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A Summer of Local

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Springtime in the mountains. Snow recedes slowly along the peaks, rivers rush with renewed vigor, and the world begins to turn green again. Somewhere in the sunny, singing moments between the days of balmy drizzle, valley residents rush into their gardens to wake up winter soil and sow seeds in anticipation of warmer days to come.

Rains in late May have already coaxed early crops to the table as asparagus and rhubarb begin to ripen during the cool, damp days of spring. The season starts with the first signs of sunshine and warmer nights. In a region characterized by a short growing season, growing your own food presents its own unique challenges—time is of the essence. As days lengthen seedlings begin to emerge, and with them the hopes of saturating the kitchen with food grown with care, close to home.

“Growing your own” is a motto for many, but has grown in popularity in recent years. The cost of food production and transportation in the United States, and elsewhere, is increasing steadily as oil prices continue to rise.

With a food economy so reliant of fossil fuels the parallel nature of rising costs is significant, spurring many families to fill in the gaps in their grocery carts with produce grown in

their own backyards or within their own communities.

Montanans, like many other citizens, are seeking out new ways of thinking about their food systems. As energy costs rise globally, buying or producing locally has become a valuable alternative that supports local economies, producers, and community vitality.

With a national food culture rooted in large-scale production, processing, and transportation, eating locally brings the cycle of food a little closer to home. Buying locally drastically reduces the distance food travels, using less fuel in transportation and limiting the travel time of each vegetable before it reaches the consumer. Reduced travel time means those wonderful summer tomatoes, cucumbers, and watermelon can ripen in the field—retaining their highest nutritional quality... and taste.



Locally grown produce from the Seeley-Swan.

What’s more, the environmental benefits of locally produced food extend beyond reduced resource consumption, retaining soil integrity, reducing water use, preserving biodiversity, and reducing the number of pollutants entering a landscape. Just to name a few.

Small-scale growers typically use smaller machinery which helps to reduce the disturbance, compaction, and erosion of top-soil. Small, multi-crop gardens also tend to use less fertilizer and have fewer pest problems, allowing them to limit the influx of chemicals and supplemental nutrients entering soil and water systems.

Local producers typically use less water per unit in irrigation as well by preventing water loss that is characteristic of large, inefficient irrigators. In short, maintaining small-scale production and locality of food has almost innumerable and immeasurable environmental benefits that help keep local landscapes working and enrich the communities that are a part of them.

Buying from local farmer's markets strengthens local economies by supporting community growers and tightening the relationship between producer and consumer. Farmer's markets allow you to see the face that grew your vegetables or meat from infancy—supporting the farmer directly and largely cutting out both processing and shipping.

Important connections are made at farmer's markets; communities are supported and good food is put on the table. Perhaps above all else, farmers markets are an opportunity to connect with friends and neighbors among spreads of rich greens and fragrant garlic. Spending warm summer days in a convergence of food, land, and community.

In a valley as rich and diverse as the Seeley-Swan, farmer's markets are an opportunity to bolster a sense of community, support valley growers, and bring the relationship of food and land a little bit closer to home.

Jan LaPlante, local grower and Condon market organizer, will willingly tell you of her excitement for the market

season. She explains that the Condon Community Farmer's Market is not just about the food, "People come and stay for a while, they talk and visit, it's a community social."

The Condon Community Farmer's Market is in its second year this year and will feature both produce and craft vendors with goods including mint and peppermint, strawberries, pie cherries, goatmilk soaps, leatherworks, and jams. The Condon market runs every Wednesday from 2 – 6pm, July 2nd through September and is located at mile marker 44 on Charles Road.

Additionally, the Seeley Lake market is celebrating its first season at Littlebird's Marketplace and has vendors selling locally raised vegetables, beef, lamb, as well as crafts and native plants. It is also a current drop site for blue-bag recycling. Littlebird's runs every Sunday, June 15th through September 14th from 10 am – 2 pm.

So get out and enjoy the growing season in the valley, support your community, and eat well.