

Eat Right: Eating Local or Global?

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Abstract

Our food choices have been characterized as significant moral choices in recent years. No longer is what you eat seen as a morally neutral private affair without moral ramifications. We are encouraged to eat organic, local, sustainable foods. Further we are confronted with choices about fair trade, humanely raised, absent antibiotics, hormones, and GMOs. These choices can be confusing if only seen as ones relevant to our prudential interests, but the stakes are raised when we are chided that we will be immoral if we consume the “wrong” products. Many of these considerations are promoted as necessary for achieving sustainability goals: eat and shop locally for the good of the planet and the future. Others such as humanely raised animals, support other considerations—concern for animals’ welfare—but are also tied back into the goals of sustainability since factory farming of animals leads, to among other problems, massive quantities of manure that contaminates the surrounding areas including critical waterways, killing off fish and other wildlife. In this paper, I will consider what we should eat if we are concerned about sustainability. Sustainability is a notoriously tricky notion to pin down a specific meaning. For this paper, I will understand it as an expansive notion that includes preserving ecological integrity for current and future generations, but also includes cultural sustainability which embodies values, like justice and care for current and future generations as well as non-human animals. I will explore the widely accepted views about buying local and whether there are cogent moral arguments based on sustainability for those choices. In considering those reasons for buying local, I will investigate Peter Singer’s arguments against buying local supported by our duty to aid those suffering immediate harm. Singer’s arguments force us to examine what are our duties to aid those in developing nations versus supporting local economies. I will argue that our duties in regard to food purchases are complex and impinge on multiple values, including supporting local communities, ecological integrity, and concern for fair global food practices.

Keywords: Sustainability, Food ethics, Climate justice, Local foods, Global duties

Our food choices have been characterized as significant moral choices in recent years. We are preached at by nutritionists, chastised by animal welfare supporters, proselytized by small farm advocates, foodies and “localavores,” and castigated by sustainable development activists to eat only some kinds of foods from only certain places produced by only certain types of people. Going hand in hand with these encouragements are the abundance of popular books, among them are *Fast Food Nation*, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, *Food Politics*, *Stuffed and Starved*, *Tomatoland*, and *The Ethics of What we Eat*, exposing the moral, political, environmental and nutritious problems of our complex modern food system.

Why single out food for special moral attention in our consumer choices? What are the ethical issues that arise in our food choices and the food system in general? First there are a variety of questions pertaining to the environment that are raised about ecological integrity resulting from the industrialization of food production. These include the loss of biodiversity, depletion of topsoil, increased CO₂ levels in the atmosphere from production and transportation, and pollution of waterways. Environmental problems such as climate change will further transform where and what we can produce, and in some cases, populations will have to flee their agricultural lands entirely due to flooding and other results of climate change. The transportation of food across vast distances and borders raises questions about the environmental impact of that transportation, the security of national food sources and whether such practices contribute to or detract from more equitable and sustainable national economies.

From the perspective of human health, contemporary food ways have led to an “obesity epidemic” in developed nations, particularly among the poor and minority populations. Many of these people are undernourished since the foods they eat have little or no nutritional value. Soaring rates of cancer, heart disease, and other lifestyle diseases are also products of our current food practices. The major killers in the world are not infectious diseases; rather they are heart disease, cancers, lung disease and diabetes. These diseases killed more than 36 million people in 2008 according a report by the World Health Organization. Industrial bioengineered plants and animals, and animals raised in concentrated feeding operations, have produced more food, but at what cost to human health, animal welfare, and the welfare of the planet? At the same time, malnourishment and starvation remain rampant in less developed nations where wholesale loss of cultural food practices have occurred due to increases in agricultural trade and resulting crop choices.

Whether animals should be part of our diet has gained attention first with the exposure of the horrors of factory farming and now with exposure of the negative impact of meat production on the environment. Peter Singer raised the issues of the plight of farm animals in his classic book from 1975 *Animal Liberation*. Since then the suffering endemic to the system of animal food production has been difficult to ignore. Whether animals have rights as some philosophers have argued or are part of the moral community due to their ability to suffer, or (even more modestly) if we have a duty to avoid unnecessary cruelty or suffering to animals, the contemporary production of meat is morally problematic.

And lastly, although not the least of the moral complexity of food, are the social justice issues presented by food. Food is an important lens to view global poverty and sustainable development. The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights recognizes a right to be free from poverty and a right to food. The global market in food raises serious ethical questions since, for instance, people are growing food for export but are food insecure themselves. The UN reported that even though in 2009 there were record amounts of food produced, the number of hungry people went up. Internationally, 870 million people are food insecure, including ironically in the U.S.A. where we export tons of food. “Hunger, in most cases, is

caused by lack of *money* rather than a shortage of food production.” (my italics)¹ How it is that modern agriculture has increased production, the Green Revolution was supposed to end hunger, but “food deserts” make it difficult to eat nutritious food in some American cities, and malnutrition continues in Africa and Asia? These paradoxes in our global food system raise issues of food security on a national and community level that underscore the difficulty of the challenges confronting us. As climate changes occur, new types of injustices emerge; developed nations dump their wastes of overconsumption into the common atmosphere, where the vulnerable in developed nations will be most disadvantaged. In many cases, climate change will exacerbate the food crisis situation of those peoples. Other questions of social justice have to do with the conditions of farm laborers and others in the food supply chain in the United States and globally. Guest worker programs have increased growers’ access to farm labor but have they not alleviated and perhaps, they have aggravated the historic problem of depressed wages and itinerancy among farm workers. Farm workers are unnecessarily exposed to pesticides and other dangers in a system pursuing cheap food where workers’ have little say in the conditions under which they work.

All these issues compel us to think about the role our food choices play in this morally complex system that has effects on so many around the world and into the future. No longer is what you eat seen as a morally neutral private affair without moral ramifications. We are encouraged to eat organic, local, sustainable foods. Further we are confronted with choices about fair trade, humanely raised, absent antibiotics, hormones, and GMOs. These choices can be confusing if only seen as ones relevant to our prudential interests, but the stakes are raised when we are chided that we will be immoral if we consume the “wrong” products. Many of these considerations are promoted as necessary for achieving sustainability goals: eat and shop locally for the good of the planet and the future. Others such as humanely raised animals, support other considerations—concern for animals’ welfare—but are also tied back into the goals of sustainability since factory farming of animals leads to among other problems, massive quantities of manure that contaminates the surrounding areas including critical waterways, killing off fish and other wildlife and greenhouse gases. In this paper, I will consider what we should eat if we are concerned about sustainability. Sustainability is a notoriously tricky notion to pin down a specific meaning. For this paper, I will understand it as an expansive notion that includes preserving ecological integrity for current and future generations, but also includes cultural sustainability which embodies values, like justice and care for current and future generations as well as non-human animals.

