Best Place for

Eating Right

San Francisco Bay Area, California

The "farm to table" movement began here. The region's bounty of produce and year-round growing season make eating healthy—and local—a natural.

EARTHLY BEAUTIES *Many-colored organic carrots at the Ferry Plaza Farmers Market.*

By Suzanne Bohan

With saxophone music wafting through the air, a man drawing laughs with his opera-diva marionette, and a sea of stalls piled with delectable fresh foods, a visit to San Francisco's Ferry Plaza Farmers Market feels more like joining a vast outdoor party than a trek to get provisions. On Saturdays, up to 30,000 people flock to the waterside market to take in the downtown skyline and the magnificent views of San Francisco Bay. But it's the food, of course, that ultimately attracts the masses of visitors, who fill their bags with tasty delights, some of which aren't sold anywhere else.

The Ferry Plaza market opened in 1993 on a smaller site, but like many other Bay Area businesses associated with the locally grown food movement, it kept expanding. In 2003 it moved to its current location, where three times a week some 100 sellers display an astonishing array of delicious-looking foods, from fresh seafood and grass-fed meats to countless varieties of fruit and vegetables, cheeses, olive oil, breads and healthy to-go fare.

At the booth for Rojas Family Farms, organic lettuce varieties, carrots, beets and Swiss chard lined the counters on an early-spring Saturday. Fresh strawberries and jars of jams in deep purples and reds filled the display of Swanton Berry Farm, while Cap'n Mike's Holy Smoke stand drew enthusiastic buyers for his preservative-free smoked fish. Third-generation asparagus grower Roscoe Zuckerman spoke about the business he's run at the farmers' market for 20 years. He and his workers raise the flavorful deep-green spears on 1,500 acres of rich Delta peatland 80 miles east of San Francisco, and restaurants account for at least half his sales. "Any good restaurant in this town, they come here," Zuckerman said, rattling off a few marquee names.

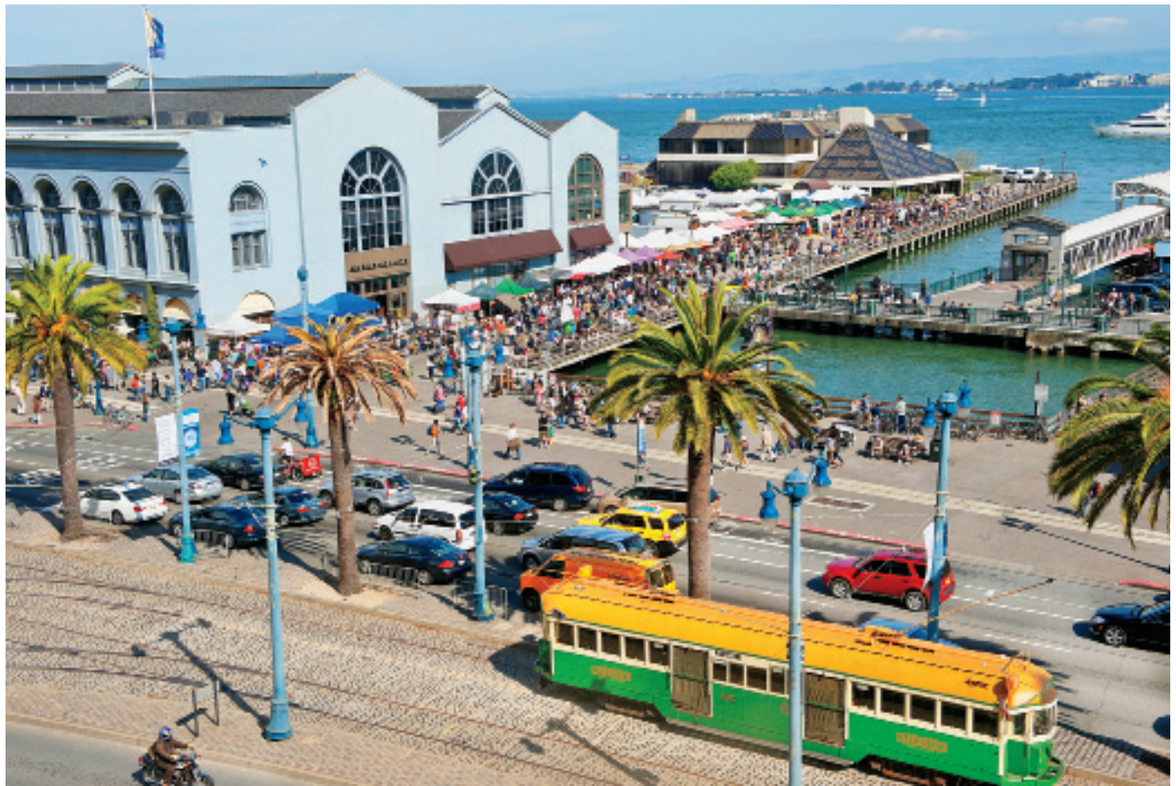
At least 300 chefs shop the market regularly. Justine Kelly pushed a cart topped by a box of morel mushrooms. They would go into a scallop dish at the plush, private San Francisco club where she heads the kitchen. The asparagus from Zuckerman's Farm was destined for a salad special that night, and as a side dish with steaks. Robin Song, who was named one of the *San Francisco Chronicle*'s "2013 Rising Star Chefs," is a regular. When he rolled up to Zuckerman's, his cart was already laden with pale baby parsnips purchased from another farmer, as well as green strawberries. "They have a nice tartness," Song said. Both chefs get most of their produce from the market.

