

Karen Telleen-Lawton: ‘Just Food’ Gaining Ground

Local efforts cultivate the community-building side of farming

Weekly produce delivery — one small box — from the John Givens Farm. (Karen Telleen-Lawton / Noozhawk photo)

By **Karen Telleen-Lawton, Noozhawk Columnist** | Published on 07.26.2010

There’s a miracle in the making, and it’s as simple as good food that tastes good. “Just food” is a concept that something as important as eating should incorporate food that tastes good, is healthful for the body, supports the local community and doesn’t harm the Earth in production.

Just food is practiced in various forms, including farming internships, community-supported agriculture, and food grown for community kitchens. It also embraces fruit and vegetable stands adjacent to working fields, where parents can choose local produce while exposing their children to lessons about where food comes from.

The Five Loaves Project takes advantage of [Santa Barbara Community Church’s](#) 40-acre plot near Foothill Road and San Marcos Pass. Church members and the larger community can come anytime to dig, plant, weed or pick; the fresh produce is delivered to local programs such as [Backyard Harvest](#) and the [Unity Shoppe](#).

The Abundant Table Farm Project is an Episcopal-based program associated with the campus ministry at [Cal State Channel Islands](#) using leased acreage in Oxnard. It offers 10 practical tips to work toward food that is more aligned with the needs of people and the

needs of the Earth:

- » Know where your food comes from.
- » Buy fair trade.
- » Use animal products sparingly.
- » Cook from scratch.
- » Cook from what you have.
- » Know what's native.
- » Check out local garden projects.
- » Rethink plastic.
- » Consider horticultural therapy.
- » Support eateries that buy locally.

It's not difficult to deduce the importance of each of these. (1) If you know where your food comes from, you're less likely to ingest something that's unhealthful or unsustainably grown. Pocket-sized guides can help you buy fish that is safe and not overharvested.

Buying fair trade items (2) gives some assurance (not guaranteed of course) that your purchases don't support slavery, child labor or other unethical practices. Animal products (3) are a rich source of protein, but they are a huge drain on the Earth's terrestrial resources when eaten in the amounts westerners do, and bring the added

responsibility of ethical treatment and biochemical use issues.

Cooking from scratch (4) means you know how much salt, refined sugar and fat your food contains. Knowing what's native (6) helps you choose garden plants that grow in local soil and sustain native animals and insects. Rethinking plastic (8) means considering what plastic containers add to microwaved food, as well as where your plastic bags might end up (such as the bellies of fish and birds).

Supporting local markets and eateries (10) that buy locally is easy in our agriculture-rich area. A few that make special efforts are [Sojourner Café](#), [Hungry Cat](#), [Zookers](#), [Elements](#), [Blue Agave](#), Savoy Café, New Frontiers, the [Isla Vista Coop](#), [Mattei's Tavern](#), [Tri-County Produce](#), [Lazy Acres](#), Montecito Village Grocery and [Los Olivos Market](#).

Besides supporting restaurants that use local food, home cooks are partaking in an increasingly popular distribution process called a CSA — community supported agriculture (7) — wherein farmers deliver a box of produce each week to participating members. The Harvest Share Program ([Fairview Gardens](#)) and the [John Givens Farm](#) both run CSAs, and there are several other produce delivery options.

Emiko Corey grew up in Santa Barbara (her name was Jen Higa), growing produce with her grandfather and appreciating the taste of fresh food. She worked as the farm manager at Fairview Gardens for two years, where she came to understand the community-building side of farming.

“I saw how having an urban farm could be the hub of bringing

community together. Besides that, I love homegrown food,” said Corey, who also helped found the Five Loaves Project. “We can pretend we have control, but in the end we’re just helping nature do what it wants to do. It’s so transforming; it’s a miracle.”

— *Karen Telleen-Lawton’s column is a mélange of observations supporting sustainability. Graze her writing and excerpts from Canyon Voices: The Nature of Rattlesnake Canyon at www.CanyonVoices.com.*