I will explore the widely accepted views about buying local and whether there are cogent moral arguments based on sustainability for those choices. In considering those reasons for buying local, I will investigate Peter Singer’s arguments against buying local supported by our duty to aid those suffering immediate harm. Singer’s arguments force us to examine what are our duties to aid those in developing nations versus supporting local economies. I will argue that our duties in regard to food purchases are complex and impinge on multiple values, including supporting local communities, ecological integrity, and concern for fair global food practices.

Buying local—always the right ethical choice?

Many popular writers have been arguing that “buying local” is the single change that one can make to ensure that one is making the right eating choices. Buying local foods has become shorthand for morally good food. One of the leaders of this movement is Michael Pollen, among the virtues of buying local food he advances these as his top three, the food is

¹ <http://www.wfp.org/hunger/causes>

generally fresher, local food generally leaves a much lighter environmental footprint, buying local is an act of conservation.²

Outside of taste and nutrition, the effects on the environment of buying local are forefront in this movement. Gary Nabham, often called the pioneer of the local food movement, argues in *Coming Home to Eat: The Pleasures and Politics of Local Foods*³ that our global eating habits are destroying the environment.⁴ Other writers such as Anna Lappe in *Diet for a Hot Planet*⁵ argue for purchasing local as a way to mitigate climate change.

The idea of investigating where our food comes from, and in particular how far it travels to get to our plate, has gained tremendous traction in the last few years. A researcher in Iowa in 2005 found that the milk, sugar, and strawberries that go into strawberry yogurt collectively traveled 2,211 miles (3,558 kilometers) to the processing plant. Environmental groups such as Natural Resources Defense Council claim:

How your food is grown, stored, transported, processed and cooked can all influence how it impacts climate change and the environment. Transportation-related impacts are particularly important for imported foods. NRDC calculated the transportation impacts of importing fresh produce and wine widely consumed in California, directly comparing the climate and air quality emissions from importing these foods instead of growing and consuming them in California. We did not attempt a full lifecycle assessment of all climate and air impacts. The results of our analysis show that—all else being equal—locally grown foods are a better choice.⁶

The local-food movement has grown up and the concept of "food miles," meaning the distance food travels from farm to plate, has come into its own. The United Kingdom's Tesco, it's largest supermarket chain, instituted a carbon labeling on all its products.⁷ This and other policies have been supported by environmental groups who encourage local food sourcing as the moral choice for the planet.

Before granting a wholehearted endorsement of local food to solve our environmental crisis, what 'local' means has itself been a source of controversy. For Gary Nabham in *Coming Home to Eat* in northern Arizona he settled on a radius of 250 miles. Whereas Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon, authors of *The 100-Mile Diet*, explain the boundary of their diet as "a 100-mile radius is large enough to reach beyond a big city and small enough to feel truly local. And it rolls off the tongue more easily than the '160-kilometer diet.'" The term "locavore" was coined by Sage Van Wing from Marin County, California, where there is an agricultural abundance limited her diet to food from within 100 miles. Rich Pirog from the Leopold Institute conducted a survey of consumers throughout the United States found that two-thirds considered "local food" to mean food grown within 100 miles. Yet, sometimes 'local' gets associated with a state or province identification. In Arizona the produce is often marketed "Arizona Grown" the implication that it is local even though for many people in the state produce grown in Mexico would be more "local" than other parts of the state—less than 100 miles. Some countries market their own food as "local" and encourage a kind of nationalism or patriotism about purchasing those foods, supporting their farms and resisting the globalization of food—the converse is xenophobia about purchasing the foods of *others*. Some have asked if the zeal for local food is a kind of "culinary racism."

² Michael Pollen, "Eat Your View" *New York Times* May 17, 2006,

³ Gary Nabham, *Coming Home to Eat: The Pleasures and Politics of Local Foods* (New York: Norton, 2001).

⁴ Gary Nabham, *Coming Home to Eat: The Pleasures and Politics of Local Foods*

⁵ Anna Lappe *Diet for a Hot Planet* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010).

⁶ <http://www.nrdc.org/policy> November 2007

⁷ <http://www.carbontrustcertification.com/page?pageid=a042000000FjjEv>

Why is local thought to be morally better?

Looking at Pollen's arguments, his first claim is that local food is fresher and more nutritious. To this point, Peter Singer's responds that buying local food that is "fresher and tastes better" aren't ethical reasons for purchases. That's not entirely accurate, purchasing food that is better for you and your family are moral considerations (on the assumption that morality requires you to consider your family's and your own welfare), but local food, as any food may or may not be fresh depending on how it is handled. I will leave aside the nutritious claim at this point.

Local food is thought to be the most ecologically sustainable based on the concept of "lower food miles." Focusing on Rich Pirog's study of produce in Iowa, for instance, the average produce in the U.S. traveled 1500 miles to the store versus the 47 of local produce.⁸ That difference does seem to imply that buying local would make a big difference in one's carbon footprint. Nevertheless, the caveat that Pirog introduces to this simplistic analysis is that it is not only important to consider the food miles but by what form of transport is used. Shipped foods, and train transported foods are significantly more efficient than trucked foods. For instance, trains are 10 times more efficient than trucks. Rice grown and shipped from Asia may have less environmental impact than rice grown and trucked in the United States. Food miles just focus on transportations cost and neglect the other environmental impacts of growing food in particular regions and the packaging of food. Hot house grown tomatoes in northern climates may be local, but the amount of energy consumed to grow them in a hothouse, cancels out any saving in transportation. Regions like Florida with lots of sunshine and water are better choices from the perspective of greenhouse gases. In the Southwest we have an agricultural industry that has grown up on borrowed water resources and overusing ground water. So even though the food is locally produced some of that produce is rapidly depleting our water supplies and water in the Southwest involves a tremendous amount of energy since it needs to be pumped.⁹ As global climate change occurs or technologies advance (for example greenhouses might efficiently be heated with renewable energy), what can be grown environmentally efficiently will change as well. The calculations for environment impact of particular food products in particular regions will change over time. Nevertheless, the shorthand of "food miles" doesn't capture the entire environmental impact of any food, and hence doesn't provide a useful shortcut for the most sustainable food choice.¹⁰

