

Ten Principles of Household and Community Food Security.

By Bob Waldrop

Food security is not in the supermarket. It's not in the government. It's not at the emergency services division. True food security is the historical normalcy of packing it in during the abundant times, building that in-house larder, and resting easy knowing that our little ones are not dependent on next week's farmers' market or the electronic cashiers at the supermarket.

– Joel Salatin, *Folks, This Ain't Normal: A Farmer's Advice for Happier Hens, Healthier People, and a Better World*

Permaculture tells us to "start at your doorstep." For most of us in urban areas, the "doorstep to permaculture" is the kitchen.

- x People have more control over their food than almost any other area of life and work. This is true even of college students eating in dormitory cafeterias.
- x It is the most easily accessible and understandable place for people to start.
- x The kitchen provides great short-term rewards for time invested in learning and work.

The permacultured kitchen offers an accessible way to make lifestyle changes that have major (and multiple!) beneficial impacts on the environment, create social justice, and limit the damage we do to the ecologies and watersheds where we live. The beneficial changes propagate outwards and may impact people and ecosystems many hundreds and even thousands of miles away. Everything connects!

Kitchen permaculture increases family, household, and community food security, and is an essential adaptation to the cardinal threats of peak oil, global climate instability, political criminality, and economic chaos.

We need food that is safe, nutritious, and tasty and that increases the quality of our food lives.

Permaculture design can provide a description of the way forward into a more sustainable way of living that cares for people, cares for the planet, and has a care for the future.

These ten principles are a basic design for developing household and community food security. You can enter the process at any one of the ten principles and customize them based on your own personal situation.

1. Prepare meals from basic ingredients.

Somewhere along the line, one meal at a time, people became convinced that a low quality high priced frozen manufactured food-like substance from a big box national superstore was a better deal than a low cost, nutritious, and better tasting home cooked meal.

We think we are too busy to cook. It's Too Much Work. Our days are full of activities. We go, we come, we do this, we do that, and we do the other. We learned to devalue the domestic arts. Advertising conditions us to think that cooking is hard work and a useless way to spend our time. Only unimportant people actually cook, people say who want to sell us their low quality high price frozen manufactured food-like substances, artificially flavored and fortified with "9 essential vitamins."

So it comes to pass that people just don't know how to cook.

Therefore. . . One of the most important “best sustainable practices” for food is preparing meals from basic ingredients. It is the entry level of household and community food security. Fortunately, this is a fun and rewarding activity with practically instant gratification. Preparing meals from basic ingredients takes much less time than people think it does. As with any other skill, there is a learning curve. With practice comes efficiency and tasty meals from your kitchen.

2. Eat with the season.

Our demand for out-of-season fresh vegetables and fruits, imported from long distances during the winter, is one of the more unsustainable aspects of our food systems. We want lettuce salads in the snows of January and fresh grapes, even though our gluttony may take food from the mouths of hungry children in third world countries. This demand drives the dispossession of traditional subsistence farmers in poor countries and sends them into the slums of the cities.

Permaculture design suggests temperance in our choice of foods. Eating out of season drives unsustainability. That's why the permaculture choice is to eat with the season. No green salads in the snows of winter – unless of course someone grows them in your locality with season extension methods that don't involve heating greenhouses with vast amounts of fossil fuels. Microgreens grown inside your sunny windows would be fine. Greens imported from far across the continents and seas?

Just say “no way” to that kind of environmental devastation and injustice against the poor. So when you eat out, don't order and don't pay for out-of-season produce. Get the soup, not the salad, for an appetizer during the winter. Use your economic choices to help the restaurant business become more sustainable.

3. Don't eat meat or poultry from concentrated animal feeding operations. Eat meats from free ranging, humanely-managed flocks and herds or go vegetarian.

Yes, free-range meats may cost more. You can finesse that by simply eating less meat and eating less expensive meats. If you are more traditional, go with a “meatless Friday.” If you are more modern, try a “meatless Monday.” Conventional livestock production, which confines cattle in feedlots while feeding them an unnatural diet of grain and corn is a primary driver of the emissions that produce global climate instability. Research indicates that a pound of hamburger bought at a supermarket owned by a national chain might have DNA from as many as 100 different animals in it.

