A farmer and distinguished writer explains why it is vital that we understand where and how our food is produced.

Many times, after I have finished a lecture on the decline of American farming and rural life, someone in the audience has asked, "What can city people do?"

"Eat responsibly," I have usually answered. Of course, I have tried to explain what I meant by that, but afterward I have invariably felt that there was more to be said than I had been able to convey. Now I would like to attempt a better explanation.

I begin with the proposition that eating is an agricultural act. Eating ends the annual drama of the food economy that begins with planting and birth. Most eaters, however, are no longer aware that this is true. They think of food as an agricultural product, perhaps, but they do not think of themselves as participants in agriculture. They think of themselves as "consumers." If they think beyond that, they recognize that they are passive consumers. They buy what they want—or what they have been persuaded to want—within the limits of what they can get. They pay, mostly without protest, what they are charged. And they mostly ignore certain critical questions about the quality and the cost of what they are sold: How fresh is it? How pure or clean is it, how free of dangerous chemicals? How far was it transported, and what did transportation add to the cost? How much did manufacturing or packaging or advertising add to the cost? When the food product has been manufactured or "processed" or "precooked," how has that affected its quality or price or nutritional value?
The Pleasure of Eating

By Wendell Berry

Food in the Mind of the Eater

When food, in the minds of many, is no longer associated with farming and with the land, then the eater is suffering a kind of cultural amnesia that is misleading and dangerous. The past is a distant continent, existing in a mists of preconception and of memory and of oblivion, and the present is a plastic continent, existing in a mists of presentment and of concept and of illusion. The products of nature and agriculture have been made, in all probability, the products of industry. Still, we are able to see the foodstuffs as if they were not in any way biological entities. The result is a kind of blandness, unprecedented in human experience, in which the same thing is being eaten as food, and again and again, and again, and again, and again, and again.

The pleasure of eating, then, is not in the mere food, but in the understanding of the world from which the food came. In eating something that you have grown, you understand the world from which it came. In eating something that you have caught, you understand the world from which it came. In eating something that you have killed, you understand the world from which it came. In eating something that you have stolen, you understand the world from which it came. In eating something that you have bought, you understand the world from which it came.

So it is that the pleasure of eating is not in the mere food, but in the understanding of the world from which it came. And this pleasure of eating is not in the mere food, but in the understanding of the world from which it came. And this pleasure of eating is not in the mere food, but in the understanding of the world from which it came. And this pleasure of eating is not in the mere food, but in the understanding of the world from which it came.

The pleasure of eating should be an extensive pleasure, not that of the mere gourmet. People should learn the origins of the food they eat, and buy the food that is produced closest to them. They should learn what is involved in the best farming and gardening. They should learn what is involved in the best farming and gardening. They should learn what is involved in the best farming and gardening. They should learn what is involved in the best farming and gardening. They should learn what is involved in the best farming and gardening.

To purchase this issue, view the magazine, Issue #33.