In considering the environmental effect of food choices, certain foods, in particular meat and dairy products, create significantly greater amounts greenhouse emissions than other food products. Raising animals for food requires producing food in the form of grains and corn, and feeding it to the animals. It requires as much as 10 times the number of calories from grain to produce the same calories in meat.¹¹ From the perspective of greenhouse gases, that is not efficient production of food. All the carbon costs of the grain production and transportation including the fertilizers and pesticides are included in the meat and dairy emissions. Additionally, animals like cows and sheep emit gases, methane and nitrous oxide, which are 23, in the case of methane and 296 in the case of nitrous oxide, times more

⁸ Rich Pirog, "Food, Fuel, and Freeways: An Iowa perspective on how far food travels, fuel usage, and greenhouse gas emissions" <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/>

⁹ William Debus *A Great Aridness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁰ See Christopher Weber and H. Scott Matthews' "Food-Miles and the Relative Climate Impacts of Food Choices in the United States" in *Environ. Sci. Technol.*, 2008, 42 (10) analysis where they determined that the transportation, the final delivery of food, only represented 4% of the total greenhouse gases for food. They found that 83% of the emissions for agricultural products occur before the food leaves the farm.

¹¹ "Rethinking the Meat Guzzler" By Mark Bittman *New York Times*, January 27, 2008.

destructive than carbon dioxide.¹² Overall, whether local or not, there are heavy environmental costs from industrial animal production. Other environmental impacts include problems of disposal of the wastes produced by concentrated animal feeding operations (or CAFOs), often called “manure lagoons”. A study of the United Kingdom’s food systems showed that meat and dairy amounted to half of all the emissions in the U.K. food supply. The researcher concluded that “probably the single most helpful behavioral shift one can make” to reduce the greenhouse gases from food products is “eating fewer meat and dairy products and consuming more plant foods in their place.”¹³ This conclusion has been taken up with the “Meatless Mondays” movement which tries to get people not to consume meat one day a week based on the health and environmental benefits.¹⁴

Food miles are not the only way in which local food is thought to be more environmentally sustainable. Local food proponents are also advocates of eating seasonally. Bringing food halfway around the world so that consumers can continue to eat grapes in the winter is not generally a very greenhouse gas efficient approach to eating. Eating seasonally from your local area would have some benefits. Nevertheless, eating locally wouldn’t be feasible everywhere given the particular environments. The prescription of eating local doesn’t have to be understood as absolute—“never eat anything that isn’t locally produced”—but rather, other things being equal, purchase food that is produced locally. How easy or difficult eating locally is, how successful one might be in achieving it will vary on one’s location. Another part of the “eat locally” movement is to eat less processed foods. Processed food almost always use more energy in producing and packaging them; even just the transport costs of moving the ingredients to the point of production adds an additional level to the transportation costs. Furthermore, processed foods tend to have more packaging which has environmental cost (producing the packaging), and the packaging usually ends up in landfills which itself is an environmental problem.

Finally, local food advocates argue for organically produced foods. Not all “local” producers are organic. Nevertheless, organic food is the largest growth area in the food business, in 2011 the organic industry was worth 31.5 billion.¹⁵ Organically produced food does not use synthetically produced fertilizers and pesticides and does not use growth hormones and antibiotics. Creating synthetic fertilizers and pesticides produces greenhouse gases and applying them on the crops results in nitrous oxide. Additionally, the fertilizers pollute waterways, kill wild fish and other marine wildlife, and bees; they contribute to soil erosion which in turn creates carbon dioxide, further exacerbating the climate problems. Generally, organically produced foods have a significantly better effect on the environment even when produced at a large scale. A 2012 study by Stanford University researchers argued that organically grown foods aren’t more nutritious than nonorganic food. However, it did show that organic foods lead to fewer toxins in the body.¹⁶ Since the impact on the ecological environment is substantially better than non-organically produced foods, and since they don’t expose farm laborers to pesticides which are hazardous to their health, there are good moral reasons for choosing organically produced foods.

It is important to mention, something that Pollen is conspicuously silent about, that buying local and even organic doesn’t guarantee fair treatment of farmworkers who helped bring the local and/or organic food to market. In one instance of farm worker exploitation in the United

¹² <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/research/topics/climate-change/response>

¹³ Garrett T. Sources for the chart showing total UK food consumption GHG emissions as percentage of total UK consumption related GHGs. Work in progress, 13 March 2007, Food Climate Research Network, <http://www.fcrn.org.uk/>

¹⁴ <http://www.meatlessmonday.com/why-meatless/>

¹⁵ <http://www.businessnewsdaily.com/2404-organic-industry-healthy-growth.html>

¹⁶ Crystal Smith-Spangler, et.al., “Are Organic Foods Safer or Healthier Than Conventional Alternatives?: A Systematic Review” *Annals of Medicine* 4 September 2012, Vol 157, No. 5

States, Eric Holt-Gimenez in “The Coalition of Immokalee Workers: Fighting Modern Day Slavery in the Industrial Food System” exposed slave like conditions for farm workers in Florida. Living in Florida and purchasing these tomatoes would be purchasing locally, but in so doing, would be supporting conditions of abuse and exploitation. There are not guarantees that local, even small scale farmers, are not engaged in unfair labor practices. Unfortunately, there are structural problems in determining whether farm workers in the United States are treated fairly. In the 1930s, the National Labor Relations Act (guaranteeing the right to form unions) and the Fair Labor Standards Act, didn’t include farm workers in their provisions. Consequently, in the US, farm workers are not automatically subject to the same protection as other workers, including minimum wage and OSHA protections.

The final argument Pollen presents for local is that it is “an act of conservation — of the land, of agriculture and of the local economy, all of which are threatened by the globalization of food. Anyone who prizes agricultural landscapes, and worries about sprawl destroying them, should buy local whenever possible. . . . Otherwise the landscape will revert to second-growth forest or housing developments.” In Europe they have a saying “Eat your view” which has gained momentum in this country including in 2008 with White House’s garden. Buying local will preserve agricultural landscapes. But the types of landscapes Pollen and others have in mind are the smaller agricultural operations and not the large-scale industrial agribusinesses. What we are trying to conserve are particular types of landscapes, with varied crops and animals, practicing good land stewardship. Pollen is correct to point out that conservation of land should not be seen as exclusively wilderness preservation as has been the focus of many major environmental groups in the latter half of the 20th century. Aldo Leopold was well aware of the virtues of conservation of farm land and wrote extensively about farmers as conservationists. His famous commentary on our current relationship with the land was: “We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.”¹⁷ But not all farms are small and Arcadian, practicing the type of land stewardship that will conserve the environment. Again just supporting local is not sufficient, more has to be said about the types of practices the farm and farmer are engaged in.

