

# DAILY NEXUS

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

## SB Localized Produce Spurs University Research

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By [Kristin Crosier](#)

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A recent study by UCSB Environmental studies professor David Cleveland and a team of researchers from the Bren School of Environmental Science and Management found that food localization does not necessarily ensure sustainability and health.

The research — published in scholarly journal *Environmental Science & Technology* — revealed that over 95 percent of Santa Barbara County's consumed produce is imported from countries as far away as New Zealand, and that 99 percent of produce grown within the county is exported to countries as far as Japan. The county is among the top 1 percent in value of agricultural products — 80 percent coming from fruits and vegetables — in America. According to Cleveland, the team compiled information from throughout the distribution process to create a comprehensive report.

"I thought Santa Barbara County would be a good place to try to quantify the amount of agriculture production, knowing it was in the top one percent of all agriculture counties in the U.S.," Cleveland said. "I realized that the data did not exist so the main task was to generate data by working with the farmer's market, produce stores, the I.V. Co-Op and other organizations."

Environmental studies and zoology graduate and research assistant Corie Radka said the data reflects the minimal impact the region's agricultural industry has on local consumption.

"Santa Barbara is a huge agricultural county that grows nine times more produce than the county could ever consume and yet we only eat one to two percent of the produce we grow," Radka said. "If our county can't be local, no one can because a lot of people don't have as much access to local produce as we do."

The team analyzed the findings to determine the effects localizing produce consumption would have on the environment and public health, Cleveland said.

"We found out that we export almost all of the produce [we grow] and import almost all that we consume, which was startling," Cleveland said. "The next question was, 'If we

could grow all the fruits and vegetables we consume here, [what] difference it would make to greenhouse gas emissions and nutrition?”

According to the research, switching consumption to crops grown within the county would only decrease greenhouse gas emissions of total agricultural food systems by less than one percent and have a negligible impact on nutrition intake.

Additionally, Bren School master's candidate Niki Mazaroli said companies use localization for 'greenwashing' — a misleading marketing tactic that falsely labels products as environmentally friendly.

“The potential for greenwash is another thing to be concerned about, with things being advertised as low food miles,” Mazaroli said. “You can have something with low food miles, but does it really benefit the community in terms of goals we want to fulfill?”

Radka said the study demonstrates that using locally grown food is only one of several factors needed to improve agricultural production.

“We're trying to show that localization shouldn't be the goal but it needs to be a necessary strategy to [achieve] goals such as increasing economic benefits, decreasing impacts on the environment and improving community health,” Radka said. “An issue with localization is that just because something is local doesn't mean it has sustainable environmental practices or that it will increase peoples' nutrition.”

Cleveland, Radka and other students hosted a workshop last weekend to discuss ways to improve the area's agricultural output. Mazaroli said the workshop allowed individuals from the industry's various facets to discuss localization and its goals.

“The best part of the workshop was being in the room with all of these key players where farmers could ask questions to the distributors and so on,” Mazaroli said. “It was really representative of everyone because the problem doesn't stem from any one group.”