But wait – there's more, and it's even worse. Many stores and national fast-food restaurants add “pink slime” to their meats, a/k/a “lean finely textured beef.” Corporations make it from mechanically separated meat trimmings (which can include cartilage, connective tissue, and sinew). The manufacturers treat the pink slime with ammonia to disinfect it. By law, as much as 15% of a ground beef product may be made of “pink slime” and the manufacturer doesn't have to say anything about it on the ingredient list.. About 70% of ground beef sold in national chain supermarkets contains pink slime. There's a reason supermarket ground beef is cheap and it's not because they buy quality ingredients.

When you buy supermarket meats, you pay for substandard food and you finance production practices that people consider cruel and inhumane. It is better to buy beef from producers who use more humane animal management practices and do not adulterate their meats with weird ingredients like pink slime.

Know your farmer and where your food comes from.

If there was a truth in labeling law, supermarket chicken would be labeled – “Contents: one small tortured bird.” Egg producers confine their birds in such small spaces that they routinely burn off their beaks because the

chickens lives are so miserable they peck each other and themselves to death.

Modern product line processing of meat chickens includes soaking the carcasses in a chlorine bath that as the day moves along becomes progressively more contaminated with stray chicken guts and feces.

If you can't find free range meats from trustworthy producers, my best advice is "go vegetarian."

4. Grow some food.

Many of us in urban areas live in apartments and don't have access to any land. Even so we have some food production possibilities.

- x Grow vegetables and herbs in pots on balconies, fire escapes, patios, and in sunny windows. Just because you can't grow a lot doesn't mean that you shouldn't grow some. You will be able to grow more food than you think in small areas. Vertical garden structures pack a lot of food into a small footprint.
- x Participate in a community garden.
- x Garden small bits of land. A 3' x 3' square patch of ground can grow more food than you think possible.
- x If you have small land, such as a house on a typical 1/8th acre urban plot, you can grow lots of food. Look at what these people did with their small front yard: <http://www.resilientcommunities.com/a-resilient-home-transformation-youve-got-to-see/>
- x Encourage your local government, schools, churches, and businesses to plant edible landscaping in parks and along streets. Perennial food production plants are great additions for urban and rural spaces. They increase the value of property, and provide high quality locally produced food.

5. Buy some food from your local area, preferably directly from its producers.

In the modern world, our cities' foodsheds are literally the world. This makes our cities' food supply chains long and complicated. This is a problem. The longer and more complicated the supply chain, the more brittle and unsustainable and the less resilient the food system. Encouraging food production in the immediate "neighborhood" of cities (a 100- to 150 mile radius, depending on the size of the city) is of critical importance for community food security.

It's not impossible. The large cities of the 19th century were almost entirely fed from the immediate foodshed around those cities.

If we want a more sustainable, just, local, humane, and resilient food system, there must be a market for the products of sustainable, just, local, humane, and resilient agricultural systems.

This means that people have to be willing to put their money down on the barrel-head and buy what local farms produce. As people make more and more of these kinds of purchasing decisions, the local market grows and that causes local production to grow. It is folly to expect a growth in local agriculture absent a cash market for that production.

It is not necessary to buy 100% local foods immediately. Most of us don't have that kind of access to locally produced foods. What is necessary is to buy "some" of your food from local production, even if it is only three or four pounds of meat or a few pounds of seasonal vegetables each month. This jump starts the production/buying cycle. Be a missionary about this! Encourage your friends, family, co-workers, and the general public to buy some local food.

Most areas will benefit from additional methods of buying from local producers. Typical structures that facilitate local production are farmers' markets, roadside stands, Community Supported Agriculture programs,

and food cooperatives. There may be municipal regulations that complicate or hinder the development of local agriculture marketplaces and those must be addressed by local governments.

One effective model is the local food cooperative, which is a food cooperative that distributes locally produced food and nonfood items. These kinds of cooperatives do not have stores. They operate via an online ordering system coupled with a volunteer, or mostly volunteer, delivery system. You can read a case study done by the Northwest Cooperative Development organization about Idaho's Bounty, one of the nation's local food cooperatives, which you can find online at <http://www.nwcdc.coop/Resources/IBCCaseStudy.pdf> .

