

Life in LAMORINDA

The Rise of the Locavores

By Sophie Braccini



Richard Hauser of Moraga at his booth at the Moraga Farmers' Market

The Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors has been working with the County Agricultural Commissioner and County Health Services Department to develop a food purchasing policy that maximizes the use of locally grown fresh foods at County hospitals and other facilities. Are they implementing a "locavores" mandate? Not quite, but they seem to be in sync with many residents, retailers and restaurants in Lamorinda who strive to consume (or sell) locally grown food as often as possible.

The term "locavore" was coined about three years ago by a group of four Bay Area women who wanted to eat only food produced within one hundred miles of their homes. The movement grew, rapidly surfing on the wave of the call for fresher, tastier food that does not require too much energy to produce. Most "green" movements promote "locavoring."

"I try to be a locavore," says Bart Carr, co-founder of

Sustainable Lafayette, "the very best is to eat from one's garden and we've grown summer crops over the past years." When his garden is not operational, the Lafayette resident goes to the Farmers' Markets in Walnut Creek or Moraga, and when shopping in supermarkets he asks for the origin of the organic foods that are available there. Another of his favorite spots is the Hurst farm on St Mary's Road (across from the baseball field). The Hursts grow and sell vegetables in season from their half-acre plot.

This local family farm is one among a few others in Lamorinda. The Hauser family in Moraga cultivates a small farm on a one-third acre property. They sell their produce at the Moraga Farmers' Market on Sunday mornings.

Wannabe locavores have a large range of motivations, which can be health related: "Eating locally provides a good variety of nutrients as the available fruits and vegetables change

from season to season," says real estate broker and Moraga resident Ben Olsen. "As a vegetarian family that prefers organic food, we end up being locavores almost by default. We get the majority of our produce from our garden, from a community garden or from local vendors at the Farmers' Market." Olsen feels blessed to be living in a place that is surrounded by some of the greatest food and beverages on Earth. Here we can get nearly any food item from the Central Valley, and have access to wonderful wines from Napa and beers from the dozens of breweries in the area.

For others, eating local foods is part of a deeper experience. "I go to the Farmers' Market each Sunday morning for the sense of community it affords," says Moraga resident Rob Lucacher.

"It provides a closer relationship with the people who grow our food, a better understanding of how our food is grown, and the role that food plays in binding us together as a community. I especially like to peruse the fish stall at the market as it gives me a real time understanding of what's happening on the water when I can't spend the day fishing myself."

Lucacher confides that improving his carbon footprint comes only as a second thought and he is not the only one who questions the energy efficiency of locavoring. Surprisingly enough, from the University of California Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program came the news that local foods are not necessarily energy efficient.

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Jill Mercurio, Woman Working

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After meeting her husband and wanting to start a family, she needed a position that wouldn't require her to travel all the time. She obtained a position in Concord as a senior civil engineer and was in charge of all construction and capital projects for six years. She was then recruited by Vince to come to Moraga, and says, "I love to work in this town, we get to tackle a wider variety of issues, and the people are wonderful to work with."

Her responsibility as a Public Works Director has mostly to do with oversight, planning and budgeting. "Dan Bernie, the Public Work Superintendent, does extraordinary work with his team," she says.

Her engineering mandate takes most of her time. She manages all of the capital and development projects for Moraga. She enjoys applying for grants that will solve direct problems. "You don't go after grants just because the money is available," she explains, "it has to be a pre-existing project for the town. We have limited human resources; adding extra

projects wouldn't make any sense."

The most recent cases she worked on were grants to finance a stop light at Ascot Drive and Moraga Road, and to fund a sidewalk on Corliss, leading to Los Perales Elementary School.

One of Mercurio's largest tasks these past two years has been the management of the installation of the new EBMUD pipeline on Moraga Road, with the objective of minimizing the impact on the town and protecting the infrastructure. She started a "pavement deflection testing" a year ago. "It is the fairest way to measure degradation," says Mercurio of a process that measures how much the road bends under stress. This technique allows the assess damage in the underlying structure of the pavement, which is a big risk with heavy equipment working on the road for months. The first test was done a year ago, the second just before the work started and the third will be done afterwards. The three measures will give an accurate picture of what degradation has been done by the EBMUD project, once the natural

passage of time is deducted.

Unfortunately, Moraga Road is not her only challenge. High on her list is the terrible condition of Rheem Boulevard. As of today, the rehabilitation project is on the five-year capital improvement project list, but with no date or money allocated. Altogether, the roads need \$8.4 million in work. "The best way is to get the design done and then look for additional funding," explains Mercurio. She is working with Ellen Tauscher to obtain federal funding for a Rheem Blvd. project.

Her other big concern is the storm drain system. "We had a big problem two years ago with a sink hole," she remembers, "we can't see the system and do not really know the state it is in. But I would rather know and plan for what has to be done." So Mercurio engaged in a videotaping of the whole drainage system that will give the town an accurate picture by fall. She will be working hard to plan and find resources to protect Moraga's infrastructure.



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