

The Blue Banner's View

Shopping locally increases Asheville's sustainability

In Asheville, alternatives to the corporate system of mass production are everywhere. Residents have the ability to locally source everything, from food and beer to clothing, art and movies. This cannot and should not be taken for granted as these alternative systems of production are not easily sustained.

The days of mom-and-pops are largely nonexistent in today's globalized mass-marketed culture because they run against the cheap, quick access large conglomerates provide. An ethic of care thrives in Asheville, especially in regards to food.

"I think relationships have been damaged and destroyed," said Grace Campbell, lecturer at UNCA, in response to the industrialized food system. "We don't have a very hospitable environment for affiliative ties. I don't think we're affiliated with Archer Daniels Midland for example. We don't know who is making decisions in these large companies. And so we can say one of the costs is losing care and the ethics of care.

We don't care about one another because we don't have a chance to experience our interdependence. And the food system isn't the only way this is true, but it is one major way that it is true."

Even if people don't participate in buying locally produced food, they know that it is a largely a system other locals support. At least every other car one passes beams "Locally Produced Food: Thousands of Miles Fresher" on its bumper.

With more than 12,000 family farms in Western North Carolina, the supply of locally grown food is more than sufficient. Although Whole Foods may have cornered the market in buying out one of the largest alternative grocery stores, there are 13 tailgate markets in Buncombe County alone that are open every Saturday in various parts of town.

Even during the winter, the ability to purchase local products will remain because numerous restaurants around town support the local food economy and carry various meats and whole

foods on their menu.

"People that value local food and have the awareness to understand the sustainability issues are very highly principled people that are willing to pay more, is what it boils down to," said former owner of Greenlife John Swann. "Another person is just going to say, 'Who cares, I can get it for less at Wal-Mart.'"

Budgets and the economy are large factors in the ethical dilemma of buying local for a few more cents on the dollar or rushing through Target in a hurried daze. It is the price and availability that ultimately decide the fate of consumers' almighty dollars.

But if people knew that the winter coat they decided to buy their child actually cost the life of another child overseas, would the \$5 price difference persuade the consumer to find a locally made one or one that ensures fair trade standards? Ethical issues such as child slavery in apparel factories and chemical pesticides in the food industry have pushed demand to local markets.

The local clothing industry is bolstered with trendy and conservative styles made locally or without the use of sweatshops. These include Honeypot, Hip Replacements, Push, Virtue and The Old North State Clothing Company.

"The potential that Asheville has to grow in unique and more diverse ways is delightfully exciting. The opportunity to become involved in the community and create real connections with creative people striving for quality of life is inspiring," according to Franzi Charin, co-owner of Hip Replacements.

So whether people are shopping for knee-high stockings or simply buying groceries for the week, an important ideal for them to keep in mind is how they feel about this alternative, progressive and largely self-sufficient town. It runs on consumer dollars and needs the support of its people in order to fight corporate domination. Local is the new black as the cute new slogan says, and Asheville should keep it that way.

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The Blue Banner is a designated forum for free speech and welcomes letters to the editor, considering them on basis of interest, space and timeliness. Letters and articles should be e-mailed to the editor-in-chief or the appropriate section editor.

Letters should include the writer's name, year in school, and major or other relationship to UNCA. Include a telephone number to aid in verification. All articles are subject to editing.