now boil down seawater for salt, survive off raw Brussels sprouts for entire afternoons and never touch tortillas. I suddenly know and admire goat farmers for unexpected reasons. I serve wait staff pop-geography quizzes and cook at odd hours so I’ll lose less weight. I drink Clear Madness Moonshine from Gonzales with fresh-squeezed orange juice from Madera, and drink tap water and local Pinot over Evian and France’s best Bordeaux. I am considering erecting a monument to free-range organic bacon from a ranch called Tastes Like Chicken.

Yes, life as a localvore, a term the New Oxford American Dictionary recently named its New Word of the Year, is a different existence than that I knew before. It can be expensive—to wit, I’ve dropped $60 on luxury Carmel Valley olive oil alone in the past two weeks. It can be complicated, though my diet has been simplified significantly. And there’s this to chew on: Because eating close to home can involve some far-ranging adventures around Monterey County and beyond, the intended consequences of this 15-day, 150-mile diet—to reduce the carbon costs of my eating habits by grazing upon food items that don’t have to travel long distances to make cameos on my non-stick pan—has grown a little dubious.

But the auxiliary benefits have proved addictive: The original experiment was slated to last a week, but the fact that the foods I’ve been eating are fresher, healthier and wonderfully unprocessed—and that my habits have kept my food monies within the local family farm circuit—inspired me to stay in localvore lockstep longer than I originally planned. Moreover, as the right-around-here diet demands some strategic planning, especially during an active workweek, I was just getting vaguely proficient by day seven, so the thought of quitting then seemed a little half-cooked.

Meanwhile, the discoveries I continue to make on a daily basis, even through day 14, have gathered a self-perpetuating momentum all their own. Just today, after decades of ignorant abstinence, I discovered San Joaquin Valley persimmons. I ate four in two hours. There was another factor, however, that helped clinch the continuation: The inherently intriguing stories behind the milk and honey, the bacon and eggs, the apples and onions allow for another layer of flavor I didn’t necessarily anticipate. With food playing such a fundamental role in our day-to-day existence and basic social-cultural experience—in a world where we are increasingly isolated from our food by monsoon-proof packaging and inter-continental processing and shipping—it tastes damn good to step outside the industrial food complex and personally know the nexus of my nourishment, especially when that nexus is a goat pasture next to a yurt in the hills outside Watsonville.

Organic produce, Serendipity Farms, Carmel Valley
Free range organic chicken, Petaluma
Free range organic pork, Tastes Like Chicken Ranch, Watsonville

Miles to Go Before I Eat

The journey to consume local foods is fraught with fresh ingredients, inspiring insights and local stories.

By Mark C. Anderson

(All continued on page 21)
Sometimes, it turns out, nourishment can come from a little too nearby. At Summer Meadows Farm, well within 150 miles of the Weekly office in Seaside, Calif., but up a steep twisting dirt road outside of Watsonville—past five abandoned cars, several grazing horses and three generally gregarious dogs—Lynn Selness and her family learned that the hard way. They were sitting down to some succulent goat loin in their wood-and-fabric yurt when the kids, who home-school so they can help with the demands of milking, feeding and grazing their sizable herd of goats, realized Slurpee was the main dish for dinner.

Standing next to her goats’ feeding trough while throwing leftover produce and small branches of live oak to her herd, which they grind through with stunning efficacy, Selness says that was the end of goat steaks. “Slurpee [the goat] was one of the kids’ favorites—they named him,” she says. “From then on it was only ground hamburger. That way they didn’t think about what they were eating.”

