

Protecting God's Creation • Embracing Gospel Justice • Nurturing Spiritual Fulfillment

Food

Our Lenten practice this week is buying and eating our food responsibly.

Eating is a moral act.

"Give us today our daily bread." All the food we eat comes directly from Earth. The act of eating unites us to the soil, water, and animals of this planet like nothing else. All these gifts of God's creation are included in our food.

Every purchase of food and every act of eating becomes a moral decision. When making food choices, we need to consider the manner in which crops were planted and fertilized, the method used to raise animals for eating, and the distance food must be shipped.

While our agricultural system produces a lot of food, it also has a downside. Chemical fertilizers and pesticides from large industrial farms contaminate our soil. Animal waste from factory-farmed meat spoils our streams and rivers. Transporting food over long distances pollutes our air. Food choices are having a huge impact on the whole of creation.

Food is not only central to survival, it is a sacramental gift of God's grace and providence. Our Lenten fast this week aims to develop greater sensitivity to how our food choices can honor, rather than exploit, the sacredness of creation.

Laudato Si, Pope Francis's encyclical on ecology and caring for the environment, flows from a deep tradition of Catholic social teaching based on our interconnectedness. Pope Francis writes: "Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature."

Think about the implications of your food choices before you buy.



"From the moment you put a piece of bread in your mouth you are part of the world. Who grew the wheat? Who made the bread? Where did it come from? You are in relationship with all who brought it to the table. We are least separate and most in common when we eat and drink."

—Thomas Merton

"Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished." —Matthew 4:1-2

What the Church Is Saying

1. Listen to Earth

"We can no longer simply do what we like . . . with this earth of ours, with the reality entrusted to us. On the contrary, we must respect the inner laws of creation, of this earth, we must learn these laws and obey these laws if we want to survive. Consequently, this obedience to the voice of the earth . . . is more important for our future happiness than . . . the desires of the moment. . . . Being itself, our earth, speaks to us and we must listen if we want to survive."

—Pope Benedict XVI

2. Don't Waste Food

"Whenever food is thrown out it is as if it were stolen from the table of the poor, from the hungry! I ask everyone to reflect on the problem of the loss and waste of food, to identify ways and approaches which, by seriously dealing with this problem, convey solidarity and sharing with the underprivileged."

—Pope Francis

3. We Have Responsibility for World Food Concerns

"Farm owners and farmworkers are the immediate stewards of the natural resources required to produce the food that is necessary to sustain life. These resources must be understood as gifts of a generous God. When they are seen in that light and when the human race is perceived as a single moral community, we gain a sense of the substantial responsibility we bear as a nation for the world food system."

—United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

4. Raising Animals for Food Has Ethical Implications

"Catholic teaching about the stewardship of creation leads us to question certain farming practices, such as the operation of massive confined animal feeding operations. We believe that these operations should be carefully regulated and monitored so that environmental risks are minimized and animals are treated as creatures of God."

—United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



Imagine Earth divided equally among all of us. Each person would receive 4.2 acres. Now imagine that everything you need—food, energy, home, clothing, appliances, gadgets—must come from those 4.2 acres. But it takes 17.2 acres per person to maintain the average American lifestyle. Inspired by Pope Francis, Lent 4.2 is a new way of observing Lent that helps us care for God's creation by taking steps toward using only our fair share of its resources. Moving in the direction of 4.2 is essential for anyone walking in the footsteps of Jesus today. Information online at www.lent42.org.

On average, food travels 1,500 to 2,500 miles to get from farm to plate.

“Lord, to those who are hungry, give bread. And to those who have bread, give the hunger for justice.”

—Latin American Prayer

Action Steps

Eating is a moral act. If you eat, you participate in our agriculture system, and the ethical dimensions of food production should be a concern. You “vote” three times a day. With every meal you can choose to bless or spoil God’s creation. This week of Lent 4.2 offers suggestions on how grocery shopping and eating habits can make a difference.

What we eat is one of our most ingrained habits—and that makes it difficult to change. There are numerous ways to show respect for creation when eating. The most obvious is to begin with a prayer of gratitude and then take practical steps to reduce your negative impact. It boils down to eating less meat and more food that is grown organically and locally (so that it doesn’t need to be shipped long distances). Realize that chemical fertilizers, transportation, and packaging of food have a huge impact on the planet. Consider which steps you can take.

✓ If There’s Only One Thing You Can Do . . .

Abstain from meat this week . . . or make meat only a side dish.

Pound for pound, livestock requires more water, land, and energy than grains and vegetables. Waste disposal from factory farming of animals pollutes water supplies. Almost 800 million people suffer from hunger or malnutrition while much of the corn and soy grown in the world feeds cattle, pigs, and chickens for wealthy eaters. Consuming less meat is one of the most significant ways to lower your impact on God’s creation.



What and Where to Buy

- Try purchasing sustainable and organic food. It’s grown without pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, or harmful additives.
- If buying meat or dairy, choose animal products that have not been treated cruelly or grown in Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations.
- Whenever possible, buy food grown and processed close to home. Transportation of food guzzles energy. Shop at a farmers’ market.

Prayer



*Good and gracious God,
you provided manna in the desert
for your chosen people.
May we recognize that our food
comes from your bounty,
the generosity of our planet,
and the strenuous work
of many human hands.
Teach us to reverence your creation
which supplies our food.
Show us how to make room
at the table for everyone. Amen.*

- Eat real food. Hint: shop the perimeter of the store. Most foods in the middle aisles of supermarkets are preprocessed and packaged.
- Buy in bulk. To minimize landfill waste, support manufacturers who use minimal packaging.
- Like your caffeine? Drink only fair-trade coffee/tea. Commit to giving farmers a fair price for their product and work.

Cooking and Eating

- Do without fast food and highly processed food for the week. If that’s not possible, before biting into the burger, choose food that is produced sustainably and ethically.
- Lent = Fish. Select seafood that’s good for you and the oceans. Download a consumer’s guide to sustainable seafood at www.seafood.edf.org.
- Purchase and set up a composting bin at home. Send food waste back to the soil instead of landfills.
- Pause in prayer before eating to be grateful for the bounty of creation and the many hands that helped bring food to your table.
- Check out the Slow Food movement. Bring balance to fast food and fast life.

Food Security

- Participate in food production to the extent you can. Connect with Earth and grow some of your own food. You will appreciate your food, having known it all its life.
- Support a just food system that provides adequate food for everyone. Learn more at the Bread for the World website: www.bread.org.

Steps Continued

1. Calculate your food footprint at www.eatlowcarbon.org.
2. Watch “The Meatrix,” a four-minute video on the factory farming of animals.
3. Read about the dark side of food issues in our country—two extracts from the introduction to Eric Schlosser’s *Fast Food Nation* are available online.
4. Eating is a moral act. Learn more at the Catholic Rural Life website.
5. Learn about “food deserts” in your community. Use USDA food desert locator.

All this and more available online at www.Lent42.org.