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A Tale of Two Tomatoes

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by SectionZ

safe for people

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We can change all that by rethinking some of our basic assumptions. Let's start by recognizing that the "economy" is but a part of the larger "ecology." The result will be more prosper-

The science is there, the economics is there, and we need

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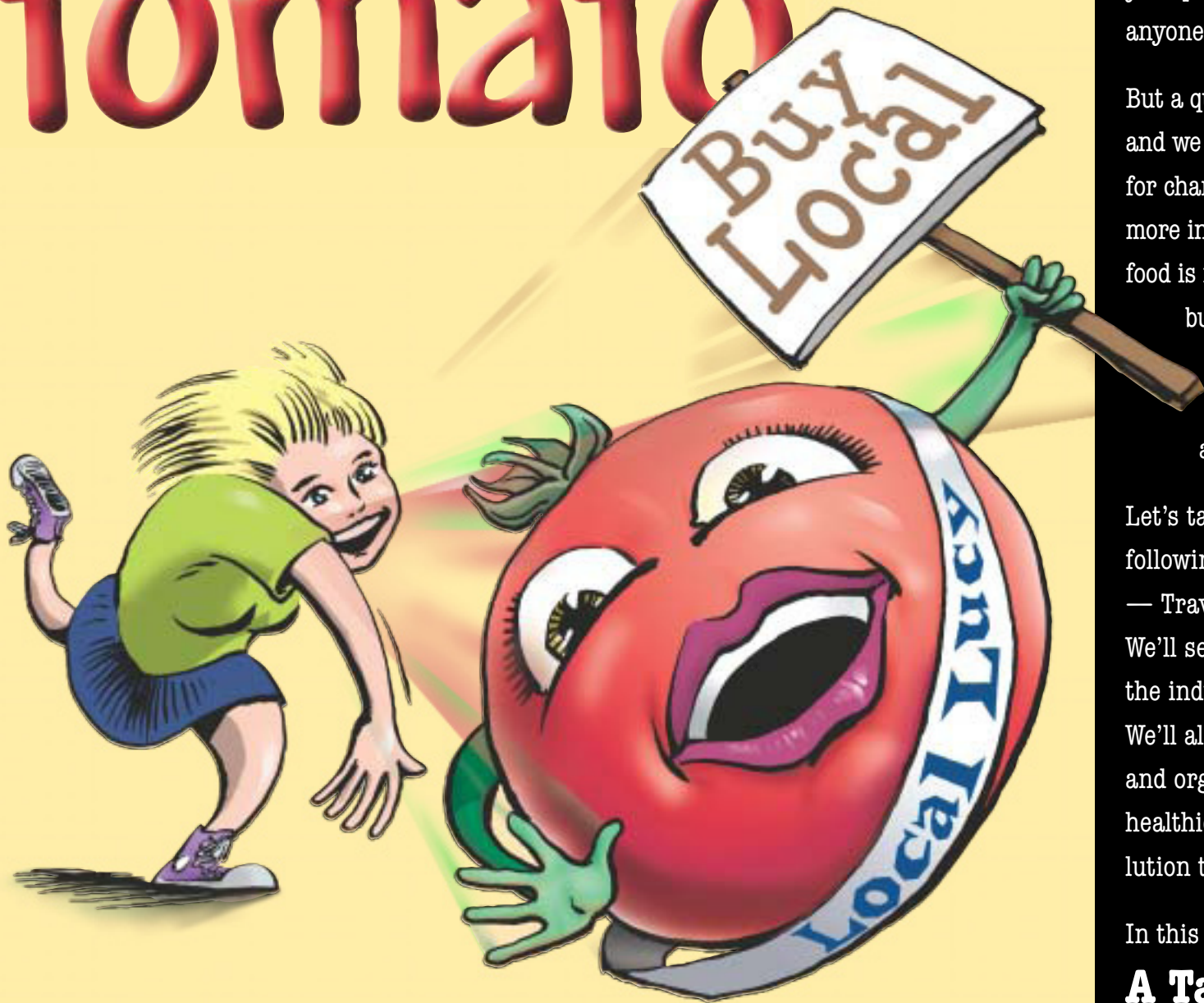
Shannon Wheeler

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Start a revolution with a tomato



SectionZ: Making our economy safe for people and nature. If we keep planet, profit and the public good all in mind, there's no reason that one has to run roughshod over the others. Over the course of six issues throughout 2003, SectionZ will present a slew of ideas that have the power to change everything. Learn more online at www.SectionZ.info.

Buy local and live free.

The food industry is consolidating at an alarming rate. The top companies producing meats, grains, and other staples now enjoy virtual control over the markets for their products. It's gotten to the point where much of our nourishment depends on a handful of giants. And they're shipping foods an average of 1500 miles to reach your plate, a practice that strains anyone's notion of "fresh."

But a quiet revolution is in the air, and we the eaters hold the power for change. Retailers are posting more information about where our food is raised. And new ways of buying direct — like farmers' markets — are providing us with tastier and more diverse choices.