While Ferry Plaza is the best-known farmers' market in the Bay Area, the nine-county region (population: 7 million) featured 209 certified markets at last count. That's more than a quarter of California's record-breaking 823 farmers' markets. New York is a distant second nationally, with 636 farmers' markets, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

All this abundance in the Bay Area seems to translate into better eating habits. Several national studies, not surprisingly, find a correlation between easy access to affordable fruits and vegetables and more consumption of them. Nationwide, only 33% of adults achieved federal health goals set in 2000 for consuming fruit at least twice a day, and only 26% achieved the goal of at least three servings of vegetables daily, according to a 2010 report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Those targets fall far short of the USDA's recommended seven to 13 servings daily of fruits and vegetables for optimal health, but produce consumption among Americans was so abysmally low in 2000 that the CDC set what it thought was a modest interim target of increasing consumption to five per day by 2010.

The Bay Area is one of the few places in the country where many people hit that target. Half of adults here consume at least five servings of produce daily, accord-

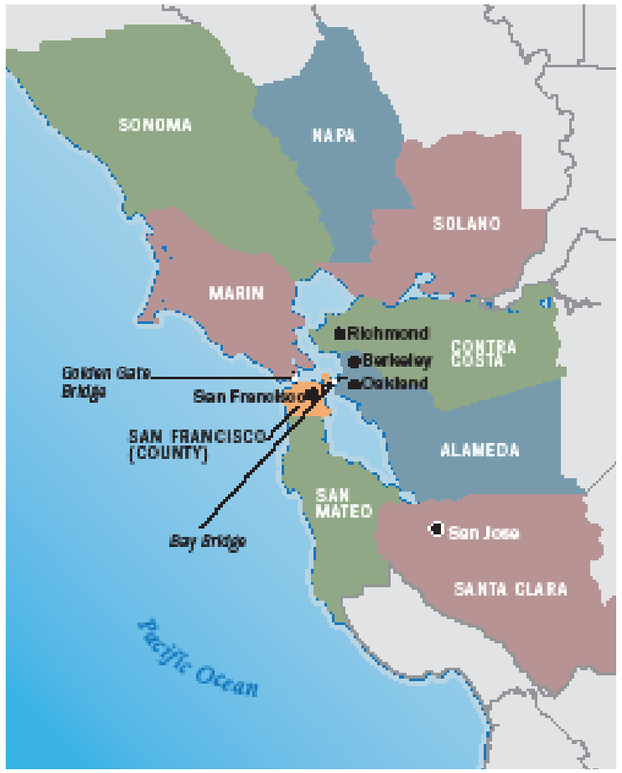
FEAST FOR THE SENSES *Opposite: A profusion of grapes at the Rojas Family Farms stand. Below: The farmers' market occupies a century-old ferry terminal on the Embarcadero walkway.*