Peter Singer is more sanguine about the argument of supporting the “endangered family farm” than are the other arguments advanced for buying local. He notes the precipitous decline in family farms from nearly 40 percent of the population living on farms in the 1900s to less than 2 percent today. Much of this decline is a result of widespread industrial agriculture taking over family farms. Small farms have difficulty competing with the large-scale agribusiness and the consolidation of the food business which have driven down the wholesale costs. Singer points out that not all rural depopulation is a bad thing, rural communities can be “stultifying narrow and intolerant of diversity”¹⁸ and limit opportunities of residents to farming. Farming can involve difficult labor, and in an era where the systemic supports are for large operations, it is easy to understand the reason for the decline in small farms. Nevertheless, Singer does say that some rural values are:

undeniably worth preserving. When people see themselves as custodian of a heritage they have received from their parent and will pass on to their children, they are more likely to cherish the land and farm it sustainably. If those people are replaced by large, corporate-owned farms with a focus on recouping the investment and making profits for a generation at most, we will all be worse off in the long run.¹⁹

¹⁷ Aldo Leopold *Sand County Almanac* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1949), 203-204

¹⁸ Peter Singer and Jim Mason, *The Ethics of what We Eat*, (Rodale, 2006) 143.

¹⁹ Singer 143.

Supporting local farmers, small family operations, not multinational agribusinesses, with roots in a community, strengthens the local economy by keeping the money spent within the local economy. Those purchases from local farmers make it possible for farmers to be economically viable. This movement has been embraced by many local retailers as well in the digital age where individuals purchase items over the internet and the local businesses can't survive, creating unemployment, and without local businesses communities don't receive taxes for schools and other public services. This is a compelling argument since the tax base of a community is what provides the services that make people's lives better and sustain communities-- schools, libraries, parks, police and fire protection all significantly contribute to the welfare of residents of a community. If farmers can bring their products more directly to community consumers, without intermediaries, they will reap more of the profits, hence making the practice of farming sustainable for families. The mantra "buy local" has led to the revitalization of farmer's markets and community supported agriculture (CSA) where people commit to purchase produce and meat directly from a particular farmer each week. Supporting one's community represents important values for one's self-interest--of providing a more livable community-- and for the sake of others who are members of your community. Community means that we are in an interdependent relationship with the members of the community, and being in a community entails relationships of reciprocity with others in the community. Communities can't survive without those reciprocal relationships among the members. Already in the digital age more and more commerce and services are going outside the local community. It stands to reason that at some point, the geographically situated community can't survive without the support of its members. Globalization of all food production and manufacture risks essential relationships needed to keep alive particular communities. Singer notes that "keep your dollars circulating in your own community" is not an ethical principle and embodies a kind of "community selfishness." That claim overreaches as well. We do have responsibilities to our communities, to promote the welfare of the citizens as well as our own. Individuals and groups such as civic organizations take seriously those responsibilities and provide important services to communities. Pragmatically, it makes sense to locate moral responsibilities to others primarily to one's community since one is in a better position to know the pressing needs and concerns and share basic values with those in one's community. Indeed the dangers of paternalism and cultural hegemony when individuals try to "help" communities to which they don't belong, boosts the claim that our primary moral concerns should be our own community. Supporting the economic vitality of one's community by purchasing local as well as the conservation of agricultural landscapes and encouraging values of connection with the farmers and nutritional and aesthetic value of food are important to the cultural sustainability of communities. So while the contribution to ecological sustainability is mixed for purchasing local foods, sometimes buying local and organic (although organic is better whether local or not) is better for the environment, sometimes it is not, there are other important reasons to purchase local foods.

Singer's challenges buying local:

Singer's most serious challenge to the enthusiastic movement to purchase local food is that in so doing we will be responsible for harm to farmers in the developing world. Whatever good is achieved by buying local food (and Singer doesn't think there is much good in doing so) we wouldn't be purchasing from farmers in the developing world where people are much poorer and in need of basic assistance. When Tesco in the UK introduced carbon labeling on its foods, it was interpreted by some as a dangerous move to destroy farmers in developing nations. For Singer, we should ask about the effects of our choice to become a locavore. He says:

When we think ethically, we should put ourselves in the position of all those affected by our actions, no matter where they live. If farmers near San Francisco need extra income to send their children to good colleges, and farmers in developing nations need extra income in order to be able to afford basic health care or a few years of elementary school for their children, we will, other things being equal, do better to support the farmers in developing countries.²⁰

More than being selfish, Singer thinks that we do wrong by preferring local farmers over developing nations' farmers. He argues that we ought to act in a way that prevents the most harm and bring about the most good, and since buying local would deprive farmers in developing nations our business and since they are worse off relative to American farmers, our purchasing from developing nations would be the best ethical choice. Many in the international development community have argued for this approach to open and fair trade encouraging the richer global north countries to purchase from the global south nations. As Singer points out, developing nations are not in a technological position to compete in that arena, but they can on the agricultural level.

Undoubtedly, we have responsibilities to alleviate suffering and poverty in the world. Singer and many in the international sustainable development world argue that one of the easiest ways to satisfy that responsibility is to purchase food from developing nations. Such food purchases bring cash into the economies of developing nations and help lift individuals out of poverty. From a sustainable development perspective this kind of global trade is the best way to improve the economies of those countries and alleviate poverty. What this means is that by buying local foods, we are thereby forsaking purchasing from farmers in impoverished nations and providing more benefit to them than our local farmers.

What exactly is our responsibility to the poor of the world? Many people think that our responsibility to relieve the poverty and suffering of distant strangers in the world are positive obligations to aid and not obligations to avoid causing harm to others. Since we are not causally responsible for the harmful circumstances of those farmers in developing nations, the argument continues, we cannot be obligated to prevent the harm or to aid them. Our individual food purchases from developing nations' farmers might be good to do but not obligatory upon us. Since there are various ways to satisfy our responsibilities to aid the poor and relieve suffering (sending money to Oxfam or purchasing garments produced in Bangladesh) we are not obligated to purchase their food. Just as no given person or NGO providing services to the poor can demand aid from us, choosing to buy local food over globally produced food doesn't violate the moral duty to cause harm.