Let's take a look at this shift by following a tale of two tomatoes — Traveling Tom and Local Lucy. We'll see the deep problems that the industrial system is causing. We'll also see how some family and organic farmers are raising healthier foods locally — a revolution that will benefit all of us.

In this issue of SectionZ:

A Tale of Two Tomatoes



Think our food system is working? Think again.

The nature of food has changed dramatically in the last 60 years. More and more, our food is raised on huge farms, under terms set by distant corporations that control the process from gene to market. And while we might spend less at the checkout stand, there are other costs to pay, and no one escapes the bill.

Pesticide poisonings, rural towns on the ropes, the diminishing quality of our water and soil: these are just a few of the problems. Nothing symbolizes what's wrong with this system as clearly as Traveling Tom, a tomato that's bred to be picked green and then gassed to redness. We deserve better than this.

An alternative is on the rise, led by Local Lucy, the tomato next door. One taste and you'll never go back. When you buy her and other foods raised near to home, more of your money makes it back to the farmer, helping to keep families on the land. It's quite a ripple effect from the purchase of a simple tomato. But Lucy's a special fruit

— the vanguard of a Buy Local revolution.

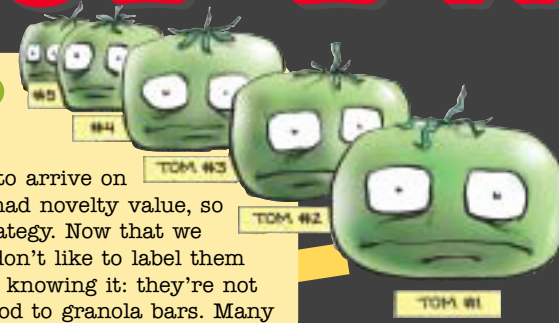
Local Lucy

A Tale of Two Tomatoes

Genetically Engineered?

Would you know if Tom was "GE"?

Genetically Engineered tomatoes were among the first GE foods to arrive on supermarket shelves almost a decade ago. Back then, GE crops had novelty value, so growers labeled them Genetically Engineered as a marketing strategy. Now that we know more about the potential dangers of GE foods, companies don't like to label them anymore. In fact, we eat foods with GE ingredients without even knowing it: they're not in tomatoes these days, but they are in everything from baby food to granola bars. Many countries insist on the labeling of GE foods, but not the U.S.



Preserving Diversity

Fruits and vegetables like Local Lucy get their beauty and taste the old-fashioned way. Local crops are bred for flavor, not mass production. In fact, farmers raise a dazzling array of tomatoes, which not only have their own unique tastes, but also carry traits that allow them to survive and adapt to new pests and changing climates. Farmers are performing a heroic service by keeping these heirloom varieties alive.



Traveling Tom

Pesticides!

Tom receives several doses of chemicals.

Pesticides in your pee — sound too weird to believe? But it's true — most Americans have traces of half a dozen pesticides in their urine. That's because pesticides don't just stay on the farm. They wind up in the air of nearby residential areas, in the streams flowing out of farm country, and in the produce we eat. Farmworkers are on the front lines of this chemical warfare, suffering tens of thousands of poisonings each year. And to top it off, these chemicals are becoming less effective over time. There's been a tenfold increase in both the amount and the toxicity of insecticide use since the 1940s, but the share of the U.S. harvest lost to pests and insects has gone up, not down.

Keeping Dollars at Home

Buying from local growers pays off big for your region. One study shows that each dollar spent with a local food business is worth \$2.50 for your community. And new types of food shopping arrangements are popping up as well. With Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), customers purchase a share of a farm's output and then enjoy produce that's distributed at the peak of ripeness throughout the growing season.

Overdrawn!

Tom uses more than his share of water and soil.

Farmers know better than anyone how important soil is to raising crops. But ironically, industrial practices are causing the very soil they depend on to vanish. Across the nation, we're losing soil 17 times faster than it naturally replaces itself. That forces farmers to rely ever more on chemical fertilizers. But fertilizers don't stay on the farm; they pollute the groundwater and are washed downstream to bays and estuaries, where they are a primary cause of low-oxygen zones that are deadly for fish. Agriculture is drawing down our water supplies as well. Over 75 percent of our water use in both Oregon and California goes to farms, and in California that means a deficit for the state's aquifers of 475 billion gallons a year.

Balancing the Books

Soil and water are essential not only for food production but even for life on earth. Innovative techniques and technologies are available that can help to protect these assets for future generations. For instance, drip irrigation — feeding water directly to the soil through tubing — has been shown to cut water use and in many cases increase crop yields as well. And farming practices like planting cover crops and leaving crop residue on fields — common tools in the organic farmer kitbag — can nourish and sustain the soil.

Gassed!

Picked while green, Tom is gassed to redness.

