

The Locavore Movement and Its Application in Korea – Focused on Pocheon, Gyeonggi Province –

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Abstract

As growing concerns about food safety, consumers consider more about what to eat and how to buy groceries. The new term 'locavore' coined in the mid-2000s is a reflection of this recent phenomenon. Its meaning is a person interested in eating food that is locally produced. As an appropriate countermeasure for healthful food consumption, the locavore movement can sustain food supply system in a various way. The agricultural business in the rural areas has been on the decline due to a series of market openings caused by the FTAs. In this regard, it is time to bring up more effective feasible measures for farming. By putting the locavore movement into action, the rural community can boost its economy as well as enhance its social unity. In this study, Pocheon, Gyeonggi province is chosen to be a model to initiate the locavore movement in Korea. As a neighboring city of Seoul, Pocheon composes of a number of farmlands and livestock breeding farms as well as tourists' attractions. The transportation system in Pocheon is so convenient that Seoul citizens easily visit the community. In this regard, Pocheon is most likely to be a starting point providing the urban areas nearby with good quality of local food.

Keywords: *locavore movement, locally produced, Pocheon, Seoul, revitalization, rural community*

1. Introduction

Globalization has been making the world get smaller and closer not only in terms of spatial distance but cultural distance. It becomes a common daily routine to have coffee produced in Ethiopia in the morning, to enjoy salmon caught in the Norwegian Sea for lunch and to finish up a meal with sweet chocolate from Belgium. This culinary adventure seems no extraordinary pleasure for ordinary diners. In other words, many of us are used to the foods which travel thousands of miles to sit on the dining table. What is more serious is the fact that not many consumers are aware of harmful effects that may occur caused by these unhealthy foods. In this regard, the locavore movement can be a turning point to help understand the importance of appropriate food consumption by eating healthy local foods.

Locavore is a compound word of 'local' and 'vore' referring to an idea of eating, which literally means a person preferring eating food that is locally produced, not moved long distances to market. The word was first created by a resident named Jessica Prentice of the San Francisco Bay Area in California. As a chef, writer and co-founder of Three Stone Hearth, a community supported kitchen cooperative in Berkeley, she coined the new term 'locavore' in 2005 in the newspaper article about eating locally grown food. Soon, the term was widely spread and adopted by everywhere, which gained popularity as to be chosen the 2007 Word

of the Year¹ for the Oxford American Dictionary. The support and purchase of local products have become a commitment for many consumers; consumer desire for locally grown products has garnered so much attention that the new word of the year in 2007 was "locavore," which defines the consumer who eats food grown or produced within local limits, usually a 50 to 100 miles radius [1].

The locavore movement is relatively new to the public, yet influential enough to reorient consumers' views by showing how they can enjoy what they eat while still appreciating the impact they have on the environment.

In our case, on the verge of FTAs² being in effect, the rural economy is most likely to suffer from the surge of market liberalization. Accordingly, the locavore movement associated with city dwellers can benefit consumers as well as producers. Requiring more attention to the rural area being of lesser means, the locavore movement will play a great role revitalizing the rural economy in a new way.

2. The Aspects of the Locavore Movement

"The word 'locavore' shows how food-lovers can enjoy what they eat while still appreciating the impact they have on the environment," according to Ben Zimmer, editor for American dictionaries at Oxford University Press, in announcing the choice. "It is significant in that it brings together eating and ecology in a new way." Not to mention an old saying that you are what you eat, food is the most essential source for all living creatures. In this context, the locavore movement is not only for preservation of the quality of life but also for the protection of the diversity of nature. Its mechanism is following: (1) Buying food at the nearest farmer's market. (2) Staying curious about food you eat. (3) Being an urban farmer. (4) Organizing a community kitchen. (5) Supporting farmers in your community. (6) Eating organic for alternatives.

These goals are recommended to keep by participants. There are a dozen of reasons suggested through the official web site: (1) Freshness. Locally-grown fruits and vegetables are usually delivered to the consumers in a short time. (2) Taste. Produce picked and eaten at the height of freshness tastes better. (3) Nutrition. Compared to the imports, nutritional value is greater. Because locally-grown produce takes a shorter time in terms of packing and delivery, thus, it is more nutritionally complete. (4) Purity. A majority of Americans are concerned about the safety of the food due to, for example, residues of pesticides, fungicide or food poisoning. Such threats are relatively less in the organic production system. (5) Regional Economic Health. Consuming locally grown food circulates wealth within the neighborhood contributing to the health of all sectors of the local economy. Consequently, the whole process increases the quality of life in the community. (6) Variety. Organic farmers selling locally, free from distance shipping, high yields, shelf life, are not limited to the few varieties. This can endow consumers with joy of eating a wide variety of fresh food. (7) Soil Stewardship. Soil health is a major factor for many species to survive. With organic farming, soil fertility can be sustained. (8) Energy Conservation. Buying locally grown organic foods reduces energy consumption. (9) Environmental Protection. The pollution problems are associated with today's predominant farming methods. Organic farming in the locavore movement uses the methods that protect soil, air, and water resources. (10) Cost. Conventional farming is prone to high cost on the environmental, health and social

¹ According to the official web site, Three Stone Hearth is pioneering a new business model based on a community-supported, a worker-owned cooperative, and a teaching kitchen all in one.