Philosophers have distinguished between "positive duties," duties of beneficence or to aid, and "negative duties" not to harm others, generally associated with refraining from positive actions; for instance, not killing, stealing, or assaulting others. Negative duties are often thought to be more stringent duties than positive duties.²¹ Failure to act upon them is to engage in morally wrongful behavior. Typically the sorts of cases we have in mind for negative duties are local and specific instances of harm to particular people. In killing someone or stealing that person's property, one has direct contact with an identifiable victim. The nature of the harms to others is direct, specific, and assignable to the person doing the harming. Positive duties can also be assignable to persons, helping a neighbor with her yard, taking meals to senior citizens' homes, or helping out at the food bank. But many cases are less specific, giving money to Oxfam or the Red Cross after a disaster. In giving money to disaster relief, one doesn't know any identifiable person who is aided by the charity.²²

²⁰ Singer 141.

²¹ For a fuller discussion of the issues surrounding the notion of 'stringency' see Heidi Malm's *Between the Horns of the Dilemma: Philosophical Studies* Vol. 61, No. 3, Mar., 1991.

²² See Joel Feinberg, "The Moral and Legal Responsibility of the Bad Samaritan" *Criminal Justice Ethics*

There are notorious problems with this distinction between positive and negative duties and the acts and omissions associated with them. Not all violations of negative duties are actions, for example, failure to put on the brakes for the pedestrian in the cross walk, violates a negative duty. And conversely, some violations of positive duties are omissions. Bad Samaritans fail to do easy rescues. Other cases are controversial as well: The physician giving a patient a lethal dose of medicine without the patient's consent violates a negative duty not to kill, but does the physician failing to treat a patient violate a positive or negative duty? When coming upon a drowning swimmer in an isolated lake, is the failure to do an unconditional rescue violate a positive or negative duty? And there are many other instances where it is not clear whether it is a case of a negative duty or positive one. In general, negative duties are duties not to cause harm and positive duties are duties to prevent harm. The fulfillment of either and the violation of either can involve a range of acts and omissions.²³

Singer famously doesn't accept the distinction between positive and negative obligations with the greater stringency to the former than the latter. Using the example of what your responsibility would be upon finding an infant face down in a puddle, he argues that it is clear that you ought to turn the baby over to save it from drowning even if doing so involves some inconvenience to you, such as muddying your shoes. You didn't create the situation that the baby finds itself in, that is, you didn't create the harmful situation, nevertheless, there is significant agreement that you should save the baby from drowning and that failure to do so is to do wrong. Since it is foreseeable that the baby will die and you can save it without much effort, you are responsible for its death if you fail to save it. Singer is arguing that since we can prevent harm (and do much more good) by purchasing food from poor farmers in the developing world, with little or no inconvenience to ourselves (we miss out on the fun of going to the local farmers market), then we ought to do so. Failure to prevent the harm of poverty in the developing world by buying local food means we are responsible for the misery of those farmers.

Singer's collapsing the distinction between positive and negative duties is too implausible. Most of us, most of the time could behave in another way that would increase the relative impact of our conduct. By not buying lunch or going to a movie, I could send money to the poor, by riding a bike and not driving a car, I could reduce my carbon footprint, by not going on vacation I could spend the time helping children in an orphanage. All these alternative actions would increase the general welfare of the world. Duties to aid could quickly swallow up our lives with fulfilling those requirements, undermining our own autonomy and life plans. The distinction between positive and negative duties, and the greater stringency in negative duties, avoids this slippery slope of requiring individuals to change their plans and provide assistance to those in need all the time. Without the distinction, morality is too demanding and our lives would be untenable. With the distinction, negative duties are generally easier to fulfill by just avoiding certain activities—don't kill, steal, or rape. Violations of negative duties are more difficult to justify than violations of positive duties. Though there are difficult cases of distinguishing between positive and negative duties and acts and omissions, it doesn't mean that there aren't clear cases where there is widespread agreement. What we identify as harms to others that we are obligated to avoid doing, generally are specific acts where we cause harm to identifiable victims. Positive duties are moral requirements to do certain things for the benefit of others, but there is more leeway in discharging those obligations and it is easier to justify violations. This is not to say that we ought not to provide aid to strangers and contribute to eradicating the sufferings of the world, but those obligations are not ones that should interfere with our life plans at every moment. And it is our decision when and where to act upon them. Given this discussion, it would

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²³ Conversations with Heidi Malm helped to clarify these points about positive and negative obligations.

seem, contrary to Singer, that our obligations to alleviate poverty is a positive duty, consequently, we are not obligated to purchase food from improvised developing nations' farmers.

New harms of globalization

The globalized world provides us with immediate information about the effects of our choices on the vulnerable of the world. Our purchase of cheap clothing supports exploitation and risky conditions for garment workers as we saw in the recent tragedy in Bangladesh. Our addiction to drugs fuels drug wars in Mexico, our desire for diamonds mined in Africa finances war lords that terrorize people in those regions. Consuming an abundance of energy by driving fuel inefficient cars and lavishly wasting energy in our home and offices dumps carbon into the common atmosphere of the globe contributing to global climate change. Climate change will have devastating consequences on the most vulnerable of the world. Our choices and actions, in concert with others, are creating conditions in developing nations that do or will harm those people. These are “new harms” that challenge the rigid line between not harming and aiding those in need.²⁴ The ordinary things we do, viz., driving our cars, purchasing food and clothes, what kind of light bulbs and grocery bags we use, can have tremendous effects on others around the world and into the future.

Many of the new harms are a result of the cumulative activities of many people. My driving an inefficient car, or eating foods that are flown from the other side of the globe, or otherwise consuming more than my share of energy that contributes to the carbon in the atmosphere, are part of the cumulative activities that will in concert with others cause harm to others. Climate injustice results when those creating climate change are getting the benefits of doing so (wanton consumption of energy and economic growth, for example) and imposing the harm on others who didn't contribute to the problem.²⁵ The “polluter pays principle” strikes many people as a fair principle —namely those who generate the pollution should have to pay for its effects (including compensating those who have to suffer its effects). In the current case, those who are going to pay for the effects of pollution to the atmosphere are not the polluters since many of the devastating effects of climate change will occur to the developed nations. Even the effects of climate change that do occur in the industrial West will be better tolerated since we are able to adapt to the changes, unlike the poor who don't have the resources to support adaption strategies.

Knowledge of the effects of large-scale agribusiness, the transportation of food (carbon miles), the conditions of agricultural workers in the food system, and the conditions of poor farmers in developing nations has changed the context in which we make food choices. Many of the practices will lead to global climate change. Global climate change will result in flooding and the destruction of many low-lying areas of the world, displacing millions in those countries, these effects are the results of the lifestyles of millions of other people, mainly in the western industrial nations. The most vulnerable of the world will be even worse off than they are already. It is difficult to remain oblivious to the effects of our lifestyle choices that result in harm to others even if they are in far off lands. These harms are not the discrete and local harms that we have considered in the previous section of negative duties, but are they happen to people far away, geographically and in time, and they are the consequences of many people acting in particular way. Since the food system is responsible for roughly a third of the greenhouse gases, food choices are significant contributors to these

²⁴ Judith Lichtenberg, “Negative Duties, and the “New Harms” *Ethics* vol. 120 no. 3 (April 2010).

