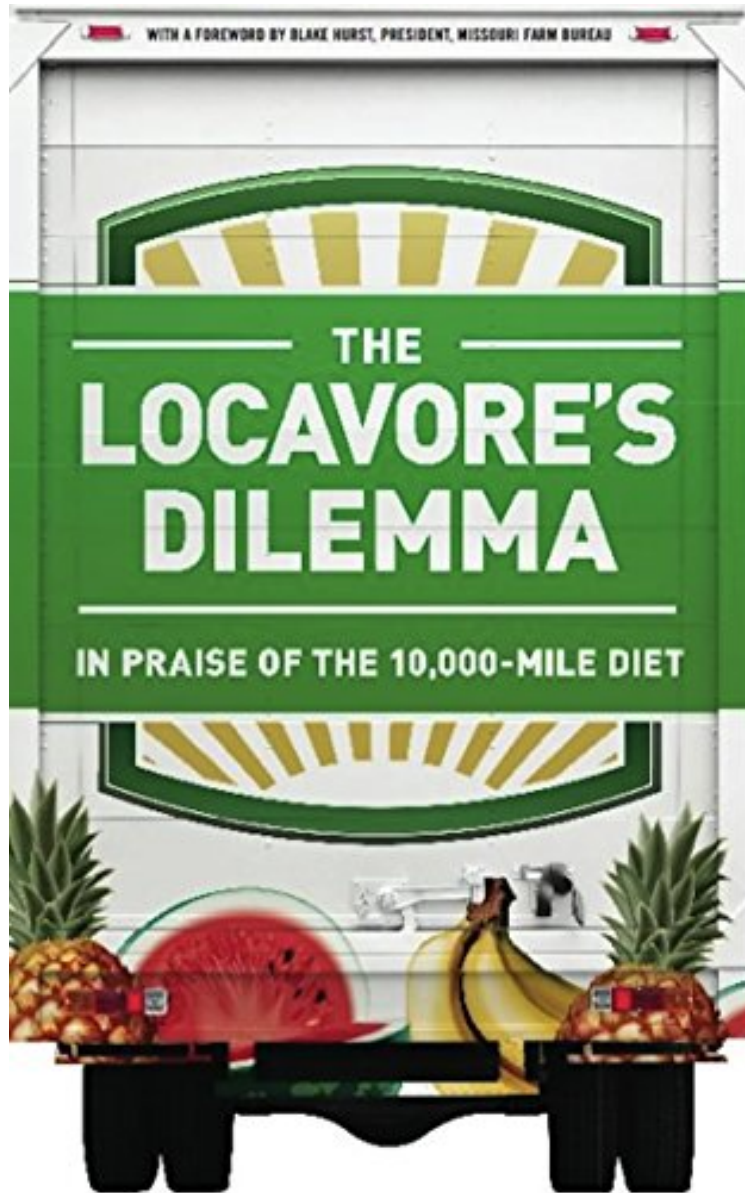


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The Locavore's Dilemma: In Praise of the 10,000-mile Diet

Pierre Desrochers, Hiroko Shimizu

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Pierre Desrochers, Hiroko Shimizu : The Locavore's Dilemma: In Praise of the 10,000-mile Diet before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Locavore's Dilemma: In Praise of the 10,000-mile Diet:

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Sour Grapes? By Leon McQuaid The negative reviews of this book all seem to miss the point. This book is a polemic against locavorism. As such it is an attack on the various beliefs of those who strive for a world where the food trade is reduced to the local level. Critics who charge this book with being

