



Yellow's Green Corner:

Back To The Garden

In Collaboration with the Earthrose Institute (www.earthrose.org)

"Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants." That's the advice journalist and author Michael Pollan offers in his new book, *In Defense of Food*. This philosophy resonates with all of the current research addressing the diseases of our modern culture including diabetes, obesity, heart disease, and cancer.

What Pollan calls the "American diet" of refined white flour, polished rice, soy and corn oil, corn sweeteners, and corn-fed animal fats has now rampaged across world markets, threatening traditional diets and their cultures.

According to Pollan, the food crops currently subsidized are corn, wheat, soy and rice. Growing little else but corn and soy means we end up with a fast food diet. In essence, these commodity programs are subsidies for the creation of junk and fast food, not REAL food that could have a positive impact on public health.

"Per capita fructose consumption has increased 25 percent in the past thirty years," Pollan writes. The mass production of food for a mass society was of course inevitable, but was it also inevitable, as one nutrition expert put it, that "we're in the middle of a national experiment in the mainlining of glucose," the form in which fructose is metabolized in the liver and transmitted by insulin to the cells to be used as energy? We assimilate the

complex nutrients of traditional foods slowly, but the rush of refined sugars supplied by our industrialized diet overwhelms the ability of insulin to process it. The result

is a sudden jolt of energy and soon a craving for more, as the unused glucose is stored as triglycerides, a fat. "An American born in 2000 has a 1 in 3 chance of developing diabetes in his lifetime," Pollan writes. "80 percent of diabetics will suffer from heart disease." This is a global pandemic in the making."

"It appears that the American food, chemical and pharmaceutical industries have created partnerships. Giant corporations like Monsanto are not only proliferating the food supply with toxic genetically modified ingredients, but they have also succeeded in slapping patents on a huge number of crop seeds, patenting life forms for the first time, controlling much of the world's seeds and therefore the food supply: an incredibly powerful position," Pollan writes.

A new "Slow Food" movement is emerging globally in reaction to the fast food industry.

A sustainable movement

During World War II, the U.S. Department





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of Agriculture, at the urging of Eleanor Roosevelt, encouraged citizens to plant "Victory Gardens" around their homes and neighbors cooperated to turn vacant lots into community cropland. In 1943, 20 million U.S. gardeners produced eight million tons of food. San Francisco's Golden Gate Park became the home to 250 gardens producing fresh, local food for city residents.

When Michael Pollan proposed in an article recently in the *New York Times*, that the White House plant an organic fruit and vegetable garden, he didn't know that the First Family would take him to heart. They did.

Today, in suburbia and in the inner city, the backyard farmer movement is growing...and bringing sustainability to suburban and urban communities.

With innovative approaches, organic farming is gathering momentum and educating people on how backyards and vacant lots have the potential to feed families and communities.

The growing interest is related directly to the rising cost of gasoline and food as well as increased interest in having sustainable agriculture. Looking to save on the grocery bill in hard economic times along with recent concerns over food safety have spurred a gardening boom. More of us are wanting to know where food comes from and what

was done to it. Concerns over pesticides, genetically engineered seeds, depleted soil, and nutrient content in our fruits and vegetables are all fueling this movement.

Growing local, and eating organic provides a density of phytonutrients, that are receiving a lot of press lately. Planting seeds and harvesting them feeds our body, mind, and spirit. For many people it is their way of reconnecting to nature while providing physical activity, and releasing stress. The community garden also becomes a meeting place to know your neighbors. It allows children to connect to the earth and to healthy foods. It offers so many of the qualities inherent in traditional cultures while living in the urban twenty first century.

Home gardens take toil but save oil. While your average tomato travels 1,500 fossil-fueled miles from farm to fork, produce from an urban garden seldom needs to travel more than 1,500 inches. In 2007, about 22% of all U.S. households (25 million homes) had some sort of backyard vegetable garden, according to the National Gardening Association. And this year, the Garden Writers Association reports, 39% of America's flower gardens also will be growing vegetables—up 5% from last year.

There are many ways to start a community



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garden. Whether you're working with friends, neighbors, school, or a local organization, there are many things you'll want to consider before you ever dig the first hole. For detailed information on how to start a community garden: www.communitygarden.org.

Buy Local

If you cannot have your own garden, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) has become a popular way for consumers to buy local, seasonal food directly from a farmer. Here are the basics: a farmer offers a certain number of "shares" to the public. Typically the share consists of a box of vegetables, but other farm products may be included. Interested consumers purchase a share (aka a "membership" or a "subscription") and in return receive a box (bag, basket) of seasonal produce each week throughout the farming season. This arrangement creates several rewards for both the farmer and the consumer. For information of CSA in our area, go to www.CSA.org.

Other websites of interest

- www.PANNA.org (Pesticide action network)
- www.localharvest.org/csa (Community Agriculture)

Factoid: Agricultural Lands

A huge percentage of the world's open spaces

are set aside for cattle. This is especially true in fragile habitats such as the western U.S., In tropical regions of Asia and South and Central American, cattle production is a major reason for burning and clearing rainforests. About 260 million acres of forests in the U.S. have been cleared to create cropland for cattle, and many millions more have been cleared, and are cleared every day, in forests around the world.

Meat production requires not only land but also energy and water. Sixteen pounds of wheat and up to 2,500 gallons of water are necessary to produce one pound of grain-fed beef. Cattle production also consumes large amounts of fossil fuels - about a gallon of gasoline per pound of beef - and produces water pollution. Chicken and pork production also require large amounts of water, grain, and energy and result in significant water and air pollution. This is especially true of "factory farms" or confined-animal feeding operations, which have polluted waterways throughout the U.S.