²⁵ Stephen Gardiner, “Climate Justice”. In John Dryzek, David Schlosberg and Richard Norgaard, eds. *Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society*. Oxford University Press. (2011)

kinds of environmental harms. But as we have seen, the fact of the impact on the environment of food doesn't tell us whether in any given case to purchase local or global.

What are our responsibilities to avoid or alleviate these "new harms"? Are these new harms represented by negative obligations such that we will do wrong if we don't avoid them? They are different from the old harms since we don't cause them on our own. Judith Lichtenberg's discussion of the new harms usefully distinguishes them into two types of harms. The first type of harm occurs when an aggregate of people act in certain ways. In and of themselves these activities, for example, burning fossil fuels are not harmful, but it is the aggregate of many people burning fossil fuels that leads to the harm of global climate change. Examples of these types of harms include eating foods that have a larger than necessary carbon footprint (out of season fruits flown across the world or energy intensive products grown locally). The second type of harm is represented by, for example, buying products made in factories where the workers are exploited or animals are treated cruelly. These harms "involve actions that are wrong in themselves, irrespective of what others do."²⁶ In the second kind of cases our reason for not wanting to purchase those goods that involve those types of harms is that we don't want to participate or be complicit in those harms. Our own actions may not affect whether the harms occur but we still don't want to "participate" in those harms—"I don't want to support the use of child labor." The first type of cases, the aggregative harms appeal to considerations of fairness. Here a person's reasoning might employ the categorical imperative: "Since allowing everyone to consume energy at the rate consumed by the average American leads to disaster, it is unfair for her to consume at that rate."²⁷ In both of these cases there is a question whether one's actions will have any effect on the state of the world, that is, whether her action will change anything to reduce the harms caused by that type of action. Often, they will not have the effect of stopping the harms.

Are failures to purchase food, harms?

The above examples are cases of harms to others and we have been considering our role in creating, contributing or perpetuating those harms. Even though they are aggregate harms, we still need to be responsible for our contribution or complicity. What about the cases of not buying from impoverished farmers in developing nations? Are those instances of harms, even of the new harms version? Those cases have the aggregative quality as well, namely, my purchasing tomatoes from a Guatemalan farmer wouldn't alone lift him out of poverty, but it might do so in concert with others purchasing his product. The cases we discussed above, the contribution to climate injustices or intrinsically wrong actions, e.g., exploiting child labor, are cases of negative duties since they involve avoiding harm to others. Are the instances of not purchasing from impoverished farmers instances of harms to others? Are we harming those farmers by not purchasing their produce as Singer implies? Harms are judged as making people "worse off" than they would be otherwise. Assessments of the baseline from which we make the judgment of worse off or better off are not without controversy. Those questions include: How widely or narrowly should we construe the baseline, how much description should be included in the baseline, and should that description include normative assessments? On the face of it, the purchases from farmers in developing nations appear to be instances of benefitting them and not harming them since they are better off with our purchases than they would be otherwise. If that's true, then these cases are ones of aiding others in need, or positive obligations, and not negative duties. (It is not clear that we should categorize these purchases as "duties to aid" since we are being advantaged by the purchases unlike the case of unconditional aid to the poor.) These aren't then instances of "new harms".

²⁶ Lichtenberg, 568.

²⁷ Lichtenberg, 568.

One complicating factor is if we are complicit in the paucity of the background conditions of those in need that makes their situation so terrible. Here I have in mind the result of colonialism or even the exploitation US companies that engineered conditions in those countries supported by the US government that leave the impoverished of the developing world in miserable conditions. These factors would change the baseline from which we judge better off or worse off. We will discuss these larger background factors in the next section.

The fact that they aren't harms doesn't mean that we shouldn't purchase from farmers in the developing world other things being equal (e.g., carbon footprint) thereby helping them out of their poverty. If we can aid the suffering of others we should do so. Though our more stringent obligations are to avoid harm, we still have duties to aid. There are cases where failing to aid others in suffering does seem particularly callous and indifferent to the suffering of others. Singer's baby in the puddle is an example where failure to render aid makes the person morally monstrous. Positive duties *are* duties, and if we can do something as simple as purchasing from a particular farmer then, other things being equal, we ought to do so. Though they are positive duties, they too can contribute to integrity; how I think I should live, what kind of life plan I have, include my views about caring for the suffering of others and making a better world. Consequently drawing a sharp line between positive and negative duties may not be necessary in these cases. As Lichtenberg suggests, we can avoid the slippery slope when not drawing a sharp line between positive and negative duties by suggesting that each of us should do our "fair share" of aiding the suffering of others.

Other problems with the duty to purchase from developing nations

Singer argument that we should when possible choose to support the least well off in the world economy by purchasing their food and not favoring those in our community as locavores advocate for us to do has some other problems. There is, for example, a *knowledge problem* with Singer's claim that we should prefer the global poor farmers over local farmers. There are so many factors about the conditions under which food is produced, whether the laborers are paid a fair wage, who gets the profit, who are the various conglomerates that no consumer can know with confidence what the effect of their purchase will be on people in a poor nation. Thomas Pogge points out: "This is unknowable because as they [our consumer choices] reverberate around the globe, the effects of my economic decision intermingle with the effects of billions of decisions made by others, and it is impossible to try to disentangle, even *ex post*, the impact of *my* decision from this vast traffic by trying to figure out how things would have gone had I acted differently."²⁸ Consequently buying food from poor countries is not analogous to preventing the harm of the death of the baby in the puddle. In the baby's case it is very immediate and specific what the outcome of your action or omission will be. Since the outcome of your conduct is not foreseeable or knowable in a specific sense, you can't be held responsible for the state of poverty of developing nations' farmers. On the other hand, in buying from a particular farmer at a farmers market, one can have direct knowledge of the outcome of that purchase. Isn't this an argument against the "new harms" where I can't know who is affect by my actions? It isn't, since we weren't relying on specific individuals being harmed by our collective action rather it is the knowledge that it will affect classes of people, for example, people living in low-lying countries.

