

Why eat local, seasonal food?

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It's August! Time for peaches, tomatoes, and tired critiques of seasonal and/or local eating.

I should take a pass on more of these, but [come on, James Ramsden](#). Ordinarily such articles either quibble with environmental math or laugh off the notion of some unquantifiable value in knowing where your food comes from. Ramsden rehearses both, the scientific critique and the sciencistic one. Then it gets worse:

Other seasonal [cheerleaders use words such as "harmony"](#). It's a nice idea, but it's as wishy-washy as any winter strawberry....

Perhaps the most compelling argument of all is that of simply supporting British producers. Unless you're after blood oranges or pineapples, by shopping seasonally you should, by and large, find yourself buying British....

Ultimately, however, our understanding of food seasons, while clearly leaving room for improvement, is less of a concern than countless other defects in our relationship with food. There was a time [when the "hungry gap"](#), was a cause for genuine alarm, the unyielding fields making for spartan dinner tables. I can't help wondering if our forebears wouldn't be tickled by our sniffiness at eating green beans in March.

Now, the situation in Great Britain is different from the U.S. in any number of ways. But note how, after dismissing the concept of harmony out of hand, Ramsden pivots to sort-of-support for buying British and then contrasts the issue with hunger—as if harmony, supporting nearby farmers, and people not being hungry are unrelated concepts.

What's missing here is an appreciation that local, seasonal eating isn't just about distance; it's about *scale*. It's about local and regional economies that have been devastated by national and global ones. Here in the States, robust small-scale economies used to provide a degree of social cohesion and harmony—concretely among people, not just wishy-washily with the dirt. They also brought a modest degree of prosperity, as money changed hands but stayed in the community.

These days, a lot of people in these places are hungry. The loss of smaller-scale agriculture is hardly the only cause, but it's been a major factor in the decline of small-town America.

So while I try to eat locally and seasonally (I'm hardly strict about it), I don't do it to cut my carbon footprint, to proudly recite my farmer's name, or to be one with the dirt. I do it to contribute to the project of rebuilding smaller-scale economies in the region where I live. Harmony's not a bad word for that—but it's a concrete and complex harmony, not the thin notion Ramsden so casually flicks away.