

Every month the Smart Living Project will issue a new smart living challenge. Give it a try just once a week and then add a new challenge each month. If you already live smart, try our advanced challenge, or try to do something else sustainable every day. You can do it, and we are here to help.

Remember to **send us** your smart living stories!

September Challenge

Food is such a large portion of what we consume every day. Do you ever think about how the food choices you make can influence the world and your health? Your challenge for September is to start considering how and what you eat, starting in the grocery store.

Buy one organic item in the grocery store each week or visit a local farmers' market this month.

Advanced challenge

Replace one regular meal per week with a vegetarian meal.

Vegetarian recipes

Allrecipes.com

Vegkitchen.com

What is sustainable food?

Sustainable food, in its simplest form, is food that was produced and transported to you in an environmentally benign way. Many things influence the definition of sustainability when it comes to food, but here are the highlights:

- Food produced without major input of chemicals, such as pesticides and fertilizers
- Food that did not originate from genetically modified seed stock
- Food that has few food miles (see below)
- Food produced with concern for farm workers and fairly traded (see below)
- Food that is produced and consumed in such a way that resources are shared equally globally, and between generations

More reading

Sustainable Table

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy's **Local Foods program**

Just for fun
OTA's Store Wars

What does food miles mean?

Food miles is a term coined to describe how far food travels from its origin to your plate, including any stops and detours made on the way. The food miles concept is loosely based on **Life Cycle Assessment (LCA)**, a scientific method to evaluate the environmental impact of a product from product design, extraction of raw materials and production, to packaging, consumption and ultimate disposal. Cradle-to-grave or cradle-to-cradle are common ways of talking about the idea of Life Cycle Assessment.

Considering how far food is transported and how is important primarily because of emissions and other environmental impacts from transportation, but a lot of attention has also been placed on the social and economic consequences of transporting food very far. Considering what type of food production you want to support is probably the most important food decision you can make.

More reading

Global food issues at IATP's **AgObservatory**

Recommended reading

Eat here by Brian Halweil (Worldwatch Institute)

Home grown: the case for local food in a global market by Brian Halweil (Worldwatch Institute)

Food miles calculator

Local versus organic

Ideally, food should be both but ultimately this becomes a personal choice. Many local, small-scale farmers are not participating in the National Organic Program for a variety of reasons. You have to decide for yourself whether it is more important to know where your food came from and have a personal relationship with the person who produced your food, or if strict adherence to good food production practices is more important. Oftentimes, small-scale farmers adhere to somewhat organic practices without certification, but that is not always the case.

More reading

Organic Trade Association

Local food in east-central Indiana

The Downtown Farm Stand

Minnetrista Farmer's Market June–October

Trader's Point Creamery

Sustainability and vegetarian food

The production of meat contributes greatly to environmental degradation, in fact, it is one of the main contributors to environmental degradation. The primary issues are the intense water use, waste production, and energy input needed to produce one pound of meat compared to the energy needed to produce one pound of vegetables or grains.

Packaging

Less is more is the key here. Look for minimal packaging, and maybe even bulk items if that works for you.

Labeling

Product labels are a great way to educate yourself about sustainable choices. But which labels can you trust? It may take some digging to find out just which labels are good, and which ones are meaningless. Below are examples of a few important and trustworthy labels. If you are unsure about a label, visit Consumer Reports **Greener Choices** (formerly eco-label.org) to check if an eco-label has the standards to back up its claims or if the label is meaningless.