

Buying local benefits our own first – then the world Think Global, Act Local more than a mantra

By Jamie Reaume

“Joe” is a small, diversified farmer eking out a living in Ontario’s Holland Marsh. He produces world class spouts, coloured carrots, artichokes, and a wide variety of other seasonal products. His local market – which would have been the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) – has been stripped away from him, eroded by imports from countries that 30 years ago most Canadians couldn’t find on a map – let alone know that they grew products that line today’s grocery shelves. He wants to make his living from the marketplace – but finds that a retailer near-monopoly, government rules and regulations, and an unconcerned consumer impede his ability to do what he loves and what he is great at: farming.

Joe makes just enough to feed his family, clothe his two boys, and send them to school. He tries to hire locally, because that is what he wants his customers to begin – think global, act local. He struggles because his competitors – thousands of miles away – barely pay for a week what he pays for one hour of the same work and effort. But, he has big plans for his sons, wanting them to continue the family tradition of farming, providing for a nation that has been, for the most part, long removed from the agricultural scene and clearly unaware of the hard work, cost, and effort put in by Joe and others to feed them healthy, nutritious, and safe food.

Joe knows he’s a minority – both as a farmer and as someone who cares passionately for what his efforts provide to his fellow citizens. Joe knows there are less than two per cent of his nation’s population actively involved in agriculture – and not all of sector is dedicated to feeding people. Some in agriculture, Joe knows, are involved in energy, fuel, and fibre – even has the product grown in fields turned in panels for automobiles.

But Joe has a problem. He likes the local food movement – because he thinks that this will develop new opportunities for himself, his family, and his fellow farming brethren. While he is not in favour of the 100-Mile Diet, one that severely restricts the healthy needs of his fellow Ontarians, he doesn’t understand how anyone – from federal government officials to the average citizen – can question how buying local will disadvantage millions around the world.

It’s a question that perplexes Joe. There’s not many of his kind left, and while aiding and assisting others has always been an integral part of his life, so too has been farming. He and his family were environmentalists long before there were environmentalists – living, playing, and working off as original stewards of the land. He knows the weather, knows the little tricks to make harvest just a little easier – but continually fails to grasp how globalists continue to pander out party lines about how his efforts are hurting others thousands of miles away. All he knows is that his markets are limited, even restricted, because those same people thousands of miles away are already importing their products into this country without providing for their own first.

Joe knows that buying local benefits the environment, reduces his consumers environmental footprint, reduces carbon emissions by limiting transportation thousands of unnecessary miles to

bring in product that already is grown by himself and others right here, and done under the most stringent regulatory system for growing food in the world.

He also knows that buying local means consumers have access to fresher, just picked products – often that very day, and that means great taste instead of some of the inedible food he finds at his own local grocery store way too often. He knows that buying local supports farmers like him, a local business person doing a good job under sometimes harsh climatic conditions. Joe knows that spending money on local products makes good economic sense – especially during a time when the nation’s economy is slowly sliding backwards. A rich nation is Canada – but its wealth is not evenly distributed at times – and supporting local food ensures that the dollars spent remain here. It also helps build stronger communities – at a time when most of his customers are working hard to bridge the urban-rural gulf in the second largest country in the world.

Joe also knows that his contribution is greater than just the food he grows for consumption; his tax dollars work very hard – harder, it seems, than some of his urban friends and neighbours. Farms contribute more in taxes than they require in services, whereas suburban development costs more than it generates in taxes. On average, for every \$1 in revenue raised by residential development, governments must spend \$1.17 on services, thus requiring higher taxes of all taxpayers. For each dollar of revenue raised by farm, forest, or open space, governments spend 34 cents on services.

Joe feels for farmers who struggle to make a living – in any country, because he is one and he lives in one of the wealthiest nations in the world. But Joe is proud to be Canadian, proud to be a farmer. He just thinks that buying local, buying his food, makes sense because he thinks global, but acts local. Not within 100-miles – but local because he is Canadian.

More important than all of that, Joe knows that buying local is about securing a future – for all, not just his sons and his family. By supporting local farmers today, Joe knows that his legacy of producing safe, healthy, nutritious, fresh, and tasty products – where his customers know him – ensures that there will farmers, maybe even his own children, down the road. For Canadians, that means they’ll not go hungry – because a nation that cannot feed itself can no longer be called a nation.

Jamie Reaume is the Executive Director of the Holland Marsh Growers’ Association, a farmer-based organization striving to capture the growing consumer sentiment to support the local food movement.