² As of Mar. 2013, Korea has enacted free trade agreements with countries such as America, Chile, Columbia and the EU. Most of these countries form a strong agrarian economy.

consequences of production practices.

(11) A Step towards Regional Food Self Reliance. Far away food leaves a region vulnerable to supply disruptions, and removes any real accountability of producer to consumer. It also has propensity of promotion of larger, less diversified farms that hurt both the environment and local economies or communities. (12) Passing on the Stewardship Ethic. Buying locally produced organic food raises the consciousness of other people around about how food buying decisions can make a difference in life and the life of the community [2]. That is, it is environmentally correct as well as beneficial to every aspect of our life.

Referring to these sets of socio-environmental principles, the locavore movement implies more complex structure involving from environment to ecology, from agriculture to socio-economy and from individual to community. Accordingly, in the middle of hardships of domestic agriculture caused by market liberalization, the locavore movement can provide a very good example to revitalize rural communities in Korea as well as to benefit city dwellers.

3. Application of the Locavore Movement in Pocheon, Gyeonggi Province

3.1 The Present Condition of Pocheon

Pocheon is located in the middle of the Korean Peninsula near the capital city. Pocheon is likely to be a bedtown city in the far northeastern region of Gyeonggi province that covers 826.48 square kilometers (1.4 times bigger than the Seoul area) with a population of 157,559 people, as of December, 2012. According to the statistics, about 23,000 in 7,217 households earn a living from farming and the approximate size of farmlands is about 3,722 ha. Pocheon lies between Seoul and the mountainous northwestern areas of Gangwon province. Thus, the city is very easy to access especially from the Seoul Metropolitan City. Its administrative districts include 3 dong³, 1 eup⁴ and 8 myeons⁵ and it composes of many small and mid-sized businesses and farmlands.

69.2 percent of the total area consists of arable lands while an urban area accounts for 4.4 percent. The main crops produced in Pocheon include rice and barley as well as sesame, perilla and ginseng as local specialties. The livestock industry is also active in the citywide [3].

Table 1. The number of the stockbreeding farms in Pocheon (2010)

Name of the livestock	No. of the farms
Chicken	91
Cow, hanwoo, beef cattle	700
Pig	120
Duck	37
Rabbit	39
Canine	652
Deer	66
Goat	46
Honeybee	38

The Korean Statistics Information Service

There are 91 households running a large scale of poultry farms in Pocheon as 700 farms for hanwoos(Korean cows) and beef cows and 120 for pigs, 37 for ducks, 46 for goats, 66 for

³ Dong is a section of a city.

⁴ It is one of the divisions of a county.

⁵ a smaller division of a county than an eup

deer. The biggest portion of the stockbreeding is canine breeding as of 2010 according to official figures.

In addition, in the city, there are one university and one junior college. More than 2,100 small and medium sized manufacturers produce such as textiles and metal products. Pocheon is nationwide famous for the breweries for makgeolli⁶ and Idong galbi.⁷

There are many tourists' attractions in Pocheon. Spring water complexes are developed in the northern part of the city to attract tourists. The Korea National Arboretum, commonly known as Gwangneung Arboretum, is located around the village of Gomori. Gomori is a small town in which many beautiful cafes, romantic restaurants and an artists' village can be found. Pocheon is known to be many natural resources including Sanjeong Lake, Mt. Myeongseong and Mt. Wunak where a large scale of the national resort was founded.

In terms of the tangible and intangible cultural properties, as of 2003, the city has one Treasure and a Historical Site designated by the state government, and also 15 properties designated to be as such by Gyeonggi province including 4 tangible and 1 intangible cultural properties, 2 cultural documents, and 8 surveyors. With its cultural assets from the past and the present, Pocheon strives to earn good reputation as a city of culture and tourism. To sustain any devised promotion for the community, the administrative effort is one major factor for successful implementation. In that case, Pocheon proves to be a good model for the governance with very resilient activities of the local civic groups.

