

We Live in a Food System

Alex Risley Schroeder

Have you ever thought about where the food you eat comes from? And what it takes to get it to you? All of us live and eat in a food system! The term food system describes the full cycle of how food is grown, transported, processed, marketed, sold, eaten, and thrown away.

Nearly every one of us in the U.S. counts on the global food system for our food. Tour your grocery store and see if you can figure out where the grapes or apples came from. And where was the wheat grown in the bread you eat? According to some estimates, food on our plate travels an average of 1500 miles. There are many concerns about the global food system, including:

1. the environmental impact of agricultural production, especially the energy, water, and pesticides that are used to grow food.
2. the energy it takes to transport food around the world and the effect this has on the climate.
3. our high levels of food waste.

4. the inequities in distribution that leave so many people hungry.

5. the conditions experienced by the workers who harvest our food, transport it, stock the store shelves, and cook in kitchens or wait on tables.

As people, communities, and states consider these issues with the global food system, there is a growing movement to reduce our dependence on globally supplied foods and to build sustainable local food systems. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of a local food system instead of a global food system?

Through her work with the MA Workforce Alliance, Alex Risley Schroeder helps coordinate the development of the MA Food System Plan.



A Statewide Food System: Vermont Feeds Vermonters

Vermont has taken the lead in the U.S. by developing a statewide food system where-by Vermont increasingly feeds Vermonters. Their “Farm to Plate Investment Program,” which was approved by the state legislature in 2009, aims to:

- increase economic development in Vermont’s food and farm sector.
- create new jobs.
- improve access to healthy local foods.

Vermont’s effort to grow and distribute local food has created over 2,000 jobs in the past four years. These jobs include growing and processing food, distributing food, and man-

aging food waste. Other states also have food system plans. Does yours? If you live in Massachusetts, you can help create the state’s food system plan: <www.mapc.org/massfoodplan>.

AFTER YOU READ: Based on the information in this article, use your own words to describe a food system.

READ FURTHER about how building local food systems can create jobs at <change-agent.nelrc.org/issues>.

LEARN MORE by using the resources at <www.discoverfoodsys.cornell.edu>.