

Are you locavore enough to take the 100-mile Thanksgiving challenge?

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Is it possible to have a Thanksgiving meal prepared with only ingredients from within

100-miles? Yes, says this turkey that lives 120 miles from your house. Photo by Flickr user BBM Explorer

Depending on where you sit down for your Thanksgiving feast, your meal may look a bit different — cornbread dressing in the south, oyster stuffing in the northeast, chiles rellenos in the southwest. But no matter where you are in America, turkey, fixings and pie will likely be on your menu. Flash back to the original holiday, which began as a harvest celebration, and your menu might have included deer, corn and shellfish. You know, local food.

These days the food that makes our Thanksgiving feast doesn't have to be local, yet over the past decade demand for local food has increased. With the explosion of farmers markets and Community Supported Agriculture Programs, or CSAs, it's easier than ever to shop for locally produced food. People who eat said food were even given a name. In 2007, the New Oxford American Dictionary officially recognized "locavore."

"Economically, buying local supports your community by creating jobs and places to gather like farmers markets," said Barbie Marshall who owns her own sustainable farm outside of Philadelphia. "Environmentally, buying local foods reduces the carbon footprint and emissions from transportation. One of the health advantages you have now is that you can ask the farmer what growing practices were used and when it was harvested."

The idea of a "local diet," which has roots in the locavore movement and J.B. MacKinnon's book, "The 100-Mile Diet," is as popular as ever today. There are restaurants, grocery stores and even a television series dedicated to the practice.

But then there's Thanksgiving.



Whitney Pipkin of Alexandria, Va., is planning to host a 100-mile turkey day this year. "This year will be the first time I'm in charge of the lion's share of dishes for the

Thanksgiving feast and am, therefore, able to take full advantage of the local offerings for more than side dishes,” Pipkin said.

The freelance journalist sources most of her food as close to home as possible on a regular basis.

“Buying locally means I can get to know the wonderful people growing my food and know more about what’s going into it,” Pipkin said. “Thanksgiving is the culmination of the farming season and close to the end of my neighborhood farmers market. I can think of no more fitting way to celebrate and say thank-you to the people who’ve fed me all year than to buy the fixing’s for the meals from them.”

Up the East Coast in Bayport, N.Y., Christine Egan and her family have been having 100-mile Thanksgivings for the past five years.

“It’s a great way to prepare your Thanksgiving meal,” Egan said. “It really puts the whole family in touch with the food you eat. It’s also a great way to avoid the busy supermarket, help your local farmer and eat what is in season.”

Across the country in Sacramento, Calif., Patrick Mulvaney and his wife Bobbin will be preparing a 100-mile meal, not for their family but for 150 people in their restaurant on the Monday of Thanksgiving week.

“Our food focuses on the seasonal and local everyday so our Thanksgiving day meal will too,” said Mulvaney. “I think this helps raise awareness about all the great things we have growing in our region 12 months a year plus we enjoy the challenge of using a local box of crayons.”

Mulvaney, however, admitted that the one non-local product on their menu is the pasta.

“Each year we honor Calvin Trillin by serving his and our favorite Thanksgiving dish — Spaghetti Carbonara,” Mulvaney said, referring to the venerable food writer.

That is one of the biggest challenges of the 100-mile diet. What do you do if you really want that one dish, but it isn’t local? And then there are the other challenges, like cost and availability.

“You may not have cranberry sauce if cranberries aren’t within your 100 miles,” said Marshall.

Beth Bader, author of “The Cleaner Plate Club,” understands the difficulty of adhering to a 100-mile diet. The flavors on Thanksgiving alone are enough to give most people pause.

“Think about it, unless you are on a coast and happen to know how to make your own sea salt, forget that brine on a local pastured turkey, the kind of lean meaty not fatty bird that is

going to be dry as bone without brine,” Bader said. “No cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves or ginger or vanilla. No coffee with that pie. Sweeteners have to come from sorghum or honey. No baking powder or baking soda. No cranberries unless you are in New England.”

So is a 100-mile Thanksgiving even possible or desirable? It depends on where you live and how dedicated you are to finding your ingredients.

“If you’re looking for specific foods, you may need to drive to various farms to find exactly what you are looking for,” said Egan.

Pipkin, who admitted that buying a turkey from a farmer made her realize just how much turkeys are supposed to cost, suggests starting small and with what’s in season where you live.

“If you were going to make an asparagus dish, why not substitute it for something more seasonal, and therefore, more delicious, like brussels sprouts,” she said.

Bader agreed.

“Frankly, the 100-mile diet was the biggest emotional barrier for enough mass of consumers to embrace eating local. What makes a bigger impact is when more people buy at least some things local.who want to eat in a way that helps the environment and the local economy can start by buying at least some local products.

She practices what she preaches.

“So, what has shown up from local sources on my Thanksgiving table or is used in our dishes? Turkey, kale, chard, garlic, lettuces, apples, pears, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, butter cream, eggs, wine and beer, pecans, chestnuts, bread, honey, milk, cheese. But I sure do use salt,” Bader said.

What’s on Pipkin’s, Egan’s and Mulvaney’s Thanksgiving menus? Check out our [“what does Thanksgiving look like near you”](#) map for suggested menus and even some recipes from people around the country adding local dishes to their menu. And let us know yours in the comments.