Beyond the knowledge problem, there has been a tremendous amount of discussion about whether humanitarian aid and development assistance are effective.²⁹ If there are doubts about

²⁸ Thomas Pogge, editor *Freedom from Poverty as a Human Right: Who owes what to the Very Poor?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). 17

²⁹ See for example Thomas W. Dichter, *Despite Good Intentions: Why Development Assistance to the Third World has Failed* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003) and Dale Jamison, "Duties to the

the effectiveness of providing assistance to those in need, then one can't have an obligation to engage in futile practices. One of the problems with aid is, for example, who exactly is benefitted by the aid. In the case of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) the US government's largest agency for aid and assistance, most of the contracts and grants go to American firms. For example, food aid, agricultural products, must be purchased from US farmers; food cannot be purchased from other countries even if those purchases would aid the country that we are trying to help. President Obama has recently tried to change this policy but has been unsuccessful in getting it approved by Congress. Much international aid ends up in the hands of corrupt leaders who siphon the funds into their own accounts rather than providing for their nation's poor. Consider the billions of dollars in assistance that went into Haiti after the 2010 earthquake. Even though Haiti was the largest recipient of aid in the world in 2010, the country is still listed as a fragile state with a high vulnerable index.³⁰ The country remains in crisis. There is much discussion of whether aid is effective at all or whether it actually is disadvantaging those that the aid is trying to help. Consequently, the requirement that we provide aid to distant strangers is not as straightforward as it might seem, or as Singer's baby in the puddle example suggests.

The argument we have been considering is that we ought to buy from farmers in developing nations in order to lift them out of poverty. This assumes uncritically that the system is advantageous to those farmers. Are they, however, being advantaged by the global food system? In the modern food system, though there are many farmers and many consumers, there are only a few corporate buyers and transporters of food, and they have driven down the price of food from farmers.³¹ By the time Ugandan coffee is sold in the US it is 200 times the amount that the farmer got for his product. The profits for the product are mostly received by corporate interests as opposed to the farmer.³² Consider the banana plantations in Central America which have been controlled by United Fruit Company (now called Chiquita Brands) since 1899. Those countries are notorious for their poverty and the brutality of their governments (many of which were supported by United Fruit). Far from supporting the people's interests, the global food business is as Raj Patel describes it a "story of colonialism, control over channels of production, distribution, marketing and finance, mobilization of national interests, and a racialized repainting of the Third World."³³ With space limitations, I can't consider all the intricacies of the global food system. Suffice to say, we shouldn't assume that developing nation farmers are advantaged by this schema as opposed to another system say where they were encouraged to supply for their own community's needs.

Human right to avoid severe poverty

Another approach to the presumed duty to purchase food from farmers of the developing world rather than local farmers is that doing so is necessary to avoid violating the human rights of developing nations' farmers. The UN Declaration of Human Rights recognizes a right to avoid severe poverty and a right to food. Could our failure to purchase food which would alleviate the economic distress of poor developing nation's farmers be a violation of their human rights? We need to ask is what is the construction of the right to avoid severe poverty? Normally we conceive of rights as correlated with duties. In this cases, who has the duty with which the right to avoid poverty is correlated? If we thought that the right to food

Distant: Aid, Assistance, and Intervention in the Developing World" *The Journal of Ethics* (2005) 9.

³⁰ <http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/countryprofile/haiti>

³¹ Raj Patel, *Stuff and Starved*, (Brooklyn: Melville, 2007) 19-22.

³² Patel, 18.

³³ Patel, 110.

was a right that imposes on all of us a correlative duty to feed those in poverty, then it seems implausible for the reasons we developed in collapsing the negative/positive duties. We need to determine the signification of the human right to avoid severe poverty. It is plausible to suppose that the right to food and the right to be free from severe poverty means that nations should have policies that make it possible for individuals to either produce or have access to food at reasonable prices which means that states avoid policies that “foreseeably and avoidably produce life-threatening poverty.”³⁴ When nations sell off farmland to foreign investors, for example, in countries such as Mozambique, Mali, and the Philippines, pushing local farmers off the land, they cut “access to food...livelihoods are shattered and communities are uprooted.”³⁵ Nation states that permit the sale of farmland to outside investors (in many cases encourage them for the profit) have policies that violate the human rights of their citizens.

Earlier I argued that individuals can’t know the outcomes of individual purchases around the world, and consequently they can’t be held responsible for global poverty when they don’t purchase food from developing nations’ farmers. Does this mean that individuals in affluent countries have no obligations to those who are impoverished of the world? Is it only the responsibility of the nations where those individuals live to protect their human rights to be free from poverty and have other basic necessities like food? Pogge develops an argument that we have a negative duty “not to participate in the imposition of social institutions under which some avoidably lack secure access to the objects of their economic human rights.”³⁶ The most important factors relevant to severe poverty in the world are institutional factors, the national and international background rules and policies within which economic transactions occur. At the international level, Pogge points out “[e]ven small changes in the rules governing international trade, lending, investment, resource use, or intellectual property can have a huge impact on the global incidence of life-threatening poverty.”³⁷ For instance, NAFTA was supposed to open up markets to trade in Mexico, the U.S., in Canada. This agreement seemed like it would advantage poor farmers in Mexico who could sell their products to the US and Canada. The agreement ended up driving 1.2 million small farmers in Mexico out of business (forcing them into the cities and driving wages down 10% in Mexico) since the agreement permitted the US to continue subsidies of their farmers making their corn cheaper than the Mexican produced corn.³⁸ Mexico became an importer of corn after the agreement. NAFTA illustrates how the structural arrangements within which economic activities occur have significant effects on individuals’ economic status. Many of the international economic agreements, such as those of the WTO, advantage the well-off nations and disadvantage the developing nations. National and international structural reforms which are fair would go a long way to eradicating severe global poverty. Since it is foreseeable that international agreements such as NAFTA, where unfair advantage is given to US farmers usually the industrial agribusinesses with tariffs and subsidies, will result in human rights violations to those Mexican farmers who can’t compete, there is a duty to support institutional changes that ensure fair and open international trade rules. Poverty is often a product of international background conditions including international ones that aren’t fair and give unfair advantage to the better off and disadvantage those least well off. Those unfair disadvantages extend to small farmers in this country. Those institutional arrangements violate individuals’ human rights to avoid severe poverty. Rather than a duty to purchase

³⁴ Thomas Pogge, editor *Freedom from Poverty as a Human Right: Who owes what to the Very Poor?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³⁵ Michael Kugelman, “The Global Farmland Rush” *The New York Times* February 5, 2013

³⁶ Pogge, 25.

³⁷ Pogge 26

³⁸ Patel, 61.

individual products to help alleviate poverty, we in democratic countries have duties to support institutional change and ensure international agreements and market conditions which are fair that will enable individuals to have economic opportunities.

