



Garlic: Buying Local Helps Reduce Pollution And Protect Your Health

The transportation-related pollution from importing Chinese garlic includes 39 times more particulate matter and 6 times more global warming impact than transporting garlic grown in California.

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What are the hidden costs of the food you eat? The distance your food travels from the field to your plate (known as food miles) can substantially add to global warming *and* can increase many health risks such as asthma, cancer, and premature deaths. Let's compare locally grown garlic with imported garlic traveling 7,300 miles by ship from China to California.

Why does it matter how far your garlic has traveled?

How your food is grown, stored, transported, processed and cooked can all influence how it impacts climate change and the environment. Transportation-related impacts are particularly important for imported foods, like garlic. Americans eat an average of 2.6 pounds of garlic each year, almost half of which is imported—a percentage that has doubled since the early 1990s. In California alone, more than 63 million pounds of garlic are imported per year—almost all from China, which means the garlic makes a 7,300-mile journey in cargo ships and trucks to the Ports of Los Angeles and Oakland, where it then is sent to supermarkets across the state and beyond. This long journey has major costs both to the environment and to people's health. At the same time, California is home to

Gilroy, the "Garlic Capital of the World" and each year exports about the same amount of garlic as is imported into the state.

Locally grown versus imported garlic in California

The transportation associated with importing garlic from China into California causes the release of about 4.5 million pounds of pollutants each year. This includes roughly 4.4 million pounds (2,185 tons) of global warming pollution annually—the equivalent amount of carbon dioxide emitted from 400 vehicles. Another 120,000 pounds (60 tons) of soot and smog-forming pollutants are released into the air—the amount of pollution from 13,000 vehicles. This pollution is responsible for asthma attacks and missed school days due to respiratory disease in California children.

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In 2005, the transport of garlic from China to California using trucks and cargo ships resulted in the release of an estimated 4.5 million pounds of pollutants that contributed to global warming and caused unhealthy air quality in California.

Five things you can do to help reduce your food miles

Choosing to buy local food can reduce global warming pollution, improve air quality, and protect your health. Here are five steps you can take as an individual to protect your environment and your health—without sacrificing the taste and quality of your food:

1. Buy locally grown garlic. Garlic is available year round in California.
2. Buy produce from your local farmers' market. Besides being better for the environment, freshly picked fruits and vegetables are nutritionally better and have more taste! You might also be able to sign up for deliveries of food baskets from local farms, so check for community supported agriculture (CSA) programs in your area. For more information on buying local visit <http://guide.buylocalca.org/> or www.localharvest.org.
3. Ask the grocery stores, restaurants, and work cafeterias that you frequent to carry local foods and include country of origin on food labels. You can find a sample letter to send to them at www.nrdc.org/foodmiles.
4. Encourage businesses and government bodies in your area to create farmers' markets and to adopt procurement policies that favor locally grown, organic, and sustainably harvested foods.
5. Tell the USDA to implement the provision of the 2002 Farm Bill requiring food labels on produce items to include the country of origin. You can find a sample letter to send them at www.nrdc.org/foodmiles.



The Environmental and Health Price Tag in California

- 4.4 million pounds of carbon dioxide (CO₂)
- 114,000 pounds of smog-forming nitrogen oxides (NO_x)
- 6,000 pounds of particulate matter (PM₁₀)
- Up to 14 cases of asthma per year
- Up to 260 missed school days per year