s

## Cost

Eating food that's in season can make it cheaper to buy. This is because it's often cheaper to grow food naturally than using artificial processes and if a particular type of food is widely available the price sometimes comes down. So, buying strawberries in the summer is usually cheaper than buying them in the winter.

However, much depends on the wider costs of producing the food. Sometimes, local farmers have to put their prices up because their costs are high and they are producing a small amount of food compared to food that has been **mass-produced** elsewhere.



## Local economy

Buying food that's produced locally supports local farmers and gives the local economy a boost.



The other side of this argument is that it can be difficult for small, local farmers to make a profit, and farms that mass produce crops and transport them around the world are more profitable and efficient. Technology is being developed all the time to make farming processes easier and quicker, from robots picking crops to artificial intelligence that monitors the quality of the soil, but this often benefits larger farms rather than smaller ones.



Robots harvesting tomatoes!



## OPINIONS

TV presenter and writer Gregg Wallace, who used to be a greengrocer, says: "If people ate local and seasonal food, they'd eat far better and cheaper foods, and it would help farming in this country. There are far too many imported vegetables."

Writer Adam Johns, argues that there is too much focus on seasonal eating: "Thanks to international trade we can buy anything we want, whenever we want it. We should celebrate that. It's a triumph of human **endeavour**, and our **forlorn**, beetroot-eating ancestors would have killed to have the kind of diversity in their diets that we can enjoy."



**reared** – looked after an animal when it was young

**supply chain** – the series of processes involved in the production of goods, from when they are made or grown until they are used

**Love British Food** – an organisation that works to promote, and encourage people to buy, food produced in Great Britain

**British Food Fortnight** – a two-week celebration of British food and the benefits of eating fresh, seasonal and local food. This year, it takes place from 16 September until 1 October

**food miles** – the distance food travels between the place it is produced to where it is eaten

**greenhouse gases** – gases, especially carbon dioxide, that trap heat in the Earth's atmosphere. Human activities, such as burning fossil fuels, cause a rise in greenhouse gases, which is a cause of climate change

**carbon footprint** – the total amount of carbon dioxide generated by various human activities

**mass-produced** – made in large quantities using machines

**endeavour** – determined effort

**forlorn** – unhappy, miserable and in a poor condition



## YES, WE SHOULD BE EATING SEASONALLY AND LOCALLY...



1. Eating seasonally and locally has a number of huge benefits to the environment, from reducing the greenhouse gases produced by transporting the food, to using less packaging and chemicals that pollute the soil and water. Less food is likely to be wasted, too.
2. Freshly picked food contains more vitamins and minerals than food that's been picked early and transported a long distance, so it's better for our health. Eating seasonally can also give us the right food for the weather, so in summer fruits and vegetables keep us hydrated and cool us down and winter fruits and vegetables fill us up and keep us warm.
3. Buying local, seasonal food supports small farms and gives the local economy a boost, and it can be cheaper too.



## NO, WE SHOULDN'T BE EATING SEASONALLY AND LOCALLY...



1. Most food that's brought in from other countries is transported by boat, which is carbon efficient. It's much more important to consider what we eat, for example cutting down on meat, as this can have a bigger impact on the environment than how far the food has travelled.
2. Limiting ourselves to local, seasonal food would give us much less choice, which many people would find difficult after having a wide range of foods available all year round. It could also lead to shortages of certain foods, for example if local crops fail.
3. It can be difficult for small farms to keep prices low. Large farms are more efficient and profitable and we have the systems in place so that food can be transported all over the world.





# QUESTIONS

Do you know which foods are in season in the UK now?

Are there any farms near to where you live?

Do you look at food labels to see where your food has come from?

Looking at the list of in-season foods from Love British Food, is there anything on there that surprises you?

What are your favourite fruits and vegetables?

Have you ever bought food directly from a farm or farmer's market?

Do you know if any of your favourite fruits and vegetables come from other countries?

Do you eat different kinds of food in summer than in winter?

Would you like to eat more seasonally and locally?

Would you be interested in growing some of your own food?