Our responsibility to alleviate poverty is appropriately understood at an institutional level, our nation's failure to have fair trade arrangements with developing nations, for instance, harms the poor of those nations-- threatening them with dire economic conditions. Our responsibility as individuals in democratic countries is to pressure our leaders into international agreements or other systemic changes that ensure equitable terms of exchange in the global market. The failure of the Doha agreement to have fair markets in agricultural products, for example, when it permits wealthy nations to continue to subsidize their own farmers putting them at an unfair advantage in the global market. Our duty in regards to the human right to avoid severe poverty is addressed at the institutional level of demanding that our country and other wealthy countries have fair trade agreements and ensuring that a few global corporate interests are not advantaged. If our nation engages in or supports the torture of human beings anywhere in the world we have a duty to pressure our leaders to stop engaging in torture or stop supporting policies that endorse torture. It is plausible to suppose that the specification of the human right to be free from torture would impose on individuals in other democratic countries the negative duty to demand policies that don't lead to torture. The human right to be free life-threatening poverty requires that we support international agreements that don't foreseeably and avoidably lead to severe poverty.

Multiple-values and food choices

Food choices implicate multiple values. The local food movement have directed our focused on sustainability goals in justifying their emphasis on buying local. Acknowledging that we do have duties to avoid harm to others, now and into the future, impels us to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases created by the product we purchase. Everyone, particularly those of us in affluent countries, ought to do our "fair share" to reduce the carbon that goes into the atmosphere and failure to do so is to be partially responsible for climate change and resulting harms from it. It turns out that the modern food system is a major generator of greenhouse gas. In this paper, I argue that "local food" may or may not support the sustainability goals of reducing carbon, concern about water usage, the detrimental effects of pesticides and fertilizers, packaging, refrigeration, and so on. Food choices depend on many factors which are not adequately capture by "food miles." A more accurate assessment of the impact of food is based on what scientists are now calling "life cycle assessment" which is a tool that looks at "cradle to grave" of the life of food.³⁹ It calculates what it take to grow the food, process it, package it, transport it, cook it, and dispose of it. Life cycle assessments are a much more accurate accounting of the environmental effects of food product than food miles (although not as easy to figure out).

We rejected the argument that buying locally produced food rather than food produced by impoverished farmers in the developing world harm the developing world farmers. Like a plethora of choices we make to purchase from one person rather than another, the choices entail that someone else is not benefitted by our purchasing from them. Eating at one restaurant rather than other, even if the avoided restaurant owner is impoverished, is not a case of harm to the latter. Every choice we make benefits some agent but not at the expense of her competitor. Conceptualizing not purchasing from impoverished farmer as harming them, clutters the world with too many harms and destroys our own agency in creating and

³⁹ Poritosh Ro, "A review of life cycle assessment (LCA) on some food products" *Journal of Food Engineering* Vol. 90, Issue 1, January 2009.

maintaining our own life plan. That view destroys agency since we are bandied about by outside forces that undermine our acting on our own purposes.

Nevertheless, since we in affluent nations are using more than our “fair share” of the energy and consequently, we contribute a disproportionate amount of carbon to the atmosphere, we are contributing to the cumulative harm of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. What level of use is appropriate is contentious since we have already used more than we should and advantaged our economies as a result, and the notion of “fair share” of some resource like the atmosphere it is difficult to assess. A starting place is to look at the level at which everyone in the world should be consuming to stop the advance of global climate change, and to use that as a baseline to judge our own consumption. We are not required to completely stop contributing to greenhouse gases, but there is some level one is responsible for not going over. Since food accounts for a huge amount of the greenhouse gases that are going into the atmosphere, our food choices are relevant to our decreasing our carbon footprint.

Because we don't directly harm developing nations' farmers by buying locally produced foods, it doesn't mean that we shouldn't purchase from them. As Singer notes, it takes 15 or 25 times as much energy to grow rice in California as opposed to the low-energy methods of farming rice in Bangladesh.⁴⁰ That gives us a strong reason to purchase from the Bangladesh farmer. Much produce grown in Africa have a smaller carbon footprint than British hothouse vegetables. Beyond those considerations of ecological sustainability, we should understand the effects of poverty on the sustainability of the earth. In the Brundtland commission report, *Our Common Future*, that put sustainability on the world agenda, “sustainability development” meant alleviating poverty. We have significant duties to aid those in need and when the needs of the poor are so apparent as they now are, we have even more demand upon us for relief. Our duties to strangers include those strangers across the world but also those strangers in the future who will be impacted by our current practices. I did argue that the human right to be free from severe poverty does implicate us through our government's policies. We have a duty to ensure intuitional arrangements, intellectual property rules, resource uses, lending, trade rules, and the rules governing economic interactions that are fair so as to avoid the poverty that has resulted from the current globalization.

Purchasing local food can often be “all things considered” the best choice since there are multiple values that come into play. We discussed earlier that some of the considerations for buying local are for supporting local economies and small farmers. Responsibility to sustain one's community including the cultural traditions is part of the normative framework of sustainability. The connection with the food one eats or often now the “reconnection” with food which the local food movement encourages is important to one's health and well-being and maintain the culture of a region. Purchasing from individual farmers builds trust when one engages with that person on a regular basis. Additionally, purchases from local farms sustain farmlands and ensures some level of food security for your region. If all or most food is imported or the crops that are grown in an area are for export then in crisis when importation is not possible there is no local ability to feed the community.

Sustainability is not merely about sustaining natural resources for future generations but sustaining culture.⁴¹ We are responsible to preserve things such as wilderness areas, national parks, and “land health,” treasures of art, democratic institutions, and so on. We rely upon past generations for current bequests, including natural and human-made ones (great works of literature, music and art, as well as cultural traditions we believe are worth preserving), and the future relies upon us for the same. Cultural traditions are tied up with food traditions and can have very specific regional forms that are important to the people of those communities.

⁴⁰ Singer 148.

⁴¹ Brian Norton, *Sustainability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

In sustaining food infrastructure we are passing on to the future those cultural traditions around food.

That said, our food choices should be a mix on considerations especially when thinking about the environment. Often the slogan “think globally, act locally”, is apt for food purchases—local is better. But not always, for instance, buying organic foods, whether local or not has the effect, as the Rodale Institute reports, of sequestering 40% of the world carbon emissions. Organically grown food improves the soil’s health and generally is better for the environment. Sustaining natural resources and sustaining communities, local and global, for the welfare of today and the future, will require a blend of cosmopolitan considerations and local ones.

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