

Choosing to Live Local



**How locally owned businesses
create financially secure, socially supportive,
and all-around healthier hometowns.**

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Why Living Local is good for you and for your community.

It's Saturday morning. You drive, walk, or bike into town to pick up a prescription from the pharmacy, which is owned by a neighbor whose son plays with your son. On the way, you stop at the little café that makes those mouthwatering cranberry-orange muffins. Working the register is a teenager whose mother is the manager of the community bank where you recently opened a business account. Before heading home, you stop by the printer, who promised to leave your business cards in a package outside his door. If you hurry, you can get to the farmers market before all the good tomatoes are gone.

All over America citizens are breathing new life into their cities, towns, and neighborhoods. They're seeing past the myth of everyday low prices. They're taking a look at how the businesses they support do business. They're embracing both the aesthetic and the economic value of locally owned businesses and locally raised foods. They are choosing a new path. They are choosing to live locally.

Your community is a reflection of the choices you make and the things you value. Get to know the benefits of supporting independently owned and operated retailers, restaurants, neighborhood businesses, and family farms. Then see—and feel—the difference living local can make.

What is Local Ownership?

Local ownership means that working control of a business resides within a geographically defined community. Ideally those who control the business live in that community, such as a sole proprietor or a retailer who lives and works in the same town. While there are distinct advantages to supporting the locally owned businesses and business owners who are right in your town, doing so is not always possible. Your favorite farm, for example, may be in an adjoining town, or the printer may live in an adjacent community. However, by choosing to support locally owned businesses first—whether they are in your city, town, or even county—you make an important contribution to the social and economic health of your entire region.



5 Reasons to Buy Local

- 1. Greater wealth and stability.** Local businesses are more likely to stick around for years, even generations, which makes them stabilizing forces in communities and much more reliable generators of wealth, income, and jobs.
- 2. Greater multipliers.** One of the most compelling arguments for buying from locally owned businesses is that every purchase made locally multiplies in value. The more times a dollar circulates within a defined geographic area, and the faster it circulates without leaving that area, the more income, wealth, and jobs it generates.
- 3. Less vulnerability.** A local economy that is based on self-reliance will be more immune to global economic fluctuations, which are entirely outside local control.
- 4. Smart growth.** Generally speaking, support of small-scale local business is a good way to reduce sprawl and promote smart-growth policies. Local businesses tend to be small, so they fit more easily inside homes or on the ground floor of apartment buildings. And because they focus primarily on local markets, local businesses place a high premium on being easily accessible to local residents.
- 5. Greater identity.** Part of what makes any community great is how well it preserves its unique culture, foods, ecology, architecture, history, music, and art. Local businesses celebrate those features. And local firms are more inclined to express and serve local tastes.

ADAPTED WITH PERMISSION FROM *THE SMALL-MART REVOLUTION: HOW LOCAL BUSINESSES ARE BEATING THE GLOBAL COMPETITION*, BY MICHAEL SHUMAN (BERRETT KOEHLER 2006).



Why Buy Local? Just Follow the Money.

Few of us realize that the purchasing choices we make really do influence our local economy. In fact, residents have more power to enrich their communities than they think. How is that possible? Just follow the money. Or more to the point, follow your money. Every dollar you spend at a national retailer or invest in a financial institution that operates on a global scale is a dollar that is no longer available to your community—including your local schools, the retailers that make your town an interesting place to shop, the community groups that rely on local support for arts programs, and even the beautification of neighborhoods and streets.

Keeping your hard-earned money within your community is the only real way to ensure your community's long-term economic stability. When you choose to have lunch at a locally owned restaurant that buys its bread from a local baker, who contracts with a local accountant who buys her printer paper from the corner office supply store, which pays interest on a business loan at a community bank, which loans your family money to spruce up your home with materials purchased at the local hardware store, which had its semiannual sales flyer designed and printed by a local marketing firm, you've multiplied the value of your \$8.00 lunch well beyond its initial worth. You've made a real and quantifiable investment in your community's long-term economic health.

“Over the next 60 seconds, Americans collectively will spend about \$23 million. A little less than \$16 million will be on personal needs. Every one of those dollars carries enormous power because every purchase is essentially a vote. It's a vote for a retailer, a vote for the local firms that supply the retailer, a vote for the communities where all those businesses operate.” —MICHAEL SHUMAN



Quality of Life That Money Can't Buy

Most of us have heard it our entire lives: Relationships are everything. Today, the value of relationships built on mutual respect, trust, and reciprocity is known as *social capital*. Though sometimes difficult to quantify, social capital is believed to be as essential to the health of individuals and communities as economic prosperity. Research is finding that communities rich in social capital experience fewer crimes, have comparatively higher housing values, and are less likely to fall into economic decline than those that are not.¹ And if that's not convincing enough, consider that civic connections—meaning the relationships that you cultivate with members of your community—are believed to rival marriage and affluence as predictors of life happiness.²

Nothing stimulates social capital quite like living local. When you visit local retailers, purchase food that is locally grown and raised, and run your business by purchasing goods and services from businesses that are based in your community, you're not just managing a transaction, you're forming trusted and lasting relationships. And those relationships will enhance your life in ways that low prices alone can't.