ing to the California Department of Public Health. In Sonoma County in the northern end of the region, the number reaches 56% for adults and an impressive 71% for young children. With so many folks filling up on veggies, no wonder obesity is relatively low: 46% of Bay Area adults manage to maintain a healthy weight, compared with only 30% nationally.

When health experts talk about optimal eating, the focus tends to fall on fruits and vegetables, although whole grains, healthy fats, lean meats and fish also matter. Vegetables and fruits contain vital nutrients, vitamins and phytochemicals; they're also low in fat and calories, and their high fiber content promotes feeling full. And giving credence to the buy-local fervor, studies show that the fresher the produce, the more of its original nutrients it retains. Those who meet even the minimal five-daily goal have a roughly 20% lower risk of developing heart disease or stroke compared with those who eat fewer than three servings daily, according to the Harvard School of Public Health. More than five portions a day confers even better protection. Among myriad health benefits, adequate fruit and vegetable consumption helps prevent type 2 diabetes and appears to protect against certain cancers—including breast, colon, esophagus, lung, prostate and stomach cancer.

The San Francisco Bay Area



A Movement Is Born

The word "locavore," a term for adherents of the burgeoning locally grown food movement, was coined in the Bay Area in 2005 to name a one-month eat-local campaign. The term hit the national dialogue in 2007 when the New Oxford American Dictionary chose "locavore" as its "word of the year." Alice Waters, who in 1971 founded the renowned restaurant Chez Panisse—just across the Bay Bridge in Berkeley—is widely credited with sparking the Bay Area's first burst of enthusiasm for local, organic fare served at the height of its flavor. In 2001 *Gourmet* magazine named Chez Panisse the "best restaurant in America," and between 2002 and 2008 *Restaurant* magazine ranked it as one of the world's top 50 restaurants.

For Waters, the enduring passion for in-season, local foods that taste nothing like what you'd get in a typical grocery store simply represents a return to a way of eating that was commonplace before the advent of intensely marketed processed foods. "We're coming back to our senses," she says. Waters opened Chez Panisse to replicate the simple cuisine of French bistros that enchanted her when she lived in France in the 1970s, but she hit a hurdle in finding foods, especially produce, that matched the flavor and freshness she had found in France. In 1985 she connected with the perfect small farmer to supply her restaurant. Bob Cannard took organic farming to the highest level, deeply nurturing the soils and plants on his Sonoma County farm. The result was produce unlike anything Waters had tried before in the U.S. From that direct relationship between Cannard and Chez Panisse, the "farm to table" movement unofficially began. (See the interview with Waters, opposite.)

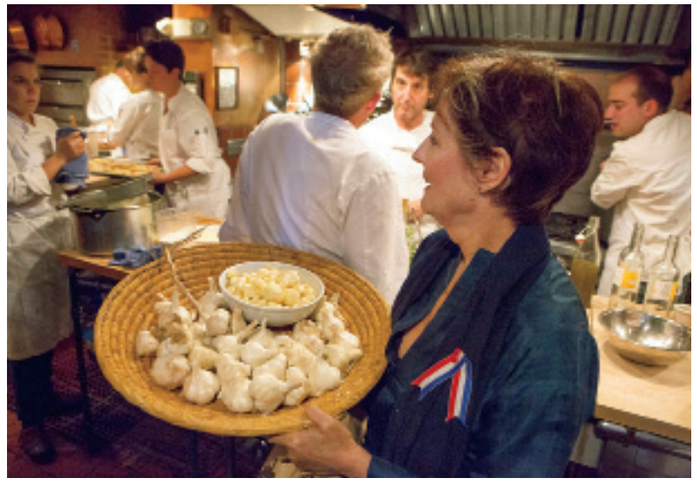
Cannard still farms in Sonoma, stocking the Green String Farm Store he co-owns, and he still supplies Chez Panisse. "And I've never missed a load. It's an honorable and important position being a food producer," he says, with the same reverence for wholesome foods that Waters has.

