

## Board Member Perspective

### Celebrate Earth Day with an Earth Dinner

By Steven Maviglio, SNFC Board Member

Remember the old expression,  
“You are what you eat?”

In his new must-read book, *In Defense of Food*, Michael Pollan, author of the best-seller *The Omnivore’s*

*Dilemma*, has a new twist on that saying. He says, “You are what you eat eats too.”

As Pollan explains, the industrial food machine is changing the way most of our food is grown. It’s also changing the way animals eat; in most cases, food animals, such as cows and sheep, are fed grains rather than left to pasture. That’s not good for them. And it’s not good for us.

The diet of animals (as vegetables grown in soil treated with pesticides) has a direct effect on the nutritional quality and healthfulness of food itself—whether it’s meat or milk or anything else.

For example, grass-fed animals have much healthier fats (more omega-3s) and fewer saturated fats in their milk, meat and eggs. Grass-fed animals also have significantly higher levels of vitamins and antioxidants.

Pollan points out that sometimes you can actually see that difference. For example, when egg yolks are a bright orange rather than mellow yellow it is the beta-carotene from the fresh green grass that makes the distinction.

That rule applies to vegetables too. “What’s good for the soil is probably good for you too,” Pollan writes. Recent studies of crops grown organically have found higher levels of antioxidants, vitamins and other nutrients than those grown by conventional methods.

It’s also well known that vegetables that spend a few days in a truck or a plane lose nutritional value quickly.

So what does all this have to do with Earth Day?

Simple. By eating food that’s locally grown, organic and unprocessed, we’re also helping our planet. Organic farming helps keep air, water and soil clean by not using toxic and persistent pesticides.

Many of the Co-op’s suppliers are piggybacking on that theme for their products on Earth Day this year. For example, Organic Valley is promoting the celebration of Earth Day with an “Earth Dinner.”

Noting that Earth Day is one of the few holidays without a celebratory meal, the company, one of the nation’s oldest and largest organic farm cooperatives, is using an “Earth Dinner” campaign to inspire connection to our food, our earth and one another.

“Food is at the heart of every culture’s celebrations and Earth Day deserves no less,” says Earth Dinner founder Theresa Marquez, who also is the marketing director for Organic Valley. “Earth dinners are a time to pause and reflect on where our food comes from and how it is grown. Bringing awareness to what we eat imbues the experience with joy and a sense of community.”

The Earth Dinner campaign is supported by a broad-based coalition of environmental organizations including Beyond Pesticides, Bioneers, Earth Day Network, Small Planet Institute and the Waterkeeper Alliance. Food-oriented groups also have signed on as cosponsors, including the Chefs Collaborative, Slow Food USA and the Organic Consumers Association.

It seems to be spreading in popularity. Top chefs around the country are joining the act. Progressive restaurateurs in Seattle, Portland (Oregon) and San Francisco have special Earth Day/Earth Dinner menus. And it shouldn’t be long before we see one in Sacramento too!

Not that you have to go out to eat. You can do the same at your kitchen table. A potluck dinner would lend itself well to an Earth Day Earth Dinner.

Start by encouraging guests to use local and organic ingredients from the Co-op. On top of that, have them find out where the food came from and how it was grown; it’ll make for some interesting dinner conversation.

At the Co-op, we’ll help you enjoy your Earth Dinner celebration on Earth Day. Produce from the Co-op is routinely identified by where it comes from. In many instances, you can also find out more from our staff (and in previous editions of the *Co-op Reporter*) about our suppliers of produce, as well as other grocery and food items.

(You can visit [www.earthdinner.org](http://www.earthdinner.org) to download free samples of Earth Day dinner recipe and conversation cards.)

Making thoughtful food choices can enrich your life—and improve our Earth. Happy Earth Day!