

# Eaton Eating Local Helps Environment



Photograph by Ellen McCurdy

By Claire Huttinger

Most people wonder, to some extent, how much industrialization we can impose on our earth before we destroy its ability to support life. And with a growing population, economic efficiency is a vital concern too. We should be able to enjoy living and learning on earth while we are careful not to damage it beyond repair. We have a responsibility that includes many aspects, one important one being pollution control. We have developed some rather effective ways of severely damaging the earth through absolute carelessness.

We can even control the weather. Scientists believe that our expulsion of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere will cause major alterations in the earth's climate, the results of which they can only speculate on, not predict.

A large part of carbon dioxide pollution comes from overusage of automobiles for food transportation. A group of people from Canton decided to try an experiment that would help cut down on air pollution. The experiment was to live on foods that need not be imported to the Canton area. Jane Eaton, whom you may have seen working as the librarian at the Valentine Reading Room, took part in this experiment and talked to me about her reasons for doing it.

The problem of carbon dioxide pollution is not very complicated to

understand, though it's not a very obvious environmental danger. To know about why CO<sub>2</sub> is dangerous is to be able to join those who are working to keep it under control.

Gas exchanges go on constantly in the environment. Plants convert carbon dioxide into oxygen which is inhaled by animals and exhaled as CO<sub>2</sub> for the plants. Another way of putting CO<sub>2</sub> into the air is by burning fossil fuels. You can probably think of a lot of things that we may or may not need daily which burn gas, oil or coal, things ranging from factories to Bunsen burners. All this CO<sub>2</sub> is too much for land and water plants to absorb, so it just hangs out in the atmosphere, absorbing the sun's radiation that would otherwise bounce off the earth, and back into space. This trapped warmth, scientists say, will build up and cause a "greenhouse effect", increasing the earth's overall temperature by 2-3 degrees C. This phenomenon could take place with in 20 to 50 years (our lifetime, folks). Speculations have been made on just what life would be like under such conditions. A model at the Metropolitan Museum of Natural History pictures Manhattan Island under water up to about the 20th floor, due to melted glaciers. References from the New Scientist and the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists seem to agree that the results would be devastating to agriculture in the Northern Hemisphere. The climate would be both warmer and drier, and the change would be enough to put an end to U.S. grain production.

The benefit foreseen of a warmer

earth would be more rain for the desert lands of the south, meaning that the Middle East, India and much of the Third World would be able to grow grain. Asia would grow more rice. Once the "greenhouse effect" has reached this point, the infrared light from the sun would not even enter the atmosphere, and the environment would be once again stable. Just different. The Third World countries, rather than the U.S. or the U.S.S.R. would have to learn to do the farming. One can foresee that political repercussions would be hairy; famine and war would be very possible. It seems that someone once said something about the poor inheriting the earth, but we'll see.

At any rate, it might be nice to know that all this catastrophe can be avoided if we cut down on our burning of fossil fuels. Jane Eaton and the group discussed ways in which we could change the way we live to use less fuel, without it's being too painful, and they decided to live on locally grown food for one week.



St. Lawrence County imports most of its food, although almost any North American vegetable can be grown here, and we grow meat and some fruits to boot. Not only does this needless transportation cough that CO<sub>2</sub> into the air, but the food has to be processed and packaged at factories, and the food loses a great deal of nutritive value along the way.

Jane decided to stop consuming foods that had to go through this process to

get to her. Under this rule, foods definitely excluded were ocean fish, citrus fruits and bananas, coffee, black tea, cane sugar, chocolate, tropical spices, peanut butter and tobacco.

The menu was not so bad, though. It may have included grain and its products, root crops, beef, mutton, pork, poultry, lake fish, apples, some pears, herbs, just about any vegetable, beans and legumes, dairy products, walnuts, filberts, wild berries, apple cider, alcohol, honey and maple syrup, and more.

Because the North Country is not geared for absolutely local eating, certain concessions had to be made. Canned foods that could be grown locally were acceptable, because vegetables and fruits are seasonal. Preserving local food can be done by home canning, sun drying, freezing, or keeping food in a root cellar. A root cellar, or cold cellar, uses no energy once it's made, and can store fresh food all winter.

Another consideration is processing. Certain grains like oats and barley need to be hulled at a mill. St. Lawrence County once had four mills, one of which was here in town, on the Grasse River. Long term Cantontites remember the grain business; the "grist" (dry wheat, corn, rye, etc.) was brought down the river by canoe to the Sherman Mill (erected 1859 under a different name) where the barter system of trade was common. This mill disappeared, along with the others, sometime in the beginning of the 19th Century, because big grain business in the West won out. So much for local milling.

Cheese is made at a factory in Russell and at an Amish factory in Norfolk. Locally made yogurt is available at Birdfoot Farm, and the Nursery Hill Cider Mill of Potsdam will sell freshly pressed apple cider this fall.

There was once a time, in the 1860s; when the North Country exported dried apples by the ton. Now the people who run the cider mill have to import apples from other parts of the state until they can get enough of this fine local food growing again.

Good North Country food is made available by home gardens, the Natural Farmer's Co-operative and the Potsdam Co-op. This food is inexpensive and fresh. People still wonder why St. Lawrence University's food service doesn't make more use of Canton-grown food rather than placing orders in Syracuse for great quantities that is shipped in from who knows where.

So, if the food is grown here, and it could be processed and sold here, why is it sent out in air polluting trucks to be sold somewhere else? This is how most local economy is organized, and this is what we're used to. And we are paying with the environment.

There are of course, many foods that have to be imported if you want them. I certainly don't mind peanut butter on my toast with orange juice and coffee in the morning, and I'd go through withdrawal if I had to give up cigarettes. We don't need to go digging for salt mines in every county, either.

The point of the local food experiment was to show that we can be nutritionally and tastefully satisfied by the goods grown in our back yard. Jane believes that trading for extra-regional foods is good, when it's needed, but perhaps we should notice these special "imports" for what they are while making use of as much local food as possible.

With enough support we can eliminate needless trucking of food and make a major step in keeping down the rising rate of pollution. This small alteration of lifestyle could help stop a detrimental change in our climate.

