# Low Carbon Diet FAQs

**Q: How does the food system contribute to climate change?**
A: Agriculture in the U.S. food system relies heavily on fossil fuel; burning fossil fuels in the transportation and processing of food products causes carbon dioxide emissions. Even more significantly, livestock produce vast quantities of methane gas, and agricultural practices release nitrous oxide. These are the three most significant greenhouse gases. For more information, check out the Low Carbon Diet page.

**Q: How can I eat a low carbon diet?**
A: A low carbon diet looks different for everyone. First, evaluate the carbon impacts of your current diet and set your own reduction goal. We think a 25% reduction is achievable for most people. Then, play with the Low Carbon Diet Calculator to create lower point meals using foods you like. Some of our suggestions: for meat eaters, eat smaller portions or eat meat less often. For vegetarians, watch your intake of dairy products. And for everyone, waste less and avoid buying ingredients that have been transported by air.

Q: **How will Low Carbon Diet options be distinguished in the café?**
On Low Carbon Diet Day, Bon Appétit chefs will transform each food station to highlight a principle of the Low Carbon Diet and answer all the tough questions: does my sushi have more frequent flier miles than I do? Do cow burps really harm the planet more than my car?

For diners who accept that beef is high carbon but still want to eat the occasional burger, the Low Carbon Diet will demonstrate how to make it more eco-friendly: skip the cheese, the bacon, and swap out-of-season lettuce and tomato for a tasty lower-carbon alternative like grilled onions.

**Q: Will eating a low carbon diet really make that much of a difference?**
A: The eating habits of people in the United States generate 5% of the world's total greenhouse gases. We can lower that by knowing the difference among different foods and substituting tasty alternatives. So, yes, eating a low carbon diet can really make a difference!

**Q: Which foods are particularly high carbon choices?**
A: Meat and dairy are especially high in carbon because ruminants (cows, sheep, and goats) naturally emit methane, a greenhouse gas 23 times more potent than carbon dioxide. Any food sent to a landfill also releases methane, as it is compressed without oxygen.

Other choices include out-of-season perishable food items, such as berries in winter or 'fresh' fish that's traveled long distances. The highest carbon method of transporting food is by air. Also, avoid produce grown in hothouses during winter (unless the hothouses are powered by renewable energy). This practice is extremely carbon-intensive.

**Q: Which foods are low carbon choices?**
A: In general, vegetables, fruit and grains grown in North America (assuming you're in North America) are low carbon choices. When it comes to meat, chicken is relatively low in carbon compared to beef. Also, less processed foods (e.g. homemade potato salad versus packaged potato chips) are usually lower carbon choices.

**Q: Why are meats and cheese so high carbon?**
A: Meat and dairy are especially high in carbon because ruminants (cows, sheep, and goats) naturally emit methane, a greenhouse gas 23 times more potent than carbon dioxide. In addition, North American, Japanese and European data are clear that emissions associated with large animal products are high. This has to do with the energy inputs associated with the production of feed for animals (very high), the length of time it takes to grow animals to maturity as compared to plants (therefore, that much more energy to feed them), and their weight (a factor in transport emissions).

**Q: Does local food have a smaller carbon footprint than non-local food?**
A: There are many important reasons to purchase local food and produce in particular. From a strict $CO_2e$ standpoint, for most Americans, buying local food is not the most important factor in lowering your carbon impact. The types of food you choose to eat such as meat vs. dairy vs. vegetables and the amount of food you waste will probably influence your carbon impact more.

There isn't enough scientific research to precisely quantify the differences between local and non-local food because of individual variables such as the number of trips customers take to the farmers' market, the type of truck that farmers use to deliver their produce, and the distance farmers are traveling to market. Many local beef ranches aren't near slaughterhouses and have to transport their 'local' beef long distances.

**Q: Is Bon Appétit Management Company maintaining its commitment to local sourcing, even though local sourcing may not have as big an impact on CO2e as eating lower on the food chain, or may actually have a bigger carbon footprint?**
A: Bon Appétit remains steadfastly committed to supporting local food sourcing for a variety of reasons. The realization that production methods and means of transport can greatly increase the carbon impact of local foods has reaffirmed Bon Appétit's support of improving the efficiency of local food systems. A more vibrant local food economy has more resources to advance sustainable production methods, such as renewable energy use.

To underscore the importance of eating locally, Bon Appétit holds an annual "Eat Local Challenge" day, where chefs prepare a lunch sourced exclusively from within a 150 mile radius of the café.

**Q: Does seasonal food generate less carbon emissions than eating out of season?**
Eating seasonally is a great rule of thumb for eating low carbon. For example, hothouse tomatoes grown locally in winter may generate more CO2e than tomatoes transported by train from a comparatively warmer region. Local root vegetables eaten in a cold climate in winter usually require few inputs and energy to grow locally, and don't generate as much emissions from farm to table as tomatoes transported from a warmer climate generate.

**Q: Does organic food generate less carbon emissions than "conventional" food?**
A: Organic produce, dairy and meat is grown without synthetic pesticides or fertilizers, which add carbon points in production systems, but a lot of organic products are grown in mono-crop systems and require other types of inputs (such as long-distance transportation of bees to pollinate crops or importation of grains to feed cattle). The types of food you choose to eat such as meat vs. dairy vs. vegetables and the amount of food you waste will probably influence your carbon impact more.

**Q: Do highly processed foods generate less carbon emissions than comparable fresh foods?**
A: Generally, yes. Processing and packaging both require high energy inputs. In addition, many highly processed food products contain ingredients such as sugar, salt, and high fructose corn syrup that are highly processed themselves. If a processed food comes from a facility that uses non-fossil fuel energy, then the carbon points associated with that product will be less. Juice is also a highly-processed food. It typically takes four oranges to make 6 oz of orange juice; then it has to be transported in a chilled container, often long-distances. Compare that glass of OJ to a simple orange.

**Q: What is $CO_2e$?**
A: $CO_2e$ stands for carbon dioxide equivalent, which is an internationally accepted measure that expresses the amount of global warming from greenhouse gases. $CO_2e$ is not limited to carbon dioxide but also includes other greenhouse gases such as methane.