



Ontario Home Economics Association

Ask a Professional Home Economist

For Immediate Release

Reduce Food Miles ~ Choose Local

by Diane O'Shea, P.H.Ec.

As the hot days of summer drift towards autumn, the bounty of Ontario produce abounds in overwhelming contrasts of colours, flavours and textures. What better place to discover the goodness of our lands than in local farmers' markets and with the added bonus of contributing to the welfare of the environment by reducing food miles!

"Food miles" is a way of measuring the distance a food travels, before you eat it. The more food miles attached to a given food, the less sustainable and the less environmentally desirable that food is. For example, one source suggests that 10 L of orange juice requires 1 L of diesel fuel just for processing and transport. Why not substitute that fruit juice with locally produced pasteurized apple cider or, better yet, a bowl of melon topped with fall raspberries or a late variety of blueberries? Foods that travel great distances may be days or weeks old. Naturally, the older the vegetable or fruit, the less vitamins and minerals remain. Nothing can beat locally grown, fresh produce. Farmers' markets offer consumers the opportunity to find locally grown, fresh produce as well as other homegrown specialties.

Ontario now boasts about 120 local farmers' markets - but beware. Not all farmers' markets are true to their name. A true farmers' market requires that only produce grown or raised on a local farm be sold there. Buying at a local farmers' market provides an opportunity for relationship selling where consumers benefit from learning about their food, when it was picked and how it was grown – this in addition to the fresh, high quality, nutritious attributes that the array of foods already possess. Most foods available at local farmers' markets are freshly picked the night before. The proof is in the flavour as it verifies freshness.

Farmers' markets are prime opportunities to try new foods and varieties. Personal experience has shown a steady growth in foods like sugar snap peas (where pod and all are gently steamed or eaten raw), summer squash varieties, blue potatoes and cylindrical beets.

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For a new taste combo, try teaming new Ontario potatoes with fresh field tomatoes and herbs. Savour the flavours! Feel good about buying local and reducing food miles while enjoying the quality and freshness of Ontario produce.

Potato Tomato Supper Dish

4 large potatoes (Superiors, Red Chieftain or Ontario-originated Yukon Gold)

1-2 cloves Ontario garlic, minced

Salt and pepper to taste

3 tbsp olive oil

½ tsp fresh rosemary

2-3 fresh field tomatoes

2 tbsp fresh herbs such as parsley, oregano, basil

¼ cup grated cheese (Cheddar or Swiss are best)

1. Scrub potatoes. Slice thinly. Place in a large bowl.
2. Add garlic, salt and pepper, olive oil and rosemary. Toss thoroughly to coat potato slices with mixture.
3. Pour into a 10-inch (25 cm) round, microwave safe dish – a large pie plate works well. Cover. Microwave 7 minutes at 100% power, stirring once.
4. Slice tomatoes. Spread attractively on top of potatoes. Sprinkle with fresh herbs and cheese over all. Microwave on 100% power for 2-3 minutes to warm tomatoes and melt cheese.
5. Oven Directions: Bake in appropriate ovenproof dish at 400 degrees F. for 20-25 minutes. Uncover. Add tomatoes and herbs. Top with cheese and bake for 5-10 minutes more.

Serves 4 – 6

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Diane O’Shea is a Professional Home Economist and Family Studies Department Head at Medway High School - just north of London. As a partner in an Ontario family farm operation and a busy mother of four, Diane recognizes the economic value of buying locally grown food in her ongoing efforts to serve healthy and affordable family meals.

The Ontario Home Economics Association, a self-regulated body of Professional Home Economists, promotes high professional standards among its members so that they may assist families and individuals to achieve and maintain a desirable quality of life.

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