One of the slogans championed by the local food movement goes by any variation of the following: Know your fisherman/farmer/rancher. At Summer Meadows, I get to know the goats. Selness herself knows each little charismatic mammal by name, all 70-plus, including Cinnamon and Chocolate, Flora and Fauna, Morning Star, Lucy and Mary Lou. A contagious smile covers her face as she describes their courtship ritual: Her two breeding bucks (Jacob and Stinky Reuben) get as smelly “as possible by peeing on themselves.” The hierarchal class system the females establish, and the ritual they practice when a member of the herd returns after time with another farm, still amaze her. Her eyes well up as she recounts the day the now-deceased matriarch goat Brownie marched an entire pasture full of goats, including many that had long ago bullied past her in rank, to the barn with a simple but particularly poignant “Bleeaah.”

“There’s a lot more going on with the goats than we know,” she says. “We don’t know anything.”

Back in her yurt, Selness strains some raw goat milk drawn earlier in the day by her daughter, Meadow, into recycled bottles sitting in the kitchen sink. Almost all of it is destined to enhance Live Earth’s boxes of community-supported agriculture; I get a quart, the first salvo in an attempt to crack my pasteurized past. But I’ve come for the cheese. She offers me a taste of her ricotta, then quickly stashes it back in the fridge, as the family’s running low. I take chevre instead, a half-pound for an agreed $8 (it’s not normally for sale). Instinctively, I up the purchase to a pound. After going more than two days without one of my major food groups—cheese, hot sauce, bacon and beer—I need me some cheese.

They must see the savage orange ache of sausage-withdrawal in my eyes. “Corralitos Market,” comes the common chorus. “You have to go.” But when I enter the market before visiting the goat ranch, the report from the meat market floor is sobering. The incomparable cheesy Bavarians, robust Kobasics and glorious Creole sausages all are expertly treated, seasoned and processed in-house. But the mouthwatering meats themselves

---

**After going more than two days without one of my major food groups—cheese, hot sauce, bacon and beer—I need me some cheese.**

---

**Life on the Farm: The pigs, cows and chickens at Tastes Like Chicken Ranch are rotated around 20 acres of certified organic pasture and are fed several tons of certified organic grains and vegetables each week.**

---

**GoinG the Distance**

Life on the Farm: The pigs, cows and chickens at Tastes Like Chicken Ranch are rotated around 20 acres of certified organic pasture and are fed several tons of certified organic grains and vegetables each week. Back in her yurt, Selness strains some raw goat milk drawn earlier in the day by her daughter, Meadow, into recycled bottles sitting in the kitchen sink. Almost all of it is destined to enhance Live Earth’s boxes of community-supported agriculture; I get a quart, the first salvo in an attempt to crack my pasteurized past. But I’ve come for the cheese. She offers me a taste of her ricotta, then quickly stashes it back in the fridge, as the family’s running low. I take chevre instead, a half-pound for an agreed $8 (it’s not normally for sale). Instinctively, I up the purchase to a pound. After going more than two days without one of my major food groups—cheese, hot sauce, bacon and beer—I need me some cheese.

They must see the savage orange ache of sausage-withdrawal in my eyes. “Corralitos Market,” comes the common chorus. “You have to go.” But when I enter the market before visiting the goat ranch, the report from the meat market floor is sobering. The incomparable cheesy Bavarians, robust Kobasics and glorious Creole sausages all are expertly treated, seasoned and processed in-house. But the mouthwatering meats themselves

---

EAT continued from page 19

---

EAT continued on page 23
hail from as far off as Canada and, yes, Bavaria. Dave Peterson and his savvy Corralitos staff do process local hunters’ hogs into sausages, but my closest canine companion is scared of guns and my musket is rusty. To leave with something I can eat, it’s all I can do to find some local salmon that’s been cured and smoked in-house.

