

EATING FOR THE EARTH

Green choices with big impact center on what you put in your mouth.

by **CHARISH BADZINSKI**

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

RECIPES ANALYZED BY GUNDERSEN LUTHERAN REGISTERED DIETITIANS

What if making a difference in the future of the planet were as simple as changing one item on your dinner plate? What if it were as easy as buying your potatoes or lettuce from a local farmer? Turns out, it *is* that simple. By following two basic guidelines, you can make an impact on the earth's health—and your own.

Eat less red meat

Why are so few people talking about this? Maybe because it seems hard to do. Meat is a part of our daily lives in middle America—meat and potatoes is our dining tradition, it supports the many farmers in our area who depend upon sales of meat for their livelihoods, we're often too busy to avoid the drive-thru and—to be honest—tofu terrifies most of us.

According to *E, The Environmental Magazine*, animal factory farms pollute U.S. waterways more than all other industrial sources combined, and you'd save more water by eliminating a pound of beef from your diet than you would by going without a shower for a year. Furthermore, 18 percent of greenhouse gases are emitted by factory farms, meaning livestock production creates more greenhouse gases than all other forms of transportation combined, according to the United Nations. So one call to action is simple, as stated by Rajendra Pachauri, head of the U.N. panel on climate change: "Please eat less meat."

"It's not about becoming vegetarian, it's about eating less meat, even a pound less," says Chandra Sherin, a local mom who strives to make ethical and earth-friendly choices for her family's meals. She points out that even changing what you eat for lunch—by ordering

a bean burrito instead of a hamburger—makes a difference. And if you set a goal to go meatless at home for one meal a week or more, you're contributing to positive change. Swap your shipped-in factory farm meats for locally raised organic farm animals, and you're supporting not only the planet, but also local families.

Eat locally grown foods

Changing our carnivorous ways isn't the only thing we can do to slow global warming. Choosing locally grown produce also makes a difference. Affiliates of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration (FSPA) have issued a Franciscan Living Challenge for 2009 to its members, with an eye toward saving the planet: Buy Local, Eat Green. Sherin, an affiliate who serves on the affiliation committee, recognizes that organic and locally grown food can often mean higher prices. "They are more expensive, so I look for sales and stock up when they are on sale. But one of the realities is that if you're going to choose to buy organic and eat local all the time, you don't buy as much refined food products," she explains. And there's an added bonus: "It's much healthier, my body agrees." Sherin points out that locally grown doesn't necessarily mean organic, just as organic doesn't mean local. Choosing foods that are both requires diligence.

"The more we can buy that's local, the greater the need for it will be, and that's a whole greening movement that's going on in the world," says Sister Lucy Slinger, the ecological advocate for FSPA, who manages the large organic garden the FSPA sisters have at Villa St. Joseph. She says the ecological choice is opting for the "food less traveled."

“The average food that we eat travels 1,500 miles,” Slinger says, “so anything we can do to grow our own or support local production through farmer’s markets, CSAs (community-supported agriculture) or raising our own is more earth friendly than the current food system. Even if it’s just a little plot in the backyard.” As an added plus, both Slinger and Sherin point out that the flavor and freshness of locally grown and/or organic fruits and vegetables is typically far better than that of conventional produce. In addition, it puts fair trade practices into our food system—a change that’s not only more ecologically just for the producer and planet, but also more savory for your palate. ❖

Tips to help you buy local and eat green

(Taken from the 2009 Franciscan Living Challenge, courtesy of affiliates of the FSPA)

1. Plant a vegetable garden.
2. Purchase from a farmer’s market.
3. Join a CSA (community-supported agriculture).
4. Freeze and can locally grown foods for the winter months.
5. Request that your grocery store carry local produce.
6. Plan your menus around seasonal foods.
7. Learn about foods grown in your region.
8. Eat at restaurants that serve local foods.
9. Request that restaurants serve local foods.
10. Join a food co-op.

Recipes provided by Chandra Sherin

LITTLE SHERIN PIZZA

Makes 6 servings.

