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Editor  
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Sir

I read with interest your economic dissection of the organic, fair-trade, and local food movements (“Voting with your trolley”, December 9<sup>th</sup> 2006). However, I wonder if you have discounted too much (in fact completely) the value of taste and variety in your consideration of local food. It is not clear to me why anyone needs to eat a tomato in winter whether it is from Spain or from a greenhouse in Britain. Eating with the seasons used to have meaning but seems to have been lost in our current 24/7, global approach to life where we view as a birthright the ability to have any food at any time of year irrespective of its natural season. As many of us have experienced, those tomatoes in winter never quite have the same taste as those in summer.

In addition, there is value in terms of genetic diversity to having locally produced foods. One potential danger in the increasingly concentrated food system is the use of a smaller and smaller number of genetic varieties of basic foodstuffs. Over time this increased concentration risk could pose problems if particular crop or animal strains are proven susceptible to pathogens. This has been well documented by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The FAO sponsored International Treaty for Plant Genetic Resources for Agriculture, which came into force in June 2004, may help to mitigate this risk. Sadly it has yet to be ratified by the United States. However, the U.S. has been a leading contributor to the Global Crop Diversity Trust, the only international organization dedicated to conservation of crop diversity worldwide.

I also found it curious that you chose not to mention geographical indications in your article. This is one attempt to find a legal means to encourage diversity and local production as well as spur rural development. One can argue whether this form of “protectionism” (as all intellectual property rights fundamentally are) is the most efficient means to accomplish this end. It is also unclear whether the EU and US and their respective allies in this debate can find a middle ground on the issue as little progress has been made in the Doha round. No matter where you stand in this “food fight”, however, it is clear that this is part of the larger debate around food politics and agricultural trade and may provide a key ingredient in any eventual deal on Doha. Thus, it deserves mention in any discussion of the issues.

You are right to note that politics as much as purchases will determine the future of food trade and the agricultural system. Thus, I found your article incomplete by failing to mention the numerous NGOs (Slowfood, Oldways, ORIGIN, and the Fair Food Foundation to name the most ambitious) active in this area. On the whole, however, I congratulate you for raising consciousness on this issue and bringing an economic perspective to the discussion.

Best regards,

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