The near local-food shutout seems surprising at a time-honored spot like this, but it’s not a unique vision as I look through my 150-mile lens. At the Monterey Sea Harvest’s fresh-fish market, less than one-quarter of the 32 different types of seafood offered is local—and according to the attendant, their lemons are from China (fortunately my petrale sole will be splendidly edible with just garlic and honey). Back by Corralitos, Freedom Meat Locker is stuffed with great cuts of devoutly manly red meat, but the attentive butcher I encounter can only offer me a brochure to S/K Cattle Co. in King City when honoring my local focus. On a Tuesday at Whole Foods Market in Monterey, the butterfish from Monterey Fish Co. is the sole fish that formerly swam the bay, despite the fact that there are dozens of different kinds of seafood on display. At many local restaurants (and many bars with underwhelming wine lists), there is nothing offered that doesn’t involve several well-traveled ingredients—with some truly heaven-sent exceptions at super-local-savvy places like Stokes Restaurant in downtown Monterey and the Aquarium’s Portola Cafe.

The smoked salmon represents a common conundrum. The fish is local, the smoking and seasoning done on the premises. But the label tells me it is cured with salt, sugar, sodium nitrate and sodium phosphate, things not likely found within a remote radius. The fact that I buy it anyway constitutes my first moment of weakness (the others, albeit fleeting, involved gum, multivitamins, a bourbon tasting, two loaded nacho chips and a tiny double-baked soufflé). It also speaks to a crux of this 150-mile odyssey: How far am I willing to go to stay local?

Nerve involves asking the waiter at Stokes to swap out the complimentary sparkling water from Europe for some of the stinky tap water from the kitchen. Courage is refusing a birthday-party shot of Crown Royal at a table of 20. And shame means having to ask for

Shame means having to ask for a persimmons refund.

Serious Withdrawals
10 things it was hard to go without.

Behold the power of flour. It gives life to tortillas; it makes it possible to break bread. Alas, most domestic wheat is grown out of state. Best-selling author Barbara Kingsolver, who spent a year eating locally, allowed her family to use grains (they baked their own bread) and oil from outside the area just to help them stay sane. Each family member also was allowed a luxury item; Dad chose coffee, the kids dried fruit and hot chocolate. Here’s what would top my luxury list—in order of what I missed most:

1. Tapatio • There’s only one Tapatio, and only one supplier of its ingredients—in Mexico.
2. Spices • This was Kingsolver’s “luxury” item(s). I get it—garlic is great, but a little curry or Italian herb can really lift a dish.
3. Flour tortillas • Quesadilla, I took you for granted. Burrito, come back to me.
4. Bread • At one point I might’ve swapped my passport for a good sourdough melt.
5. Rice • So versatile, so easy, so affordable, so long.
6. Beer • English Ales in Marina and microbrews to the north and south do delicious elixirs, but they get their barley and hops from far off.
7. Pepper jack • There are a few local cheeses, but no PJ.
8. Condiments • Making mayo from scratch and styling salad dressings without spices is a lot harder than advertised. And this amount of fruits and vegetables beg for a decent dip.
9. Bananas • Called the Humvee of food miles by some, the banana still holds a place in my heart.
10. Coffee and tea • Ranks at the top for most folks, for obvious reasons.

—Mark C. Anderson
a fresh persimmons refund. The farmer at the folding table at the Old Monterey Marketplace looks at me with a fermented blend of disgust and pity the moment I request my money back. When his co-worker leans over and asks in Spanish why I don’t want the perfectly good persimmons, he flips a dismissive hand toward me and grumbles, “Ciento cincuenta,” Spanish for “150.”

Such things happen on day two and three of my diet (and continue at points thereafter). I am unfazed, ready to go the distance for this diet—and prepared to be rather ruthless in my self-enforcement of the 150-mile limit. If the food might be from farther away, I don’t want it. As I bought the persimmons and began to move away, I asked from where the fruit hails, only to find that their farm is east of Fresno, which I quickly and ignorantly calculate to be about 2 1/2 to three hours by car, or around 150 miles away. As I’m erring on the side of draconian self-discipline, east of Fresno equals no sale.

With the number 150 all-important, I plan on cutting zero corners—after all, I already had made my peace with the hardest part of the deal: namely, I can eat nothing if it contains wheat. Dory Ford, executive chef at Portola Cafe, whose parent company Bon Appétit toes the 150-mile line whenever possible, broke the news when I called him for strategic insight.