Waters's insistence on serving locally grown, seasonal foods (for example, no fresh tomatoes on the menu in winter) triggered significant media attention and public buzz in the Bay Area on the merits of foods from small, local suppliers. Another important voice emerged in that

Alice Waters

The master chef who kicked off the local-food movement explains how it all began and how it's changing the culture and flavor of American food

BY SUZANNE BOHAN



When you started serving only locally produced food at your restaurant, Chez Panisse, did you have any idea that you'd be starting a national movement?
Oh, not a chance in the whole world. I was just trying to make a restaurant like the ones I'd eaten in all over northern France. I lucked out by being in France when it was basically a slow-food culture. Kids came home for two-hour lunches. The dinner table was a sacred place. Everybody bought bread that was hot and fresh, and vegetables that I'm sure were organic. It was before the big change in farming. I really took the whole culture with me: the idea of this beauty and slowness and taking your time, and growing for flavor, and taking care of the land. These are all ideas that have been with us since the beginning of civilization.

But you didn't have much to work with at first. Is it true that you turned to the backyard gardens of your neighbors in Berkeley?
Absolutely. People would bring out bunches of radishes and we'd kind of make trades for a dinner or a lunch. The first time I'd had fingerling potatoes was when a German couple brought them in to make a trade with us. I'd never seen such a thing. And we'd pick things in the park, things like fennel. A little foraging was going on, to say the least.

So how did you finally connect with local farmers?
My father and mother thought it was kind of crazy the way I did business, and they thought we should have a farmer of our own. They visited all the organic farms within an hour's drive of Chez Panisse, and narrowed it down to five. But they always thought that Bob Cannard was the one for us. It took us a couple of years to get into the real groove of what it was to have the farm drive the menus—that we were going to cook with what he grew. We realized pretty quickly that it made all the difference in terms of taste—there was that aliveness in food.

You've been all over the country. Why is the Bay Area such an epicenter for healthy food?
It's just because there's so much farming in California, and the organic movement started here so long ago, and because a lot of environmentalists live in Northern California. It's a very, very fertile place. But there are a lot of other areas that could be. I think about Georgia and North Carolina. Michigan and Vermont. I even think about Kentucky, because they've got [author–farmer–environmental activist] Wendell Berry, and they have to transition from tobacco to growing food. Madison, Wis. Oregon. Texas, because of the olives. Oh, my God, they could do something amazing with olive oil in and around Austin.

How do you tell people in places with short growing seasons to eat seasonally and locally?
We can eat so well with the techniques of preservation and the greenhousing possibilities. We have nuts and dried fruits; we know how to pickle and can. We know how to make syrups, and we have grains of all sorts, and dried beans and lentils in colors, and spices from around the world. There are beautiful cheeses and breads that people make, there are incredible squashes, there are carrots of every color, there are things in cold storage, turnips and beautiful potatoes.

Do you see the American food system really changing?
I'm in a very rarefied world of young people who want to help change it. There are incredible activist farmers around the country, so I'm very hopeful. I'm advocating for free, organic, locally sourced school lunch across the country. If we did that, it would change farming overnight. That and learning to cook, which brings you out of the fast-food culture and into your own place of creativity. Cooking for yourself, that really brings you back to the table.

discussion: Michael Pollan, a University of California, Berkeley, journalism professor and best-selling author on the food industry and eating right. Pollan ranks among the most influential voices today in support of buying and growing local fare and eschewing processed foods, and he's a regular in the Bay Area food scene.