In order to better survive the long journey to market, many tomatoes are picked while hard and green, then they're gassed with a hormone to help them ripen. This is just one of the eye-opening practices that has become commonplace in our industrial food system. Others include: Factory chickens typically have their beaks clipped off — in the misery of their close confinement they would peck each other violently. And farmed salmon are dyed pink — changes in their diets have caused them to lose their color.

The Taste of Honest Food

The peak ripeness of fruits and vegetables once determined the timing of harvest festivals throughout the growing season. Ripeness — not the kind that comes from a hormone gas — is still a passion among local farmers. While it may be hard to forego the convenience of long-distance fruits and vegetables throughout the winter, it's only natural that we leap at the opportunity for honest food — local food — when prime season arrives.

1500 miles!

Tom is exhausted by the time he gets to market.

1500 miles from field to fork — that's the trek made by the average fruit or vegetable these days. Because of the need to hold up over distances, our foods are bred, not for taste but for transport — their ability to handle the long haul. And what do we eaters get? Tired tomatoes.

Think also about all the oil consumed in getting that long-distance food to our supermarkets. Nine percent of America's total energy consumption is used to produce, process and transport our foods. Cheap oil, subsidized with our taxpayer dollars as well as with the mortgaging of our clean air and climate stability, is the foundation upon which the industrial food system has been built.

Livable Landscapes

We don't need fancy research to realize that eating closer to home consumes less oil. But that's not the only benefit. Relying on local ingredients also gives rise to the tasty variations that define regional cuisines. And because owner-operated farms with a dependable economic base are less vulnerable to the pressures of urban sprawl, buying local helps preserve the kind of open spaces near which we all like to live.



Local Lucy or Traveling Tom:

Who would you rather have sitting on your salad?

Dig Deeper: Resources for Local Foods online at www.SectionZ.info

BUY FRESH, BUY LOCAL

Look for places that feature local food

Shop at independent grocery stores, food co-ops, farmers’ markets, and roadside stands. Dine at restaurants that serve local food. Consider joining a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture).

For an online directory of local foods near you, visit www.caff.org/farmfresh or [Resources for Local Foods](http://www.SectionZ.info) at www.SectionZ.info.

Want to get involved?

Become a member of the **Community Alliance with Family Farmers**, and join a dynamic network of sustainable food and farming advocates throughout California. Learn more at www.caff.org or call 831-761-8507.



Help School Cafeterias Buy Local!


The H.R. 2626 Upton-Kind Farm to Cafeteria Bill provides \$10 million to create farm-to-school projects. The grants will be used to plan seasonal menus, develop relationships with nearby farmers, purchase equipment, and develop nutrition education. Endorse this bill with the Community Food Security Coalition at www.foodsecurity.org/action_alert.html or call 310-822-5410.

Celebrating local heroes


Get to know your local farmers. They, their families, and their supporters are doing more than just provide food — they are the managers of our open spaces. Here are just a few of the many people helping to build a regional food system in Central California.




Judy Low
Molino Creek Farming Collective, Davenport, CA




Andrew Griffin & daughter Lena
Mariquita Farm, Watsonville, CA



Nibby Bartle
Two Dog Farm, Davenport, CA



Jerry Thomas
Thomas Farm, Corralitos, CA



Maria Inés Catalán
Maria Inés Catalán's CSA, Hollister, CA



Vanessa Bogenholm
VB Farms, Watsonville, CA



Jim Cochran
Swanton Berry Farm, Davenport, CA



Jeff Larkey
Route 1 Farms, Santa Cruz, CA

Photos by Jered Lawson

What’s the Big Idea?

Click on [What's the Big Idea](#) at www.SectionZ.info.

“We cannot be free if our food and its sources are controlled by someone else. The condition of the passive consumer of food is not a democratic condition. One reason to eat responsibly is to live free.”
—Wendell Berry, Farmer & Essayist

Check out our sources

All our citations are listed online. Click on [Facts and Footnotes](#) at www.SectionZ.info. One example:

“The industrialized, conventional way of farming is not necessary — or inevitable. By its very nature, sustainable agriculture can enhance the environment without creating pollution and reduces the risk of human health problems by eliminating the use of toxic synthetic chemicals. It offers strong economic returns and new income opportunities for growers while providing consumers with safe, healthy food. Many farmers have already taken notice; between 40,000 and 80,000 growers in the United States (out of 1.8 million) are currently employing sustainable agriculture methods on their farms.”

—**Funders Agriculture Working Group (2001). “Roots of Change: Agriculture, Ecology and Health in California.”**

FEEDBACK MATTERS

Please let us know what you think of SectionZ. Write comments@SectionZ.info.

What do we mean when we say “local”?

As close to home as possible. Or as far as you will go to get to know your farmer.

SECTION Z

Making our economy safe for people and nature

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We can change all that by rethinking some of our basic assumptions. Let’s start by recognizing that the “economy” is but a part of the larger “ecology.” The result will be more prosperous lives for all of us.

The science is there, the economics is there, and we need you there, too.

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
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
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