“No pasta, rice, anything that contains flour,” he said with a chuckle. “No sauces, unless you make it from scratch—too many ingredients. Watch out for dressing. Where’s your oil coming from to make vinaigrette? No beer—you’re gonna have to go to wine only. That could get expensive.

“And you can’t use pepper, no spices, no salt.”

Early on, I encounter little danger to my devotion: I actually stay within just a few miles of my food sources by cooking the treasures I score in my Community Supported Agriculture box from Carmel Valley’s Serendipity Farms ($20 a week): sweet bell peppers, rainbow chard, heirloom tomatoes, artichokes, red torpedo onions, dandelion greens, Italian parsley, romaine lettuce and gorgeous ochre, light-brown and pale-green eggs. A bottle of cold-pressed Carmel Valley Extra Virgin Olive Oil ($35) offers crucial help for the initial meal, the first omelet I’ve made since I was tall enough to reach the stove where cheese isn’t involved, and the first in a decade where Tabasco doesn’t splash happily upon the per-
fect fold of yellow egg. Fortunately the earthy heirlooms and torpedo onion, left undiluted, flex mighty flavor. They play with eggs that don’t so much taste better than standard food industry offerings as they simply taste. So what if I can’t wrap the omelet in a warm flour tortilla? (For the hardest things to surrender for 15 days, see sidebar, pg. 23.)

A visit to the Wine Market in Pacific Grove on the way back from the CSA pick-up spot at the mouth of Carmel Valley arms me with an affordable local Chardonnay to go with the omelet. Before I leave the store, owner George Edwards even decides he will take it upon himself to put together a list of local wines at modest price points (see sidebar, pg. 28). He later hits up Trader Joe’s to give me more options.

The next day, I add some strawberries, pasilla peppers and honey from the Old Monterey Marketplace on Alvarado Street before I have my run-in with the understandably angry persimmons man. But as snappingly fresh as my staple foodstuffs taste, the novelty wears off rather quickly, and my dishes develop a decidedly Spartan aspect: a romaine salad with heirloom tomatoes, a few hard-boiled eggs, and a handful of artichokes is no way to go through a day. I dream of the time needed to find the ingredients for and to actually make aioli from scratch with some dexterity—as I inwardly debate whether to illicitly reassign an intern from an important story to a homemade mayonnaise mission. Simultaneously, I experience unprecedented four-minute headaches. My editor, who (like all editors) is a crack expert on everything from anthropology to zoology, summarily declares them “starch headaches.”

When the newsroom infantry marches past my desk with pungent deadline-night bacon-chicken-ranch pizza, I feel...
an internal twitch somewhere near my brain stem. That must be where my self-discipline lives.

The Summer Meadows goat cheese helps me handle life sans bacon pizza. Suddenly, a fat slice of apple with cheese and honey is a luxury. And I have another technique to temper my dietary temperance: When my stomach lining trembles at the specter of the day’s 16th and 17th servings of fresh fruit and vegetables, I distract it by accessing memories of the fowl theatrics at Glaum’s Organic egg farm.

When $2 bills go into a vending machine there, a gorgeous rack of 21 fresh eggs emerges—and a display case full of small chicken figurines in customized Halloween costumes launch into a clucking “bup-bup-bup-ba” version of “In the Mood.” When that distraction device reaches its expiration date, a slug from a gallon of the best beverage I know, angelic apple juice from down the road at Watsonville’s Gizdich Farms, offers another coping mechanism.

As I’m grinding through the mid-morning honey and fruit, local foodstuff wonder weds me to my swivel seat. Jim Dunlop of Tastes Like Chicken Ranch in Watsonville drops off some gloriously gorgeous bacon from free-range organic pigs (who mingle with the free-range chickens), some eggs and some super creamy Claravale Farm raw milk from completely hormone- and chemical-free cows. Then a colleague delivers a serious stash of goods from the Santa Cruz Farmers Market—basil, eggplant, golden potatoes and a big pumpkin-like kombucha squash—and a fifth of the only local spirit I’ve been able to locate. Osocalis, an artisanal alambic brandy made from local Colombard, Pinot Noir and other coastal California grapes, reveals a stiff $37.99 sticker but a damn smooth taste.