Getting Beyond Grapes

The Bay Area's year-round growing season certainly helps make its bounty of produce possible. But Waters points out that the region's early commitment to protecting open lands was also critical to supporting local farms. "You have a lot of areas that have been preserved," she says. Napa County is 95% protected agricultural land, about 80% of Marin County is off limits to development, and other Bay Area counties have huge swaths of open space.

Drivers heading north from San Francisco to Napa Valley find themselves surrounded by scenic vineyards as they enter the famed wine region. In the late 19th century a diversity of crops thrived, including French prunes, pears, apples and walnuts. Now it's a vast monoculture of grapes, but more people are advocating a return to crop diversity, both to satisfy demand for locally raised foods and to bolster food security, an issue underscored by California's severe drought this year. "To use that agricultural metaphor, we have all our eggs in one basket," says Greg Clark, Napa County's agricultural commissioner. "No one advocates removing all grapes, but there are opportunities to grow more than grapes."

Ted Hall, the former chairman of Robert Mondavi Corporation, among numerous other titles, has long been preaching that doctrine. He owns a large ranching operation in the region and the popular restaurant Farmstead at Long Meadow Ranch in the Napa town of St. Helena. His operation, which includes 97 acres of prime Napa Valley land and 650 acres in the adjacent hills, is known for its premium wines. But years ago Hall did the unthinkable and began raising 10 acres of vegetables on valley land that commands up to $275,000 an acre. He insists that an acre of heirloom tomatoes can yield as much profit as an acre of cabernet grapes, if done right. And diversifying what he produces has proved to be a huge boon to his restaurant. His operation not only supplies Farmstead with wine and fresh produce, it also provides grass-fed meats, eggs, honey, olive oil and potatoes for making potato buns for burgers.

Hall is now well known for his views that some grapes are planted on land that's better suited for other uses, such as vegetable crops. He's also deeply committed to organic farming, which he says can be more cost-effective than conventional farming while also shielding consumers from pesticide and herbicide residues, as well as protecting farmworkers and the soil, the watershed and wildlife. People are now listening to Hall. "I went from being an idiot to a celebrity in 25 years," he jokes. "And I'm the same person."

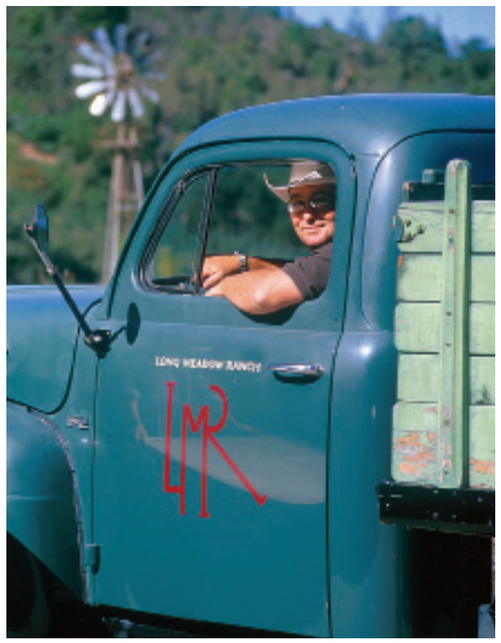
> "I went from being an idiot to a celebrity in 25 years."
> —Ted Hall, rancher and former chairman of the Robert Mondavi wine corporation, on his early advocacy of growing organic fruits and vegetables in addition to grapes in Napa's premium wine country

Other gardens and orchards are now growing among Napa vineyards. Hudson Ranch in the Carneros region has a diversified operation, selling produce, poultry and pork in addition to wine. Juston and Mindy Enos, a young couple who started Full Table Farm in 2010 on 2.5 acres in Yountville, grow hundreds of varieties of crops to serve as a one-stop shop for chefs. Demand is strong. "I don't think we could stop if we wanted to," Juston says. "We even sell our weeds. We have things like purslane and lamb's quarters that pop up around there naturally, and restaurants even want those."

