

Time to Rethink Locally Grown

Whether a farm or garden is organic, conventional, big, or small; we need them all. In the foothills Hawaii, a shockingly high percentage of the food we eat is imported. Our food supply could easily be threatened by shipping problems, weather, or global events. It is imperative that we increase the amount of food we are producing and decrease the percentage we are importing.

Maybe it is time to bring back the Victory Garden, with a slightly different spin. As some of us old timers may remember, during the world wars the United States government asked its citizens to plant Victory Gardens to provide their own fruits and vegetables due to labor and transportation constraints

and to ensure adequate food for civilians and troops.



Across the country, Americans planted gardens with the goal of producing enough fresh vegetables through the summer for the immediate family and neighbors, and enough excess to can or preserve for the coming months until the next year's victory garden produce was ripe. People were urged to make gardening a family and community effort.

More than 20 million victory gardens, which produced 9 to 10 million tons of fresh fruits and vegetables, were planted during WWII, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates. The harvest from these home and community plots during WWII was equal to all commercial production of fresh vegetables at the time. So, the program made a difference!

Although times have changed in some ways, there are still many good reasons today to plant a victory garden, or to buy from Foothill growers. Nationwide there is a "buy fresh, buy local" movement in order to reduce the energy used to transport food, support the community and its farmers, and eat food that is fresher and higher in nutrition.

In addition, many parts of the world are experiencing food shortages, and as mentioned above, in the Foothills we are not even close to self-sufficient in our food production. We need to encourage all manner of food production.

The distance that food has been transported between where it was grown and where it is purchased is currently referred to as "food miles," and is sometimes used to demonstrate the ecological importance of local foods. Although it is difficult to determine, food miles may account for 20 percent, or even more, of the total energy use associated with the production of a given food item. According to <http://www.revivevictorygarden.org>, it is estimated that 17 percent of U.S. petroleum consumption is dedicated to on-the-farm food production. When processing, packaging, refrigeration and transport of food is added to this, it accounts for a large percentage of oil supplies as well as contributing to pollution.

Instead of growing a garden you can also buy from genuine (meaning the products are locally grown) farmers markets, and look for the Calaveras Grown, Farms of Tuolumne, and Amador Farms logos in your grocery store. Ask your grocery store for locally grown products, but remember there isn't always locally grown produce available. Keep asking for it, and the increased demand for local products might encourage the planting of more gardens and fields of all sizes.

This article adapted from Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, USDA. Please contact the Farm Advisor's office at cdcalaveras@ucdavis.edu or 754-6477 with your agricultural questions. Talk to a certified Master Gardener every Wednesday, 10:00-12:00, 754-2880. To speak with a Master Gardener in Tuolumne County, please call 209 533-5696.