Thing is, Dunlop had to drive to me and my colleague had to drive to Santa Cruz and back to supply such splendor. The goat cheese, smoked salmon and apple juice round trip to Watsonville racked up 42 miles. Later in the operation, after I scoop the Pacific into jars at San Carlos Beach, it takes a full hour of high heat to reduce it to the salt I seek. I can streamline things by visiting Whole Foods and using its “locally grown” labels to track down some very good cheeses and chicken that source within 150 miles—but as Weekly reporter Zachary Stahl pointed out in the first installment of this two-part series (visit montereyweekly.com and search “food miles”), regional and national shipping infrastructure doesn’t always guarantee that foodstuffs move in straight lines from the source to the shelf.

James McWilliams understands that these confounding variables are hard to avoid—and are therefore dangerous to the righteous food-milers I aspire to

Local Treasures
10 items that helped me through.

When it comes to garlic, the saying “You don’t know what you’ve got till it’s gone,” doesn’t really resonate. I know what I’ve got in garlic—the best flavor element out there, period—and I get nervous just seeing “garlic” and “gone” in the same sentence. It ties for the top spot with olive oil, which reasserted itself as essential a cooking element as this bootleg cook knows.

1. Garlic • Garlic mushrooms, garlic chicken, garlic shrimp. Thank God for Gilroy.
2. Olive Oil • I honestly don’t know what I would’ve done without it.
3. Seafood • It felt a little weird just eating three filets of petrale for dinner. It also tasted great.
4. Wine (see sidebar, pg. 30) • Monterey County: the future of wines.
5. Bacon • TLC Ranch should need a special permit to peddle their glorious bacon.
6. Heirloom tomatoes • For sauces, stir-fries, caprese salads and happiness.
7. Artichokes • I probably ate an average of two a day. Before lunch.
8. Cheese • Straus cheeses and Cowgirl Creamery out of Point Reyes are among the 150-and-in winners.
9. Eggs • The free range organic eggs available from local farmers are delicious.
10. Gizdich apple juice • Just try it and you’ll understand.

—Mark C. Anderson
emulate. McWilliams is a fellow at Yale in the agrarian studies program and is writing a book called *Just Food*, which he says will build upon a high-profile op-ed he wrote for the *New York Times*. His op-ed describes the pitfalls of going local one-dimensionally; in the book he plans to provide a pragmatic guide to eating ethically with that in mind.

“People who want to make the right decision for the environment are buying local and thinking, therefore, ‘I’m doing my part for the larger issue of the environment;’” he says. “My problem with that is that conveys a certain false satisfaction.”

Sautéing TLC Italian sausage with Gilroy garlic, portabellas from Ariel Mushrooms and Serendipity’s torpedo onions is a wonderful way to spend a lunch hour. Watsonville strawberries blend beautifully with Gizdich olallieberry syrup, Straus yogurt from their family-owned Point Reyes ranch, and sage honey from a secret local location. Spaghetti squash “pasta” from Carmel Valley, bathed in roasted heirloom tomato and pearl onion marinara sauce—with pan-fried Petaluma chicken and zucchini on top—is a down-home way to make a houseguest happy. Same goes for goat-cheese-stuffed pasilla peppers and catch-of-the-day petrale sole.

These are just the beginning of the insights I’ve gleaned since I began my diet 15 days ago. My knowledge has deepened in other ways: Watsonville's Ariel Mushrooms sells some 60,000 pounds of fungi a week; Morganic Hilltop Crops keeps its hive locations clandestine to guard against bee-and-honey heists, and nearly all of my local sources practice progressive sustainability habits.