6. Keep some of your household savings in the form of food.

In today's uncertain economy, people need resources that they can depend upon if they lose their job or have to take a cut in pay. Besides money in the bank, food storage is an excellent hedge against household hard times. Food storage is important for resilience since there are many things that could happen without warning overnight that could stop the steady workings of our food processing and distribution systems. In such a catastrophic event, grocery stores and local warehouses would empty quickly. Food storage is much more important than most people think. Ask the people of New York City impacted by hurricane Sandy about this. NB: Also store water.

7. Shop wisely and frugally at locally owned supermarkets.

Supermarket shopping will remain a reality for many of us for years going forward. Local food systems, even with all of the growth of the past decade, remain insufficiently developed to feed cities.

Those of us living in dormitories on campus still shop for food on occasion. Smart shopping is an important survival skill for all of us.

Think about your food dollars as votes. Every time you spend a food dollar, you vote for something – good, bad, or indifferent. Make as many “good, better, and best” decisions as you can in the supermarket while avoiding as many bad choices as possible.

Supermarket permaculture tactics include –

- x Support local and regionally owned supermarket stores and chains and food cooperatives. Don't buy from national chain supermarkets.
- x Support locally owned convenience stores instead of nationally owned stores.
- x Support local and regional brands instead of national brands.
- x Support organic products (but don't buy organic vegetables out of season!). Use the Environmental Working Group's Shoppers Guide to Pesticides in Produce to decide what must be bought as organic, and what can be bought convention. Here's a hint: onions and corn on the cob are fine in their conventional form. But only eat organic strawberries, apples, celery, lettuce, or peaches. Never buy those in conventional produce sections. You may be consuming residues from as many as 20 different pesticides.
- x Buy low on the food chain – that is, purchase more basic ingredients and fewer prepared products.

8. Preserve and process food at home or in cooperation with neighbors.

You can make your own ketchup at home for less money than you can buy a name brand ketchup at the store. It will taste better and be more healthy. The time to buy produce for the year is during the summer, when production is high and prices are at their best. Preserve some of the summer bounty for eating later in the winter. Freeze it, can it, dry it, eat it later. Very tasty.

Many of us will find it helpful to do processing and preserving in groups. Many hands do in fact make for

lighter work. Organizations can support community capacities by stocking community kitchens (such as churches and schools) with food preservation and processing equipment. With a physical infrastructure in place, skills can be taught and groups organized to approach this job as a team.

9. Avoid eating at national chain or franchised restaurants or fast food locations. Choose locally-owned when eating out.

Always think of your food dollars as votes and always “vote local” when you eat out. National chains and franchises siphon dollars out of local economies and feed parasitic corporate aristocracies that don’t contribute to the local economy. It is as important to apply this principle when you eat restaurant or fast food meals or when you buy take-out as it is when you buy ingredients to prepare home-cooked meals.

10. Support public and private initiatives that promote organic gardening and farming, free-range and pastured flocks and herds, urban agriculture, local food systems, and community capacities for food security. Leave no one behind for the wolves to devour.

We are all in this together. There are many obstacles to local and community food security. Government rules and regulations can increase the work, expense, and confusion of locally producing and locally distributing foods (and nonfood necessary items too, like soap and clothing). The prevailing systems subsidize long and complicated supply chains by causing unnecessary problems for local producers and distributors. That way of doing things is an artifact of cheap energy and cheap money and those are going away bye bye forever.

So anything we can do to streamline the system, eliminate unnecessary market barriers, and prevent rent-seekers from over-regulating and cartelizing the local food marketplaces moves us onwards toward household and community food security.

Particular attention must be paid to increasing community food security capacities in low income areas and food deserts. Where markets fail, community food security groups must step up and offer technical support and material assistance for development of alternative food structures such as urban market garden initiatives, community canning and food-preservation kitchens, and organization of food cooperatives.

"This magical, marvelous food on our plate, this sustenance we absorb, has a story to tell. It has a journey. It leaves a footprint. It leaves a legacy. To eat with reckless abandon, without conscience, without knowledge; folks, this ain't normal." -- *Joel Salatin, Folks, This Ain't Normal: A Farmer's Advice for Happier Hens, Healthier People, and a Better World*

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