A few wineries have created sizable vegetable gardens for the benefit of their staff members. Much larger employers around the Bay Area are also sourcing locally for employee meals—most famously Google.

Over the hills in Sonoma, the largest and northernmost of the Bay Area's counties, few farms exemplify the transition to growing food in addition to wine grapes better than Preston Farm and Winery. Lou Preston started growing grapes on the 125-acre property in the early 1970s. But about 15 years ago he took up organic methods, and from that grew an interest in using the land for a variety of crops. He's since torn out almost half the vines—a radical move, given the profitability of grapes—and now grows numerous varieties of vegetables and fruits, raises hens, pigs and sheep and produces olive oil. He and his staff even grow wheat, milling it on-site, baking it in a wood-fired oven and selling it still warm. "I call it 'estate bread,'" he said of the dark, dense loaves, which sell out quickly.

The exuberance for local food in Sonoma County is palpable, including a Farm Trails program that began in 1973 to promote agritourism. Many restaurants, such as Backyard in the small town of Forestville, butcher

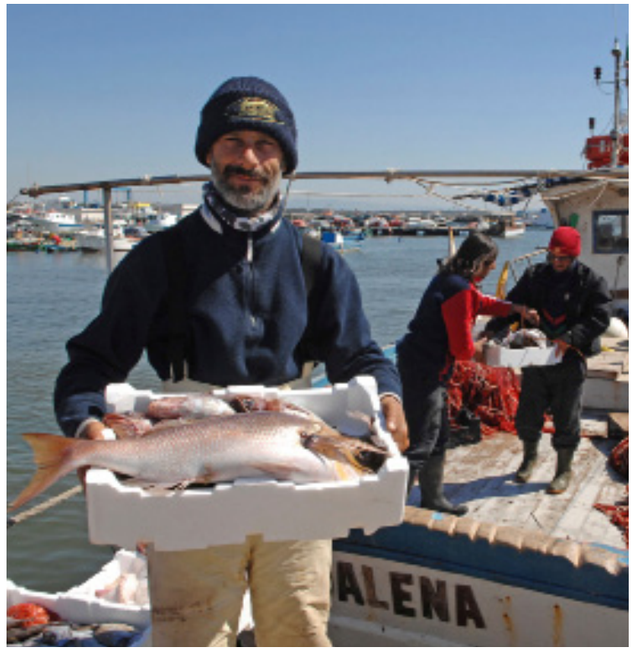


RANCHER-MAVERICK *Ted Hall at his Long Meadow Ranch.*

GREEN WAY TO GROW GREENS *At Preston Farm and Winery, grass is cut and saved for composting; cabbages replace grapevines.*

Around the World
Sardinia, Italy

The Bay Area may be the U.S. capital for eating local—with Portland, Boulder and Seattle right behind—but worldwide, nobody eats healthier than the people of Sardinia. The much-touted Mediterranean diet is a way of life here and a factor in the islanders' longevity. Fresh seafood is a staple, along with local beans, eggplant and tomatoes, washed down with Grenache, a dark red local wine that's high in antioxidants. Dishes are prepared with olive oil, lemon and garlic with a hunk of sheep's cheese or goat ricotta on the side. Meat and sugar are scarce—and scarcely missed.



FOOD FOR LIFE *Sardinians are nearly 10 times as likely to live to 100 as Americans.*

their own sides of meat raised at local ranches, and serve exclusively locally sourced goods, with the exception of essential exotics such as chocolate and coffee. Other Bay Area counties—Marin, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Alameda, Contra Costa, Solano—each have their own unique flavor of local food movements, which include cheese-making businesses that attract tourists, you-pick berry operations, ranch tours, numerous innovative small farms, and farmers' markets throughout.