Social capital offers our children a lens through which they can see, first-hand, the value of personal connections and community-based interdependence. When we live a community-centric life—one that is rooted in mutual respect, gratitude, and reciprocity—we teach our children to value all kinds of work and the people who do that work. In this environment, children develop pride in their communities, which reinforces self-esteem and respect for others. They become part of something bigger than themselves, their families, and their network of friends. They become active and engaged citizens.

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1. See Charles M. Tolbert's (et al) discussion on Civic Engagement and Locally Oriented Firms in *Southern Perspectives* (Fall 2001).
 2. For an excellent discussion on the connection between community and quality of life, see Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon and Schuster 2000).



A Place Called Home

Many of us have had the experience of reading books or seeing movies about living in Tuscany or spending a year in Provence. Who hasn't wondered what it would be like to carry home a basket filled with fresh produce from the local farmer, a freshly baked baguette from the bakery, and a bottle of wine?

Every street, neighborhood, and town in North America has a unique character and a distinct history. The businesses and occupations that first emerged in our towns and cities were products of their region's climate, the characteristics of its land, and the proximity of its cities or towns to transportation. Every structure—including schools, stores, libraries, and homes—was built on a human scale. Today, big box retail outlets are hatched in marketing departments and designed to increase efficiency, reduce social interaction, and stimulate shopping. And housing developments are situated far from towns, schools, and workplaces; a phenomenon that leads to an increased dependence on automobiles and feelings of social isolation.

Discovering your hometown is an adventure that can change your life. You don't have to use up your vacation time doing it and you won't need a plane ticket to get there. You just need to open your local newspaper, spend a little time at your local library, or tap into resources that are available on the Internet to find local cultural, culinary, sports, and civic events.

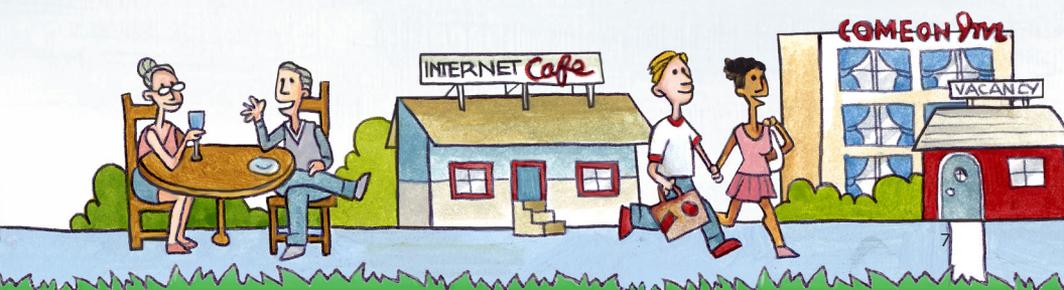


Take the time to really get to know your hometown by getting out and walking or biking through it. Make it a point to stop in stores that you know are locally owned and operated and see for yourself how different the experience can be. Grab a book about your region aimed at tourists and you might be surprised to discover day trips to farms, places of historic interest, national preserves, and parks that you never knew existed.

When we choose to live locally, we participate in creating prosperity. When we support local economies, interdependence flourishes and communities thrive, which makes us all healthier, more resilient, and more prosperous. We begin to see the difference between shopping to feel good and feeling good about how we shop. We start to see that the independently owned stores, restaurants, and service professionals in our neighborhoods are invested in our satisfaction. And we start to see how much their presence in the community enhances the quality of our life.

Independently owned and operated restaurants, farms, toy stores, book sellers, hardware stores, pharmacies, and clothing retailers, as well as community banks, financial service providers, and more make up the fabric of a community every bit as much as schools, teachers, and health-care providers. Together we can create stronger economies, healthier relationships, and places we are proud to call home.

The next time you have a choice, choose to buy local.



How far can you go in localizing yourself? In the spirit of late-night talk shows, here are 10 actions you can take to localize your community economy, from smallest to largest. Each item is followed by the target amount every American household can inject into the local economy through the prescribed action. For details about how to execute each action, see *The Small-Mart Revolution*.

10. Drink Local and Stop Smoking

Minimize consumption of booze (except local microbrews and wines), cigarettes, and naughty Internet sites, all of which are hard to localize.

Localizing potential: \$700 per household per year

9. Localize Car Services

Find a good local mechanic whom you trust and who charges reasonably. Use a locally owned car wash, auto-parts store, and insurer.

Localizing potential: \$1,000 per household per year

8. Give to local charity

Target charitable giving at local causes and nonprofits.

Localizing potential: \$1,300 per household per year

7. Localize household energy use

Conserve energy. Use local fuels, such as ethanol, wood, wind power, solar energy, or biodiesel.

