



Rice: Buying Local Helps Reduce Pollution And Protect Your Health

The transportation-related pollution from importing Thai rice includes 22 times more particulate matter and 3 times more global warming impact than transporting rice grown in California.

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What are the hidden costs of the food you eat? The distance your food travels from the field to your plate (known as food miles) can substantially add to global warming *and* can increase many health risks such as asthma, cancer, and premature deaths. Let's compare California-grown rice with rice imported by ship, traveling 8,200 miles from Thailand.

Why does it matter how far your rice has traveled?

How your food is grown, stored, transported, processed and cooked can all influence how it impacts climate change and the environment. Transportation-related impacts are particularly important for imported foods, like rice. Consumption of rice in the United States has almost doubled over the past 20 years. Americans eat an average of 20 pounds of rice each year, almost 10 percent of which is imported. In California alone, more than 471 million pounds of rice are imported per year—almost all of it from Thailand, which means the rice makes a 8,200-mile journey in cargo ships and trucks to the Port of Los Angeles, where it is then transported by truck to supermarkets across the state and beyond. This long journey has major costs both to the environment and to people's health. At the same time, the Sacramento Valley in California is one of

the three major rice growing regions in the United States and exports about three times as much rice as is imported in a given year.

Locally grown versus imported rice in California

The transportation associated with importing rice from Thailand into California causes the release of about 31.8 million pounds of pollutants each year. This includes roughly 30.8 million pounds (15,800 tons) of global warming pollution annually—the equivalent amount of carbon dioxide emitted from 2,700 vehicles. Another 1 million pounds (500 tons) of soot and smog-forming pollutants are released into the air—the amount of pollution from 113,000 vehicles. This pollution is responsible for dozens of asthma attacks and hundreds of missed school days due to respiratory disease in California children.

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Three things you can do to help reduce your food miles

Choosing to buy local food can reduce global warming pollution, improve air quality, and protect your health. Here are three steps you can take as an individual to protect your environment and your health—without sacrificing the taste and quality of your food:

1. Buy varieties of rice grown in California and avoid aromatic varieties such as jasmine that are currently imported. For more information on buying local visit <http://guide.buylocalca.org/> or www.localharvest.org.
2. Ask the grocery stores, restaurants, and work cafeterias that you frequent to carry local foods and include country of origin on food labels. You can find a sample letter to send to them at www.nrdc.org/foodmiles.
3. Encourage businesses and government bodies in your area to create farmers' markets and to adopt procurement policies that favor locally grown, organic, and sustainably harvested foods.

In 2005, the transport of rice from Thailand to California using trucks and cargo ships resulted in the release of an estimated 31.8 million pounds of pollutants that contributed to global warming and caused unhealthy air quality in California.



The Environmental and Health Price Tag in California

- 30 million pounds of carbon dioxide (CO₂)
- 9.5 million tons of smog forming nitrogen oxides (NO_x)
- 46,000 tons of particulate matter (PM₁₀)
- Up to 120 cases of asthma per year
- Up to 2,000 missed school days per year