

WHAT IS A FOODSHED?

A foodshed is defined as the geographic area that supplies a population — whether in a city, town or community — with food.¹ Foodsheds, in theory, could be very large, stretching anywhere in the globe, depending on your point of origin and food choices. They are not only local and do not have to be associated solely with geographic locations; they describe where our food comes from, whether locally, regionally, nationally or internationally.

CHALLENGES IN MAXIMIZATION

While it is nearly impossible for everyone to eat food that is grown 100 percent locally, it is possible for states and regions to maximize their foodsheds. However, there are still several limitations facing communities or states that wish to maximize their surrounding foodsheds. People have preferences for exotic foods, such as coffee, chocolate and citrus fruits, which simply cannot be grown locally or even nationally. There are further limitations, including the feasibility of growing seasons and the types of crops that can be grown in certain geographic areas.

Availability of land can also be problematic; there tends to be more land available in rural areas than in urban areas, yet more people live in urban areas and as such, urban areas require more food. The availability of farmers also plays a huge role. We need people to grow and harvest the food we eat.

The Northeastern part of the U.S. faces unique challenges. Farmers face more land competition in the Northeast than in other parts of the country as population numbers continue to rise and land is needed for buildings and other commodities unrelated to agriculture. In the case of New York state, there appears to be enough agricultural land to meet in-state food needs for six distinct food groups: grains, vegetables, fruits, dairy, meat and eggs. However, there is not enough agricultural land to meet the needs of New York City, the state's largest urban area.²

Due to these and other challenges, every state or community will remain an importer of food to some extent. Nevertheless, maximization of the land and resources near home is still possible.

WAYS TO MAXIMIZE YOUR FOODSHED

Learn what's in season. Knowing what's in season in your region will help you know what to expect at farmers markets and help you know which items at other markets and stores might be from local or regional sources.

Find locations that promote locally and regionally sourced foods. Buy your food at farmers markets, family farms and other sources of sustainably grown food in your area. Help farmers in your community decrease total foodmiles, or the distance crops have to travel to reach a consumer. By buying and consuming foods grown and raised closer to where you live, you help maintain farmland and green space in your area. A great resource for finding the best food grown closest to you is www.localharvest.org.

Plant a garden. From a simple herb garden to a larger garden of vegetables designed to feed a family, there are lots of ways to grow your own food. The U.S. Department of Agriculture provides great resources on gardening: check them out [here](#).

¹ Peters, C. J., Bills, N. L., Wilkins, J. L., & Fick, G. W. (2009). Foodshed analysis and its relevance to sustainability. *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems*, 24(1), 1–7.

² Peters, C. J., Bills, N. L., Lembo, A. J., Wilkins, J. L., & Fick, G. W. (2012). Mapping potential foodsheds in New York state by food group: An approach for prioritizing which foods to grow locally. *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems*, 27(2), 125–137.