



Fresh Facts for Industry: **Buy Local**

Canadians love their fruits and veggies, consuming more than 50 billion servings of fresh produce annually. With one of the safest food supplies in the world and a wide variety of produce items available to consumers throughout the year, Canadians are privileged to have access to a multitude of fresh, healthy and nutritious produce items from a variety of geographic sources. Despite the interest in exciting and delicious new exotic varieties of produce, and despite the overwhelming Canadian interest in more traditional varieties year-round, there has been a heightened consumer interest in and desire for locally grown produce. This interest has been complicated by an inconsistent interpretation of what is meant by the term local, as well as some misunderstanding around how the end-consumer may benefit by purchasing and consuming local produce. This fact sheet, **Fresh Facts: Buy Local** will help to explain the term local, address the inconsistencies that surround the use of this term and also answer some of the frequently asked questions concerning local produce.

What does local mean?

Any claims on labels and advertisements of foods sold in Canada must be in compliance with the Food and Drugs Act and the Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act, which prohibit false and misleading information. To facilitate compliance, CFIA has developed an interpretation policy on local.

Section B.01.012 of the Food and Drug Regulations states: Local food means a food that is manufactured, processed, produced or packaged in a local government unit and sold only in: a) the local government unit in which it is manufactured, processed or packaged; b) one or more local government units that are immediately adjacent to the one in which it is manufactured, processed, produced or packaged; or c) the local government unit in which it is manufactured, processed, produced or packaged and in one or more local government units that are immediately adjacent to the one in which it is manufactured, processed, produced or packaged.

The **Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA)** is undertaking an initiative to modernize its food labelling approach. The CFIA—with input from consumers, industry and other stakeholders—will conduct a review of food labelling regulations, guidelines and policies including claims such as use of the term "local".

In the interim, the CFIA is adopting an interim policy which recognizes "**local**" as:

- **food produced in the province or territory in which it is sold, or**
- **food sold across provincial borders within 50 km of the originating province or territory**

This is an interim policy which will be **implemented immediately** and will remain in effect until the CFIA's labelling review is complete.

More: <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/food/labelling/other-requirements/claims-and-statements/local-food-claims/eng/1368135927256/1368136146333>

Inconsistent interpretation in common usage

Irrespective of the existing government definition, there is not always a consistent application of the term “local” in everyday usage. The following are different ways that the term “local” might be used to describe fresh produce but, as is the case with examples 2 and 3, may not be part of the currently acceptable claims, as defined by CFIA (above):

1. Local might be used to indicate that the item originated from within a given distance radius before reaching the point of purchase (e.g. a 50-km radius, a 100-mile radius).
2. Local might be used to indicate that the item originated from within a particular production area, and is being offered for sale in that same region (e.g. Niagara Peninsula, Annapolis Valley, Okanagan Region).
3. Local might be used to indicate that the item originated from within the same province (e.g. anywhere in Ontario) or country (e.g. anywhere in Canada) as the point of purchase.

These different interpretations are used commonly and interchangeably, which can lead to confusion among consumers about which products really are local. For example, in one of the many communities close to the U.S./Canada border, one person might interpret a product grown in a U.S. border state to be local (distance/region), while another person might not since it originated from a different country or province.

Why all produce isn't local

Canadians consume over 50 billion servings of fresh produce annually. Variety, quality, price and access are key and so local, Canadian production, though an integral part of the domestic marketplace, cannot meet this demand alone. Canadians are able to enjoy over 400 different types of fresh fruits and vegetables from over 150 different countries throughout the year and we export Canadian-grown fresh produce, adding to the variety available to consumers in countries around the world.

- a) **Supply limited by climate and weather.** In Canada, the fresh fruit and vegetable supply is limited by a short growing season and unpredictable weather patterns. Due to Canada's geographic characteristics, there are also a limited number of fertile growing regions. While we do have extensive domestic production of some of the hardier varieties, some of the less hardy varieties can only grow in greenhouses, or if grown outdoors can only grow in certain regions at certain times of the year. Some varieties simply cannot grow here at all. Additionally, since the season is so short, domestic production can be affected heavily by poor weather (e.g. an excessively wet or dry summer, a long winter, excessive heat or cold, etc).
- b) **Canadians demand variety, best quality, best price...all year round.** Canadians have come to expect the same selection of affordable, quality fresh produce throughout the year at their supermarkets and grocery stores, regardless of season or weather patterns in Canada. Access to a global market means Canadians have the opportunity to try new and exciting exotic and tropical varieties from around the world. It also means that consumers can access different varieties that are reflective of many different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

What factors should be considered when deciding to buy local product?

As with any industry, the decision to purchase local produce is a personal decision that could be based on philosophical reasons like value-economics or the desire to support local community viability. When local varieties are in season, consumers have the opportunity to purchase these fruits and vegetables as close as possible to the harvesting source, while at the same time supporting local businesses. Consumers should buy fresh fruits and vegetables that are grown using recognized food safety standards, regardless of the source of their produce, local or other.

In Canada, CanadaGAP™ is a food safety program for companies that produce, pack and store fruits and vegetables. Internationally, various programs exist such as GLOBALG.A.P., New Zealand GAP and others.

What factors should not be considered in making this decision?

Despite heightened media attention, the decision to buy local produce should not be motivated by concerns over food safety or sustainability.

- Local as a regional designation/shopping decision should not be confused with “safer”. Regardless of the source of the product, strict regulations mean that fresh produce sold in Canada, whether local, domestic or imported, is both safe and nutritious and should continue to be consumed as part of a healthy and balanced diet, as recommended by *Canada’s Food Guide*.
- Local should not be confused with more sustainable, or better for the environment. The green/carbon footprint issue is a highly complex one with many factors. The overall distance to the point of sale is not the only contributing factor in determining carbon footprint – production methodology and storage techniques also have different emissions that need to be considered. No single factor can be isolated in determining carbon footprint.

When at the store or market, how can consumers tell where the item really came from?

When shopping for fresh fruits and vegetables, consumers who are confused at the point of purchase about what local means should ask the staff at the vendor or retail outlet for clarification on the origin of the products. Country of origin information is mandatory for imported fresh produce and is available at the store level either on packages or on the information made available for bulk product; Canadian content claims may be used on product produced in Canada.

What other considerations should be kept in mind?

Regardless of the geographic source of fresh produce, the most important thing to keep in mind is that the Canadian Cancer Society, Heart & Stroke Foundation of Canada and *Canada’s Food Guide* recommend eating the suggested number of servings of fruits and vegetables every day. See <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/basics-base/quantit-eng.php> or visit www.cpma.ca or <http://www.halfyourplate.ca/> for more information, tips and recipes.