'one-sided' have apparently neglected to read the introduction or the conclusion. If they had they would realize that the purpose of the book is not give a holistic analysis of the food industry; rather the point is to describe how the food industry evolved and how beneficial the very efficient global food trade has been. The polemical nature of this book is the key to understanding its structure. Critics have tried to poison the well by noting how the book was inspired by a remark made to one of the author's Japanese wife. Apparently a comment was made that Japan is the most parasitical nation on earth. It was declared parasitical because it imports most of its food. Critics will have you believe that the authors are writing out of a vengeful ethic but this is obscure and erroneous. Anyone with a basic understanding of trade knows that individuals specialize in what they do best. Japan is a nation with a high population and little land area for farming. As a nation they specialize in complex consumer goods rather than agriculture. There is nothing parasitical about this relationship. Rather than constructing a verbal vendetta, the authors set out to answer one question: 'if locavorism is so attractive, how is it that our system of food delivery so divorced from the ideal of local food production?' In answering this question the book is set up as a series of locavore myths. A polemic is an attack on the fundamental beliefs of one's opponent. The beliefs they attribute to locavores happen to center around a fundamental lack of economic knowledge. Thus five of the seven chapters demonstrate how locavore beliefs are founded in myth rather than fact. Critics blame the authors for leaving out the benefits of eating local. This criticism isn't valid in that that is not the intent of the book. Furthermore, critics argue that there are cases where local production can be more efficient than importing. Again, this misses the point. The authors do not assert that a global market will always be more efficient than eating locally. Rather the claim being made is that a global food trade dominates local production because it tends to be more efficient. This is a tendency, not a rule. To this I would add that foodies have always had the option of eating local food. Chefs have always known that fresher is better and that local often translates as fresher (and often cheaper) food. The authors could have written a larger book which may seem more 'balanced' to the palate of these readers, but it would be a longer, less concise book. One critic writes, "Also, on the issue of security, you have to be out of your mind and living in fantasy land to believe that a centralized, monoculture food system is more secure. In order to believe that our system is more secure than a more dispersed, locally-focused system, you have to somehow forget everything you are taught in economics about mitigating risk. On this subject, the authors have achieved an impressive level of amnesia." Is objection is misleading. The authors never make the claim that monoculture is preferred. Rather they claim that individual farmers hedge their bets against crop failure. Individual farmers know their land best and have every incentive to plan and harvest as to maximize their properties potential. Rather than advocating a 'centralized' food system, they are advocating as much decentralization as possible. Further, should crop failure occur, the best safety net is a global market. In the absence of long-distance trade local markets have no access to food during emergencies. Far from advocating monoculture and centralization, the overarching point is that economies are complex. Creating special policies for any industry can only serve to destabilize production. This critic goes on to say, "The authors also make a bunch of outright false claims with no evidence to back them up. For example, that small farms are somehow less safe than large ones. This is such a crazy claim that I don't even know where to begin. I guess in order to believe something like that, you need to forget that small farms have to follow the same guidelines as large ones..." Again, this is a misrepresentation of the material. The actual claim was that large farms have an advantage over smaller farms due to the benefits of an economy of scale. Likewise, it is cheaper (or more efficient) to enforce safety measures over a larger inventory than a smaller one. This fact would tend towards greater control over production. Again, this is a tendency not a rule. This critic goes on to mention that major bacterial outbreaks have come from factory vs. family farms. This may be true. However this does not imply that smaller farms are safer. The volume of production of meatpacking plants is staggering and the amount of failure is very small. One advantage of centralized meatpacking not mentioned by the authors is ease of tracking. Having few centralized distribution hubs makes for rapid discover of problems whenever bad meat is found. For example, if I get sick off meat I buy from Sobeys, it's easier to discover which supplier supplied the bad meat if Sobeys has one rather than one-hundred suppliers. But I must reiterate, this does not imply that larger suppliers are necessarily better. Critics also seem to disparage of the authors because they are Economic Policy Analysts. I do not understand how this is a criticism. Their tone seems to imply that they are hack economists who are not true economists. This is a foolish distinction. It is the role of policy analysts to suggest the best available policies. Economists may make good policy suggestions but, as academics, they are more concerned with theory than practice. The primary goal of the book is to account for why food production is the way it is. Given a shallow reading it may appear to be a mere apology for the status quo. A closer reading would reveal that no apology exists. Rather the authors demonstrate how policies of free trade have led to wealth and safety. The policy suggestions present in the book advocate greater freedom of trade. The Locavore's Dilemma's critics seem to have a bad case of sour grapes. It seems they want horror stories about food supply failure and instability. They denounce this work as a work of ideology but it is their own inability to read this book in its proper context that betrays their own desire for ideological confirmation.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I strongly recommend it

By Pierre Lemieux A very good book, which deflates many invalid arguments in favor of localism. I strongly recommend it.