3.2 The Platform for the Locavore Practice

As Pocheon is dotted with many agricultural resources and easy to access to the community from the metropolitan area, the priority of marketing should be focused on construction of the local co-operative. In fact, there is a nationwide agricultural union called the National Agricultural Cooperative Federation in Korea. However, its main interests include the improvement of the productivity and promotion of farmers' status in social hierarchical system. Also, the organization as one of the most powerful, largest organization in the nation has become a conglomerate expanding its businesses in many sectors somewhat irrelevant to the benefits for its members, for example, the federation even attempted the 10th pro-baseball team. The humongous organization is not always effective to devise specific strategies that meet farmers' needs. The marketing plans in detail for small farms can be obstructed due to bureaucracy. Thus, the roles of the Federation and the local government should be focused on comprehensive implementation such as constructing a necessary agricultural platform and enforcing agricultural policies reflecting the characteristics of the regional farming. For example, organizing the agricultural platform developed by the local government or certified body may acquire public credit and cooperation from farmers more efficiently.

⁶ unfiltered rice wine

⁷ short ribs marinated with sweet soy sauce

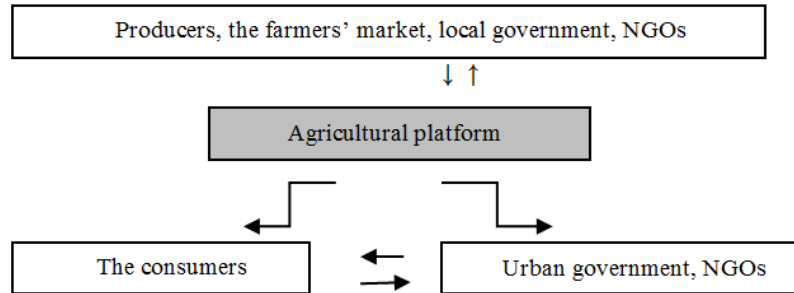


Figure 1. This figure shows how the locavore movement applies to the market

In the dramatic changing global economic and business landscape, the farming business management has been required even more advanced farming technologies not only in terms of tangible skills for better productivity but also for marketing in a more various dimension. The rural communities suffering from vacantization and economic difficulties, in the long term, need a strong clout to boost their economy and the image. As in Figure 1, the agricultural platform for the consumers and producers is devised to activate mutual exchange of the resources. The providers such as producers, farmers' markets, government, local NGOs are included in the platform system. The consumers including urban governments and NGOs based on cities are also involved in the system networking with the producers in the rural communities nearby.

As mentioned above, since Pocheon has a number of attractions, these urban consumers can be turned into tourists as well. The number of people who try to spend their spare time touring has been increasing since the 5-day work and school week have been implemented. Pocheon should be able to lead this trend into revitalizing its local economy. And also there are open markets called *Jang*, which is usually held in the countryside on a certain day of the week or on the weekends outdoors.

In *Jang*, not only locals but also people from out of town gather around the market and enjoy shopping. Traditionally, *Jang* used to be a resting spot for the townspeople and the farmers can directly sell their products to their customers without the help of distributors. As for the consumers, the religious bodies like churches and temples may organize groups of their members for regular food shopping trips to Pocheon as well. Koreans are very zealous believers and the religious groups are often united both in fellowship and share a common creed involved in a variety of activities together.

Forming social cooperatives can be a very effective solution as well. Social cooperatives strive for the interests of their member and a social cooperative aims for public interest. They operate businesses which improve the interests and welfare of the local residents or which provide jobs and social services for people from socially vulnerable classes. In the Korean society, farming is low in the social status. Recently, cooperatives as an alternative have become a new form of business since *the Basic Act on Cooperatives* was enforced in December 2012.

4. Conclusion

In two aspects, the locavore movement can be a very significant practice both farmers and townspeople. First, as growing concerns about food safety, most consumers today prefer locally grown food and are even willing to pay more for local products [4,1]. In this context, direct marketing of agricultural products allows consumers to purchase competitively priced,

high-quality fresh produce, while farmers view direct marketing as an alternative way to capture more of the consumers' money [5].

Secondly, the movement will restructure the illogical distribution system in agriculture and reduce the unnecessary steps in the course of transactions. The Korean government has poured as much as 3 trillion won (2.8 bil USD) since 2010 to improve the distribution and stabilization of food grain and demand and delivery system. However, its efforts were not amply rewarded [6].

In the study, Pocheon was chosen to develop its agricultural platform to provide fresh fruits, vegetables and good quality of meat for the metropolitan city, Seoul. To carry out the locavore practice, it needs a comprehensive platform that can involve consumers and producers first. It is an irresistible fact that as long as humans live on food, a saying “You are what you eat.” is eternal truth. Considering the recent trends in Korean society, ‘eating healthy food’ definitely has a positive impact on a rural community in many dimensions including tourism and local job market.

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