



## Self serving

Chefs who buy from our farmers help the environment as well as the local economy

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At the River Cafe in Calgary, patrons can enjoy the Fish and Game Platter. (Supplied photo)

As farmers across the country complete their planting for the coming season, chefs across the country are planning their menus accordingly.

Restaurants across Canada are embracing the growing green trend of sourcing all of their ingredients locally. But while the local food movement has been in motion since the early 1990s, many chefs are now also placing a focus on sustainable food management.

"I chose to serve only sustainable seafood at my restaurant two years ago," says Michael Howell, head chef at Tempest in Wolfville, N.S., adding it was a "purely philosophical decision and is actually bad for my business."

Staple seafood such as salmon and blue fin tuna, he says, are extraordinarily popular with customers but are the product of unsustainable fishing and harvesting practices.

"People want salmon, but persuading them that what they really want is Arctic char because it's better for the world is hard to do," he says. "Blue fin tuna is just not ethically correct anymore. They're going to be gone before we know it."

But combining recipes that were once difficult to ethically justify -- like many seafood dishes -- with the local food movement can actually boost the variety of any menu.

Many once hard to find species, such as Arctic char, are now being farmed locally in more southern climes. Even more exotic species such as striped Mediterranean sea bass are being farmed in Canada for local consumers.

So while maintaining his local food mantra -- boasting that 80% of everything served in his restaurant is produced locally -- chefs like Howell are able to provide a startlingly diverse menu while staying friendly to the environment.

To bring those friendlier options home, Howell is publishing his first book of recipes, *Atlantic Seafood*, with Nimbus Publishing this fall. The book will provide classic seafood options but also some more ecologically friendly fare.

"In a book you must offer people all kinds of choices, and one of them is always a sustainable choice."

### SUPPORTING LOCAL ECONOMIES

The economic argument for eating locally is a powerful one. While many businesses are dealing with the global economic crisis, restaurants are all too aware of the cuts patrons are making to their dinner budgets. Local food restaurants give back to their community far more than others, argues chef Michael Howell.

"Every time a food dollar leaves our region, it never comes back. Every time a food dollar stays in our region, it's spent seven times over," says Howell, head chef at the Tempest restaurant in Nova Scotia and a leader of Slow Food Nova Scotia.

Howell knows farmers in his region on a first-name basis and that helps him to get deals on produce, but also ensures that local farmers always have a reliable buyer for their products.

### THE NAYSAYERS

Not everyone is convinced that eating locally is actually the greenest choice. At a debate on the true environmental cost of shipping food around the world by air, U.K. Trade and Development Minister Gareth Thomas, argued that because food is shipped around the world in such vast quantities, the environmental impact per food item is vastly reduced.

"The distance food has travelled is not a good way to judge whether the food we eat is sustainable. Driving 6.5 miles to buy your shopping emits more carbon than flying a pack of Kenyan green beans to the U.K.," he said.

### CREATIVE DISHES

Eating locally "forces you to be creative all the time," says chef Michael Howell of Nova Scotia. But aside from creative seafood dishes, local restaurants across the country are working their creative muscles to produce more interesting local fare.

At the River Cafe in Calgary, patrons can enjoy the fish and game platter, which includes native candied trout, duck rilletes, walleye roll mop, salt cured bison, pork and game terrine, pickled egg, grilled apple and turnip relish.

Ottawa's Domus Cafe offers prosciutto wrapped Canadian saddle of rabbit, ramp and le coprin mushrooms, spring vegetables and cranberry apple chutney.

Wolfville, N.S.'s Tempest features McNeil's free range chicken breast poached in truffle broth, morel mushroom sauce, organic local spinach and roasted garlic mashed potatoes.

Fude in Winnipeg has its own famous Manitoba bison or Stonewood elk back ribs with a house raspberry barbecue sauce, potatoes and veggies.

Vancouver's Pair Bistro has a locally sourced platter that includes Wapiti elk, local fish catch, Okanagan quail, wind dried salmon candy, harvest vegetables, Pemberton potatoes, brazed mushrooms, house smoked tomatoes and organic field greens.