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A food book with a different approach

By Sally Being in the nutrition field, I get tired of hearing the same old stuff -- eat only plants, grow your own

food, eat only from local sources, etc. Few books deal with the down sides of these directives. This one does, with respect to eating locally. It identified a lot that is on the side of eating globally, showing that local eating can have high environmental and health costs.

A new generation of food activists has come to believe that "sustainable farming" and "eating local" are the way to solve a host of perceived problems with our modern food supply system. By combining healthy eating and a high standard of environmental stewardship, these locavores think, we can also deliver important economic benefits and increase food security within local economies. But after a thorough review of the evidence, economic geographer Pierre Desrochers and policy analyst Hiroko Shimizu have concluded these claims are mistaken. In *The Locavore's Dilemma*, they explain the history, science, and economics of food supply to reveal what locavores miss or misunderstand: the real environmental impacts of agricultural production; the drudgery of subsistence farming; and the essential role large-scale, industrial producers play in making food more available, varied, affordable, and nutritionally rich than ever before in history. At best, they show, locavorism is a well-meaning marketing fad among the world's most privileged consumers. At worst, it constitutes a dangerous distraction from solving serious global food issues. Deliberately provocative, but based on scrupulous research and incontrovertible scientific evidence, *The Locavore's Dilemma* proves that: Our modern food-supply chain is a superior alternative that has evolved through constant competition and ever-more-rigorous efficiency. A world food chain characterized by free trade and the absence of agricultural subsidies would deliver lower prices and more variety in a manner that is both economically and environmentally more sustainable. There is no need to feel guilty for not joining the locavores on their crusade. Eating globally, not only locally, is the way to save the planet.

"In large parts of the world, local trumps science, and people suffer as a result... Desrochers and Shimizu take the idea of local food to the back of the barn and beat the holy livin' tar out of it. In a more rational world, their defense of what is so clearly true would not be needed. However, our world is not rational, and most of what passes for thinking about food is as full of air as an elegant French pastry." --from the Foreword by Blake Hurst, president, Missouri Farm Bureau "Desrochers and Shimizu demonstrate that the debate over food miles is a distraction from the real issues that confront global food production." --Ronald Bailey, Reason.com "Desrochers ... is the scholar's scholar. In an age where few read all important material on all sides of their subject, this professor stands out." --MasterResource.org "Desrochers ... delivers a serious warning to the fetishization of local agriculture as the magic bullet that will solve our food problems." --Sustainability: Science, Practice, Policy, sspp.proquest.com from the Foreword by Blake Hurst, president, Missouri Farm Bureau "In large parts of the world, local trumps science, and people suffer as a result... Desrochers and Shimizu take the idea of local food to the back of the barn and beat the holy livin' tar out of it. In a more rational world, their defense of what is so clearly true would not be needed. However, our world is not rational, and most of what passes for thinking about food is as full of air as an elegant French pastry." Ronald Bailey, Reason.com "Desrochers and Shimizu demonstrate that the debate over food miles is a distraction from the real issues that confront global food production." MasterResource.org "Desrochers ... is the scholar's scholar. In an age where few read all important material on all sides of their subject, this professor stands out." Sustainability: Science, Practice, Policy, sspp.proquest.com "Desrochers ... delivers a serious warning to the fetishization of local agriculture as the magic bullet that will solve our food problems." "Bookloons" "There is plenty of food for thought in this unconventional, provocative look at how we should go about feeding the masses. The authors...make some very interesting points and raise concerns that must be addressed." "NATURE Magazine" "The book's strength lies in the cheerful ruthlessness with which the authors challenge sloppy thinking, special pleading and the lazy logic that assumes that 'local' must be 'best'" Spiked.com "The Locavore's Dilemma" is an ideal weapon in countering the enormous quantities of metaphorical organic manure that pass for evidence in the modern debate about food." "The Times Literary Supplement" "[The authors] are right to question the limits of 'local'... We certainly need a more sophisticated metric than 'food miles'." About the Author Pierre Desrochers is an associate professor of geography at the University of Toronto who writes frequently on economic development, globalization, energy, and transportation issues. He was a research fellow at the Center for the History of Political Economy at Duke University. Hiroko Shimizu holds a master's of international public policy from Osaka University. Desrochers and Shimizu have both been research fellows of the Property and Environment Research Center in Bozeman, Montana, and the Institute for Policy Studies at Johns Hopkins University.