

Munch ON THIS



Vitamin C

By Marcia Rae
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How and when do things become a part of our everyday knowledge, so embedded that we do not even question what we know. For instance, everybody *knows* that you should drink a glass of orange juice every day so that you get your vitamin C. Ever wonder why you think that? Should you think that?

I take this information from a great little book, *Empires of Food*, by Evan D.G. Fraser and Andrew Rimas, two journalists who tell us about food, history, and food systems. "Orange trees are Asian, with a migratory trail through the Middle East and North Africa, entering Europe through the gardens of the medieval Spanish Moors. . . . By the 1940s, Florida grew more oranges than it could sell. . . . Florida orange farmers hit on the idea of pulping, reducing, and freezing the perishable fruit into something lasting, durable, and easily delivered to faraway shoppers. . . slurry that's packed into trucks, and driven to ports where it's pumped into the holds of waiting orange juice freighters.

[1970]. . . and the nexus shifted south. . . . Brazil produces 40 percent of the planet's orange juice and commands 80 percent of the trade . . . mostly the property of four dominant companies (Cutrale, Citrusuco, Citrovita, and Louis Dreyfus Citrus), the biggest of which also own large percentages of Florida plantations. . . . In Brazil, the number of plantations dropped from 28,000 to 10,000 in the past twenty years, while less than half of 1 percent of them own a quarter of the trees. . . . Family farms usually sign long-term contracts with the international corporations that control distribution and processing – corporations that own the length of the commodity chain. . . . As of the early 1990s, oranges were the most produced fruit in the world.

[Then the pests attack the mono-crop, and Coca-Cola and PepsiCo get involved.] Orange farmers douse their crops with a heavy wash of pesticide. They spray when the trees flower, they spray when the trees bear fruit, and they top off the chemical cocktail with a fungicide to keep mold from spoiling the leaves. As in the areas where California grows tomatoes, these pesticides threaten to turn the environment into a poisonous morass. . . . As worldwide consumption grows, plantations spread and push production into the margins of the landscape. . . Slopes, of course, make for poor agricultural ground, and they erode. . . . In 2004, orange groves covered 3.6 million hectares. If every country in the world drank as much orange juice as Germany, we'd need 32 million hectares.

The entire American orange industry would likely teeter and collapse. . if it weren't for government protections. . . . The reason Brazil hasn't completely crushed Florida's industry is that the difference in production costs is made up by tariffs and something called the Florida equalization tax. . . . Add thin profit margins and loud, embarrassing allegations about child labor, and you've got an industry that looks, if not outwardly ailing, then inwardly cancerous."

So now I ask you, is this something you want to support? All fruits and vegetables contain some amount of vitamin C. Local excellent (in many cases, higher than oranges) sources include: broccoli, peppers, kale, cauliflower, strawberries, mustard and turnip greens, brussels sprouts, chard, cabbage, spinach, kiwi, snow peas, tomatoes, zucchini, raspberries, asparagus, celery, lettuce, watermelon, cantaloupe, fennel, peppermint, and parsley. And remember – the whole food is always better for you than a juice, and fresh is always better than squished, frozen, and shipped. Local supports your friends and neighbors rather than a few huge corporations.

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PS – See you at the Farmers Market this Saturday, 9 a.m. to noon. Find these fresh, local, whole foods at the Market -- apples, beets, carrots, chard, corn, dried fruit, eggplant, eggs, garlic, green beans, honey, jams, leeks, lettuce, nectarines, pears, peppers (a variety), pies, pumpkins, radishes, rutabagas, salad mix, squash, sugar snap peas, syrups, tomatillos, turnips, walnuts. Music is Tom Janssen, Cowboy Bob, Don Andrews ripping on the drums, and sweet singing Spencer Masterson.

PSS – Get ready for the Pumpkin Decorating Contest at the Farmers Market, October 30. Then Carlson's at noon for this year's Giant Pumpkin and Pumpkin Swimsuit Contests, to be followed by the Great Pumpkin Race. Jumpin' pumpkins, what a barrel of fun!

PSSS – Mark your calendar for the next Munch Night, November 5 at 6 p.m. at the Corner Café. Come and hear Jen Olsen of The Mushroomery discuss everything you always wanted to know about mushrooms. Enjoy a mushroom and local food buffet for \$10. Then stay for music with Tom Janssen, Cowboy Bob, Don Andrews, and Spencer Masterson. You do not want to miss this event.