



## **HIGH LIFE DECODED: WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT IN-SEASON FRUIT?**

**Just because you can find strawberries in January doesn't mean you should eat them. We find out why.**

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For most of existence, the words *seasonal* and *local* were rarely used in the context of food; it was just food, and people ate what grew nearby at any given time of year because that's what was available to them. After World War II, when industrialization and transportation took off, agriculture changed, and we began to lose our connection to the source of our food.

Today, farmer's markets and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs that support local farmers are rekindling that connection. They help our local economies, our land, and the air we breathe, and if we want to continue to savor the taste of a tart summer strawberry or a sweet cherry tomato, they need our support.

The arguments for eating seasonal and local produce are intertwined. By vowing to eat locally, you are automatically eating seasonally—easy. It works pretty well in the spring, summer, and fall, but what about in the winter?

Moreover, there are foods like avocados and oranges that will not grow in every region. To save the environment, do we have to give them up? The trick is understanding where food comes, when it's in season, and how to make smart decisions without completely ignoring your craving for a blueberry in February.

To find out why seasonality is worth caring about, we turn to the expert.

**The Expert:** An Ohio native, Paula Lukats became the CSA program manager for the New York organization [Just Food](#) because she wanted to help her local communities. Every time she returned to her hometown, she says she would see fewer and fewer farms. Something needed to be done.

### **EATING FRUIT IN SEASON IS IMPORTANT FOR THE ECONOMY AND FOR THE ENVIRONMENT.**

**Lukats says:** When we send trucks from Chile or even California to transport pints of strawberries, barrels of peaches, or tomatoes across the country, we are also sending more harmful emissions into the air; by eating seasonally and therefore locally, we lessen that carbon footprint. By eating fruit in season, we also help local farmers maintain their livelihood so that we

can continue to have fresh, seasonal fruit available to us in the future. Additionally, maintaining open spaces and working farms are better for the environment than the putting up condos.

## **FRUIT THAT IS IN SEASON IN YOUR REGION IS MORE NUTRITIOUS AND TASTES BETTER WHEN IT GETS TO YOU.**

**Lukats says:** Fruit that is being shipped far distances is picked before it is ripe and sits in transit, where it begins to lose nutritional value. Tomatoes are a good example. When they are being shipped over a long distance, they are picked when they are just barely turning red. In transit, they soften and develop their bright red color along the way, but they never properly ripen so they don't develop that sweetness. You may have also experienced this with strawberries in wintertime—they look big and beautiful, but when you bite into them, they don't have that sweet, homegrown taste.

## **IF YOU LIVE IN A PLACE WHERE YOU CAN'T ALWAYS EAT SEASONAL PRODUCE, CHOOSE TO EAT WHAT IS LOCAL AND IN SEASON WHEN YOU CAN.**

**Lukats says:** If it is grown nearby, it is grown in your climate. That being said, I live in the Northeast, so there are some things are not available to me. My philosophy is to eat whatever you can get locally—which for us is within 250 miles, or enough time to drive in and out of New York City in a day—while it is in season. Going to farmer's markets and participating in CSAs are options that are available in some form year-round now. For the things that we are not going to ever be able to grow in our region—like citrus fruits and avocados—you don't have to stop eating them. It's okay to buy those fruits that can only be grown farther away out of season because they have to be shipped anyway.

## **KNOWING WHEN, WHERE, AND HOW FOOD IS GROWN ALLOWS PEOPLE TO HAVE A DEEPER CONNECTION TO WHAT THEY EAT, AND ALSO MAKE HEALTHIER FOOD CHOICES.**

**Lukats says:** There are so many parents whose kids wouldn't eat vegetables until they went to a local farm or to a CSA distribution spot and got to pick the apples or raspberries themselves. By picking their food, it became *theirs*, and they can start to see their farmers in the way that they see their doctors or any other person who is integral in their lives.

CSAs are a unique way for consumers to connect with the person who grows their food; for farmers, they provide a guaranteed market and economic stability as well as direct feedback from customers about what they want. When people see that there is a person behind the food they eat, and that this person makes choices with their health in mind, they are more likely to do the same.

## **IN THE WINTER, FREEZING AND CANNING ALLOW PEOPLE TO EXTEND THE SEASON IN WHICH THEY CAN ENJOY FRUIT AT ITS BEST.**

**Lukats says:** I have strawberries and rhubarb in my freezer to make strawberry-rhubarb sauce or rhubarb yogurt in January. Like me, many home cooks are developing an interest in home skills like freezing and canning to preserve fruit while it is in season to use throughout the year. In late spring, berries and rhubarb grow locally; in July, there are cherries, apricots, peaches, and plums; and as you get to fall, we get apples and pears. During these seasons, farmers have these crops in bulk—sometimes more than they are able to move. They too are experimenting with flash freezing and other methods to store fruit when it is at its optimal state to make it easier on the home cook. However, there is something to be said about waiting for strawberry season, so when the summer comes and you buy fresh strawberries, you know that they will taste how they should—maybe even sweeter because you've been waiting for them.

## **THERE ARE HUGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE BEING LEFT OUT OF THE HEALTHY FOOD MOVEMENT. BY INVESTING IN THE SEASONAL PRODUCE OF LOCAL FARMERS, WE CAN HELP THOSE PEOPLE MAKE BETTER FOOD CHOICES TOO.**

**Lukats says:** Everybody creates their own matrix—whether they want local, seasonal, organic, sustainably grown—to decide what is the best fit for them and their families. But there are many neighborhoods that, no matter what they would like to eat, do not have those options available to them. At Just Food, our mission is to give all communities the means to bring healthy food to their people in whatever way they decide. By encouraging people to think about seasonal and local produce and why it matters to support their local farmers, we can provide more nutritious and sustainably grown food to more people.