Localizing potential: \$1,300 per household per year

6. Buy fresh food

Link up with local farmers and hydroponics operators and buy your fruits, vegetables, and meats through farmers markets, co-ops, direct delivery services, and community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs. Rediscover local bakers, butchers, cheese makers, chefs, and caterers.

Localizing potential: \$1,700 per household per year



5. Use local health care

Use local doctors, dentists, therapists, acupuncturists, and nursing homes.

Localizing potential: \$1,850 per household per year

4. Find local entertainment

Minimize your passion for high-end electronics and television. Spend more time at local sports events, health clubs, playgrounds, pools, parks, films, plays, puppet shows, dance clubs, concerts, and debate leagues.

Localizing potential: \$2,100 per household per year

3. Eat out locally

Avoid chain restaurants, especially fast-food joints that sell high-fat, high-salt food. Find locally owned alternatives, such as diners, ethnic-food restaurants, and restaurants that feature locally raised foods on their menu.

Localizing potential: \$2,300 per household per year

2. Halve auto use

Walk, bike, carpool, and take advantage of mass transit.

Localizing potential: \$2,450 per household per year

1. Localize your home

Rent from a local landlord, take a mortgage from a local bank, or, if possible, own your own home.

Localizing potential: \$7,800 per household per year

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R E S O U R C E S

CREATING BETTER COMMUNITIES

Active Living by Design: Establishes innovative approaches to increase physical activity through community design, public policies and communications strategies. www.activelivingbydesign.org

Better Together: Provides interactive ways to celebrate and learn how Americans are connecting, and provides tools and strategies to reconnect with others. Check out their 150 Ways to Build Social Capital. www.bettertogether.org/150ways.htm

League of American Bicyclists: Learn how to make your town a Bicycle Friendly Community. www.bikeleague.org

LOCATE AN INDEPENDENTLY OWNED BUSINESS

American Specialty Toy Retailing Association: Click on “Find a Store” to find an independently owned toy store near you. www.astratoy.org

Co-Op America: Check their National Green Pages to find sustainable businesses—many of them locally owned. www.coopamerica.org

Independent Community Bankers of America: Use their State Associations list to find a community bank in your region. www.icba.org

Indie Bound: The indie store finder on this site will help you locate an independently owned book store near you. www.indiebound.com

FOOD

Cooperative Grocer: Use their on-line Food Co-Op Directory to locate a food coop in your community. www.cooperativegrocer.coop

Eatwell Guide: An online directory of farms, stores, and restaurants that offer sustainably raised meat, poultry, dairy, and eggs. www.eatwellguide.org

Edible Communities: Regional magazines that connect local consumers with their region's farmers, chefs, and artisan food producers. www.ediblecommunities.com

Independent Grocers Alliance: IGA promotes the idea that a grocery store should be a community hub owned and operated by the very people who know the area best—the citizens. www.iga.com

Independent Natural Food Retailers Association: Search for independent natural and organic food retailers. www.naturalfoodretailers.net

R E S O U R C E S

Local Harvest: Use this Web site to find farmers' markets, family farms, and other sources of sustainably grown food in your area, where you can buy produce, grass-fed meats, and many other goodies. www.localharvest.org

Slow Food USA: Slow Food U.S.A. is a non-profit educational organization dedicated to supporting and celebrating the food traditions of North America. Connect with your local convivia to discover local foods and food traditions. www.slowfoodusa.org

Sustainable Table: Click on the links to locate CSAs, Farmers Markets, Food Coops, and more. The "Eat Seasonal" button will link you to seasonal produce charts from many states. www.sustainabletable.org/shop

USDA Alternative Farming Systems Information Center: Provides links to sites listing CSA farms including the Robyn Van En Center for CSA Resources and the Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association. www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/csa

USDA Farm Market Directory: Locate a farmers market in your area by using the USDA's comprehensive directory <http://search.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/>

SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENTLY OWNED BUSINESSES

American Independent Business Alliance: AMIBA provides communities with tools and resources to help them preserve a vital part of what makes "community." www.amiba.net

Authentically Local: A campaign by hyperlocal news sites to support home-grown media, stores and places. www.authenticallylocal.com

Business Alliance for Local Living Economies: BALLE is an international alliance of independently operated local business networks dedicated to building Local Living Economies. www.livingeconomies.org

Institute for Local Self-Reliance: A comprehensive Web site for creating and promoting sustainable communities. www.ilsr.org

Shift Your Shopping encourages residents to take job creation and economic concerns into their own hands by exercising their power to strengthen their own local economies. www.shiftyourshopping.org

The 350 Project is devoted to "saving the brick and mortars our nation is built on." www.the350project.net

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For information about sponsorship and distribution contact Zafra Press at info@zafrapress.com

Zafra Press, LLC

211 North Harrison Street • Suite A-5
Princeton, NJ 08540

P 609-921-0835 • F 609-683-4465

info@zafrapress.com • www.zafrapress.com