Deep Bioregionalism as Antidote to the Illusion of Local Food

Michael Bomford, PhD
The local advantage

• Food security
  • Fresh, nutritious food
  • Decentralized, resilient production systems
  • Strong connection between farmers and eaters

• Resource cycling
  • Keep dollars circulating locally
    • Greater share to local farms, farmers and farm workers
    • Human scale, personal connections
  • Less dependence on fossil energy and imported fertilizers
    • Greater use of locally-available renewable resources (sun, rain, soil, compost, people) instead of imported and extracted non-renewables (oil, coal, natural gas, groundwater, rockwool, synthetic N, mined P, mined K etc.)

• Less transportation
• Less pollution and greenhouse gas emissions

• Vibrant, resilient, decentralized local economies
Fossil energy input to food system far exceeds food energy delivered

Fossil energy input and food output for US food system, 2012

Calories/person/day

- Kitchens
- Food service
- Selling
- Transport
- Packaging
- Processing
- Farming

Fossil input

Food available

Going to buy food

Canning et al., USDA-ERS, 2017
Fossil energy used to put food on US plates in 2012

- Mostly electricity, not petroleum
- Mostly processing and preparation
- Farming uses small proportion of total energy use
- Household trips to grocery store use almost as much petroleum as trucking/shipping before grocery store

Canning et al., USDA-ERS, 2017
Food self-reliance, Southwest BC, 2011

Dorward et al., 2016
Why do you need to partner with growers in the U.S. and Mexico?

Growing produce in BC during the winter is costly, since artificial heat and light must be used to overcome cold local temperatures and minimal sun. During this time, we partner with producers in U.S. and Mexico to grow product that meets our exacting standards and mirrors what we produce locally during our growing season. We work closely with our southern partners to make sure best practices in growing and food safety are rigorously followed.

https://bchothouse.com/faqs/
Shadow Brands

- Bowen Island Brewing and Hey Y’All Southern Tea are both owned by Northam, which brews in Whistler, BC

- Samuel Adams is owned by the Boston Beer Company, which mostly brews in Ohio and Pennsylvania
Local illusion

- Place-based branding and point-of-origin labeling reveals little (nothing?) about a food product’s connection to a place.
- “Buy local” campaigns are universal but offer little to assurance of food system sustainability or regional connections.
  - Transportation is a small portion of food system energy use and greenhouse gas emissions.
  - Locally-grown foods can still be grown in resource-demanding systems, be heavily processed and packaged, or be heavily dependent on imported labour and inputs.
# Shallow vs. Deep Bioregionalism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shallow</th>
<th>Deep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Investor owned</td>
<td>Worker owned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant farm workers</td>
<td>Farm families live and work on/near farm</td>
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</tbody>
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# Shallow vs. Deep Bioregionalism

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feed / feedstock imported from off farm</td>
<td>Feed / feedstock grown on farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depends on synthetically-fixed nitrogen and imported mined fertilizers</td>
<td>Depends on plant-based nitrogen fixation and nutrient conservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generates more waste than farm can absorb</td>
<td>Wastes retained for nutrient conservation without leaching or runoff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fossil fuel intensive production</td>
<td>Uses renewable energy available on farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrigation from non-renewable groundwater or energy-intensive desalinization</td>
<td>Irrigation from surface waters, rainfall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depletes soil organic matter or uses soilless growing media</td>
<td>Sequesters carbon in soil by building organic matter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shallow Bioregionalism</td>
<td>Deep Bioregionalism</td>
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<td>------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emphasis on low “food miles”</td>
<td>Emphasis on strengthening connections between eaters, farmers, and sustainable agroecosystems</td>
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</tbody>
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Diagram: Intersections of Soil Health and Biodiversity, Land-Use and Rural Livelihood, Water Quality and Conservation, Local Access to Fresh Food, Air Quality.
Four levels of LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design)

- **CERTIFIED**: 40-49 points
- **SILVER**: 50-59 points
- **GOLD**: 60-79 points
- **PLATINUM**: 80+ points
Regenerative Organic Certification

https://regenorganic.org/
Graduated certification of regional claims