- 1 package (6) whole-grain pita bread or organic spelt tortillas
- 1 15 oz. can organic pizza sauce
- 1½ cups cheese, grated (organic bulk ends are a great buy)
- 1 8 oz. carton mushrooms
- 2 small zucchini
- 1 large red pepper, sliced (local and/or organic)
- Optional: baked tofu, Italian garlic and herb (found in refrigerated section of store)
- Pizza seasoning from the bulk section or your own fresh herbs
- Pepper
- Parmesan cheese, grated

Fit as many pita breads on a baking sheet in a single layer as possible. Apply sauce, cheese and vegetables on top, with sliced tofu, if desired. Top it off with a dash of herbs, a dash of pepper and a sprinkle of Parmesan, if you have it handy. Bake in preheated oven at 400 degrees for 12-15 minutes or until cheese is melted and it looks done.

330 calories, 17g protein, 47g carbohydrate, 8g fiber, 9g fat, 810mg sodium.



Sisters Karen Flottmeier (**left**) and Anita Beskar (**right**) harvest organic lettuce from the garden at Villa St. Joseph in La Crosse.

ARTICHOKE PESTO SALAD SANDWICH

Makes 8 servings.

- 3 cups fresh basil
- 1-3 cloves garlic
- 1/3 cup pine nuts or walnuts
- 1 12 oz. can artichoke hearts
- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 1/3 cup Parmesan, grated
- Lemon juice
- Salt and pepper
- Whole-grain bread (local and/or organic)
- Cucumbers, shredded carrots, sprouts (local and/or organic)
- Cheese, sliced (local and/or organic)

Make the artichoke pesto: In a blender or food processor, add basil and garlic to mince. Add nuts and blend until they are ground up. Then add artichoke hearts, olive oil and Parmesan as you blend. Add a dash of lemon juice and salt and pepper to taste.

Toast the bread slices and use the artichoke pesto as a spread for the sandwich. Add shredded carrots, sprouts and cheese. For added flavor, slice the cucumber thinly and season with salt and pepper before adding it to the sandwich.

Hint: Sherin likes to make extra so she can store leftovers in the refrigerator and use them at lunchtime for a few days at least. This is also a great complement to a cup of tomato soup.

330 calories, 14g protein, 20g carbohydrate, 5g fiber, 23g fat, 720mg sodium.

VEGETABLE “MEAT” STEW (VEGETARIAN)

Makes 6 servings.

- 6 cups vegetable broth
- 3 cups cubed potatoes (local and/or organic)
- Olive oil
- 2-3 sliced carrots (local and/or organic)



Volunteer Sandy Musolf helps harvest some organic vegetables from the FSPA garden at Villa St. Joseph.

- 1 small to medium head cabbage, chopped (local and/or organic)
- 2-3 tsp. onion, chives or garlic
- ½ cup fresh basil (or ¼ cup dried)
- Pepper
- 1 tsp. salt
- 2 T garlic flakes or powder
- 1 T vegetarian Worcestershire sauce
- 1 10-12 oz. package vegetable protein crumbles or veggie protein "meatballs"*
- Optional: 2 cups organic creamy mushroom broth (for added flavor)

***Hint:** Sherin recommends Quorn Meatless Meatballs for this recipe. A good second choice would be Morningstar Farms Meal Starters Grillers Recipe Crumbles, which looks similar to cooked ground beef. Both of these products are in the frozen foods section of stores.

Fill a large soup pot with broth; add potatoes, carrots and a dash of olive oil. Heat on medium until a low boil starts, then turn down low to simmer. Add cabbage, onion/chives/garlic, basil, pepper and Worcestershire sauce.

For Quorn Meatless Meatballs, just add the frozen "meatballs" in along with the cabbage and seasonings.

For Morningstar Farms crumbles, add a little oil to a frying pan, heat on medium and add the frozen crumbles to the pan. Add garlic powder and pepper to season, and heat the crumbles until they are completely thawed and warmed, about five minutes. Add the crumbles to the stew as it simmers.

The stew is ready to serve when carrots and potatoes are tender to the touch and flavors have melded, about an hour and a half. Let cool for 10 minutes and serve with a local/organic bread and tea.

210 calories, 9g protein, 37g carbohydrate, 5g fiber, 4.5g fat, 1,300mg sodium.

Charish Badzinski has been a vegetarian for 19 years for many reasons: her love of vegetables, her love of animals and her love of planet Earth. She finds eating local to be a financial and personal challenge, but a necessary and beneficial one.



Photos by LuAnn Dibb

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