Hospitals and Poor Neighborhoods Go Local

Strong advocacy for small family farms is another reason the Bay Area stands out for access to delicious healthy fare. The nonprofit Community Alliance with Family Farmers, or CAFF, started in Davis, near Sacramento, in 1978. One focus of CAFF, in partnership with the San Francisco Bay Area's chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility, is increasing purchases by a consortium of hospitals from small to midsize farms. It's a natural fit—hospitals are in the business of healing, and healthful eating is an essential part of that process. While hospital fare is famously lackluster in most of the country, a quarter of hospitals in California are shifting to more sustainable, locally grown food, and medical centers nationwide are starting to do the same.

At the University of California, San Francisco, Medical Center, nearly one-quarter of the food purchased for patients, visitors and staff is now "sustainable," meaning it's local and organic, or chicken and eggs come from cage-free hens, or cattle are grass-fed, among other criteria. Jack Henderson, former associate director of nutrition and food services, remembers encountering skepticism when he started to talk to out-of-state colleagues about local and organic food some 10 years ago. "They'd look at me like, 'Oh, he's from the Left Coast.' And I said, 'You'll see, because what happens in California will happen to everybody else sooner or later.' And they are very slowly starting to pay attention."

UCSF's hospital, like some others, is moving toward serving only meat raised without antibiotics. Most of the antibiotics sold in the United States are used in animal agriculture to promote growth and to prevent illness, not cure it, and numerous studies link this usage to antibiotic resistance in humans. More than 300 U.S. health organizations, including the American Medical Association, advocate ending the practice, which the European Union banned in 2006. The CDC conservatively estimates that more than 2 million people in the U.S. are sickened yearly with antibiotic-resistant infections, with at least 23,000 dying as a result. The medical center also recently switched to buying at an affordable price grass-fed beef raised without antibiotics, since the big-volume purchases allow the rancher to cut the price.

Affordability also reigns as a dominant concern in low-income areas, where the price tag for fresh, organic produce is too steep for many households. Yet people living in poorer communities stand to benefit the most from consuming more vegetables and fruits, as they bear the burden of more diseases and excess weight than those living in wealthier places. In the Bay Area, life expectancy differs by up to 20 years between residents of wealthier areas and those living in low-income neighborhoods, where chronic diseases often cut life short.

Across the Bay Area, nonprofit groups are hard at work changing the food landscape for the poor. One visits low-income neighborhoods with colorful "Mobile Farmers Market" trucks, offering a "$10 bag" filled with locally grown produce. Other organizations deliver low-cost produce boxes direct from farmers to qualifying households. Kaiser Permanente runs farmers' markets throughout the region at its medical centers, some in distressed areas, and 55 others nationwide at its facilities.

In the racially diverse, high-poverty community of West Oakland, across the bay from San Francisco, City Slicker Farms maintains four gardens on once-vacant or underused lands, which supply a farm stand that every Saturday sells gorgeous, freshly cut organic produce—collard greens, spinach, chard, lettuce, green onions and more. They range in price from free to $1, or more if you're willing, and supplies typically sell out. Thanks to a $4 million state grant, City Slicker Farms recently bought a 1.4-acre vacant lot in West Oakland, still surrounded by fences covered with graffiti, where it will run a farm and education center to help feed the area's 25,000 residents and train them to grow their own food. In 2012 the nonprofit also supported nearly 200 backyard gardens yielding 25,000 pounds of produce.

