

THE FAITHFUL CONSUMER

...connecting faith and the environment

By Sarah Streed

As one Earth Day a year didn't seem to be enough, the Wisconsin Interfaith Climate and Energy Campaign (WICEC), in conjunction with the Islamic Environmental Group of Wisconsin, designated April as Interfaith Earth **Month**. This April there are Interfaith celebrations in Milwaukee, Madison, Eau Claire, Stoughton and Marquette University. Don't worry if you've missed them; simply let me know that you want to celebrate next year in your town or city.

When I sat down to write this month's column, I knew it would have something to do with Earth Month. But what, I wondered, is the one topic that encompasses all the goals and purposes of an Earth Day or Earth Month? There are so many issues involved: global warming, renewable energy, conservation, and so on. So I chose the one topic that encompasses every aspect of Earth Day: Food.

When I go to the chain supermarket and buy groceries, I am buying food that has to travel about 2,000 miles from the producer to my family's table. This has an enormous affect upon the environment. First of all, there are the emissions of all the trucks that drive 2,000 miles to get the groceries to the local supermarket—or emissions from the planes that fly tropical fruits to Wisconsin in the winter. Then there is the packaging. Almost every item in the supermarket is swathed in a bundle of Styrofoam and plastic. This excess packaging is promptly thrown away where it fills our landfills and adds to the toxins leaching down to the groundwater.

The way we grocery shop today is going to become impossible in the future, as James Howard Kunstler points out in the April 7 issue of *Rolling Stone*. (My teenagers subscribe to this magazine and I have to admit that I'm impressed by some of the articles; kids today are a lot more aware of the world than we were, and that's good, because they face a future that is vastly different from anything our generation has dealt with.) Kunstler explains that 2005 is the "global oil production peak" which means there's going to be a whole lot less oil from now on. Our food production will have to do a complete turnaround as we are forced to grow more of our food closer to where we live.

Now and in the future, food production is turning toward organic and local food. Buying organic vastly reduces toxic water pollution as well as common water pollution and a higher quality of soil and greater diversity makes organic farms less harmful to wildlife. But can it work in real life? I feed a lot of people—the license plate on my mini-van reads FEEDS 7—and I say it can. I alternate between the local market and the supermarket chain. I buy organic fruits and vegetables at both places, but stock up on items like canned goods, spaghetti noodles, frozen waffles, catsup and fruit snacks at the supermarket where the prices are cheaper.

I order ALL our meat from Shoe and Sal's Farm Fresh Meats in Beaver Dam (920-927-3761.) I first encountered Shoe at our local Farmer's Market where he told me he'd deliver straight to my door. Our family doesn't eat beef—started with my fear of Mad Cow Disease a few years back and evolved into boycotting beef because of the irrationality of feeding cows grain which could feed so many hungry people in the world—so I pull out a cut of pork, chicken or salmon every morning and I'm set. Let me tell you, once you taste meat from a butcher, you'll never go back to buying meat from the supermarket.

Buying local and organic is more expensive—but it's worth it. For one thing, our kids aren't getting all the hormones, additives, antibiotics and pesticides that come in the store-bought. My teenage girls (they're going to kill me for saying this) developed at what I consider a normal age and not terribly early like many girls nowadays. Since one daughter is a child by birth and the other by adoption, I attributed this to a lack of growth hormones in food over the years rather than to genetics. My theory was substantiated by an article in **Newsweek** that said girls were getting their periods much earlier and hormones and additives in food and water were probably a factor.

I've rambled on long enough, going from Earth Month to girls' development. My point is that, over the last eighteen years of raising children, I've seen that buying local and organic is not only better for our planet, but—selfishly—better for my family. And isn't that the way it works? What's best for us, is best for our world.

April's tip: Make your food dollars help the environment: Buy organic and local.

Until next month, then, God bless—and support your local farmer.

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