



Protecting Illinois' Rivers for People, Fish, and Wildlife

OUR FOOD CHOICES CAN PROTECT WATER AND WILDLIFE

BY KIM ERNDT-PITCHER

You have probably heard the phrase “Vote with your fork.” It means that our values can be expressed in where we put our food dollars. Many of us get to choose how the food we eat has lived and died and how it was grown each and every day. We can choose to put our dollars behind the industrialized food system that supports mega-farms, billion-dollar corporations, processed foods, and has a large ecological footprint (pesticides, water use, fossil fuel consumption in the manufacturing, packaging, and transport of this food). Or, we can choose to spend our money on food that is grown close to home, is minimally processed, is grown in a way that does not degenerate the soil, air, or water and that supports our local economy, and keeps farmers in charge of their farms and land.

Additionally, as we see the definitions and labels of organic become more common, we must not forget that it

is still important to know your farmer and know how she or he grows the food that you purchase. Organic production can be industrialized too, and it can also use its fair share of pesticides, have a large ecological footprint (think of those organic peppers grown in Mexico or Chile), and involve large Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs).

Whatever demand we create is the system we support. While the state of our food system may seem too overwhelming to face with mega-corporations and federal regulations, we must not forget that we CAN do something. That “something” can have a bigger impact than you might think. We can support the farmers that grow healthy nutritious food, farmers that protect our air, streams, soil, animals, and neighbors. When we support them, every day, we demonstrate the need for more of these types of farms.

There is no doubt that it takes effort and forethought to support a more localized and environmentally wise food system, and that this is much more difficult than it should be in many cases. But, it is an important vote, and we try to make it easier for you to cast that vote.



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For the past year and a half, Prairie Rivers Network has worked with numerous other organizations to form ReGenerate Illinois, a collaborative effort that strives to create a local food system for Illinois, a food system that is deeply rooted in regenerative agriculture practices. Together, we foster the growth of farms that produce food in a way that regenerates the land, water, and soil and the markets that support them. Our work with ReGenerate Illinois and the IDEA Farm Network, a growing network of farmers that are interested in improving the way they farm (See pg. 5 for more), is our way of ensuring that Illinois water resources and wildlife habitat needs are incorporated into our land use decisions.

Using basic ecological principles, regenerative farming practices rebuild soil organic matter, store carbon, and eliminate the need for pesticides and fertilizers. They also protect biodiversity, increase water

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