Six years ago the nonprofit built a garden for Njelela Kwamilele. One of her favorite pastimes is watering it, and she's thrilled with the virtually free harvest. "It

COOK LIKE A CHEF *Schools such as Relish Culinary Adventures draw people looking to eat well affordably.*

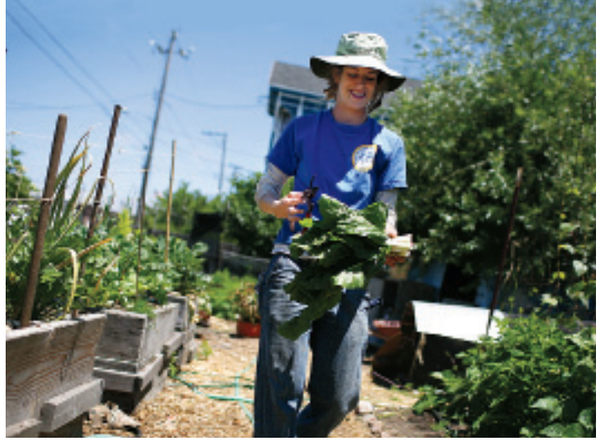
LEARNING FROM THE LAND
This page: The Edible Schoolyard Project, at a middle school in Berkeley, was one of the earliest school gardens. Students tend vegetables, herbs, an orchard, hens and ducks, and in the nearby kitchen prepare meals with their garden's produce. Opposite: In West Oakland, a high-poverty neighborhood that for many years had no grocery store, City Slicker Farms maintains four gardens on once-vacant or underused land. Its farm stand sells organic produce on a sliding scale.

saves a lot of money to have your own vegetables," says Kwamilele. During the peak season, she also gives bags away to neighbors and at church.

Other Bay Area cities also host major urban farms, such as Urban Tilth in Richmond, which oversees 11 small farms and gardens and aims to ultimately grow 5% of the city's food supply. Another is Veggielution in San Jose, a six-acre nonprofit farm dedicated to expanding access to fresh produce. Community gardens also abound in the Bay Area, with the city of San Francisco alone sponsoring 38 gardens as part of its new Urban Ag program.

Teach the Children Well

The Edible Schoolyard Project, which Chez Panisse's Waters launched in 1995 at the once run-down Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School in Berkeley, is one of the earliest school gardens. She wanted kids from low-income areas to know the pleasures of a garden and delicious homemade food. Students and staff tend to



vegetables, herbs and an 80-tree orchard on the 1.25-acre parcel—once a parking lot—and also help care for hens and ducks, which provide eggs and devour pests like snails. It's now an outdoor classroom, where teachers instruct students about science and the humanities through the lens of a garden.

The garden's presence also influenced the school cafeteria to improve its fare. It is now a model for other districts, as the cafeteria staff now serves only freshly made food, instead of the packaged items many school cafeterias reheat and serve, and it also runs a well-stocked salad bar. More schools in the Bay Area and beyond are doing the same, although few manage to be 100% made-from-scratch.

In Sonoma County, 56% of adults and an impressive **71%** of young children eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables daily. In national studies, only 26% of adults achieved the federal goal of at least three servings of vegetables.

The brightly decorated kitchen at the southern end of the garden is also an essential part of the project. Students learn about culture, history, language, chemistry and geography while preparing a meal from garden produce, which they all eat at a communal table. One spring day this year, a class of eighth graders was making sweet-potato biscuits and spicy greens; one boy wore a contented expression as he stirred the sautéed vegetables.

People leading the buy-it-local movement realize that cooking skills are also essential for eating more healthfully. There's only so much you can eat raw, and premade food is expensive. In Pollan's 2013 book *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation*, he makes the case that "taking back control of cooking may be the single most important step" for making the U.S. food system healthier.

The Ferry Plaza farmers' market holds a popular cooking class each week, and Bay Area culinary schools draw people looking to eat well affordably, since locally raised fare often does cost more. Relish Culinary Adventures in Sonoma County, for example, recently held a "snout to tail" butchering class. Students wearing wide aprons stood over the carcasses of 100-pound heirloom pigs, learning to carve various cuts of meat.

David and Elizabeth Mills signed up so they could affordably stock up on the locally raised meats they've come to love. "I come from a burger-and-fries generation, and this is about as far away from that as you can get," said David. "It's healthier, you know where it's from, no crazy chemicals." And, he notes, "it opens up a whole new world of awesome flavors."

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