McWilliams says this is just a beginning, however—eating according to food miles is still a one-dimensional way to evolve dietary habits. “Life-cycle” considerations must take place. This requires calculations that only economists might find appetizing.

“Factor inputs and externalities,” McWilliams writes in his *Times* piece, “like water use, harvesting techniques, fertilizer outlays, renewable energy applications, means of transportation (and the kind of fuel used), the amount of carbon dioxide absorbed during photosynthesis, disposal of packaging, storage procedures and dozens of other cultivation inputs.”

McWilliams understands that exten-
sive research and arcane math are a lot to digest. He adds that with so many complex food factors out there beyond consumer control, it’s as impractical as it is unsavory. “To eat totally ethically,” McWilliams says, “would require you to suspend reality.

“At this point, sure, I couldn’t do a life cycle assessment of a vegetable I buy in the store, and I’m not suggesting anybody try to do that,” he continues. “But thinking in long term, the movement to put food mile labels on products really encourages people to help see down the road. It’s in the scientific literature, not as much in the media yet, but it’s starting to get a lot more attention.”

Until then, even the most modest food-mile-informed actions can net powerful gains, as Barbara Kingsolver, Camille Kingsolver and Steven L. Hopp point out in their seminal food tome Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food. “If every U.S. citizen ate just one meal a week (any meal) composed of locally and organically raised meats and produce,” Hopp writes, “we would reduce our country’s oil consumption by over 1.1 million barrels of oil every week. That’s not gallons, but barrels.”

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle is not found in the food section at Borders, but in psychology. Fifteen days of local food help me understand why—the half month gone by hasn’t been so much about what I gave up, but what I gained: a much broader perspective on what I put in my body.

Better yet, the local community has gained with me. “Eighty-five cents of every food dollar goes to the food industry, the processors, marketers and transporters,” Kingsolver and Hopp report. Over the past two weeks, my caloric commerce made a lot more cents for local farmers like Jim Dunlop and Lynn Selness.

Not that the free-range bacon and organic egg odyssey has been all gains. The scale tells me I’ve lost three pounds.

—Mark C. Anderson

Gimme the Chimi

Fifteen days of deprivation ends with deep-fried delight.

It wouldn’t be a lie to say that the championship-caliber chimi-changa I ate to break my 150-mile food experiment came from the kitchen. Of course, it wouldn’t be completely true, either.

Jose’s Mexican Restaurant in Monterey, like the vast majority of restaurants in the country, uses a network of food-service distributors to gather the ingredients for their delicious dishes. Tracking food through that network to its source can be dizzying.

The pork for the savory carnitas in the chimichanga comes from a company called Tapia Brothers Co. Jose’s food buyer Greg Maldonado directed me to their Fresno office, which turned me over to their buyer in Los Angeles, who informed me that they purchase their pork most frequently from Iowa Beef Packers.

Tapia Brothers Co. also supplies Jose’s with its rice and beans. The buyer in charge of those purchases directed me to “CNF.” He admitted to having no idea what CNF stood for; the number he gave me for CNF, meanwhile, was busy for more than two hours.

The local distributor at Challenge Dairy, which stocks Jose’s sour cream and cheese, told me their cheese is made from milk from cows in the same town where the cows reside, in Hilmar, Calif., just south of Turlock. But before it comes to Monterey, the dairy products are shipped to San Leandro.

The tortilla hails from La Rosa Tortilla Factory in Watsonville (the flour, however, doesn’t). The avocados Del Monte Produce provides for Jose’s guacamole travel quite a bit farther. They were grown on another continent, in Chile.

All this mattered little once the diet-concluding changa hit the lips with all its deep-fried flamboyance—though it wasn’t as good as my tortilla-deficient mind had dreamed it would be over 15 days of deprivation. I could go for another one—a full afternoon of ingredient-tracking calls is enough to summon an aggressive appetite.

—Mark C. Anderson