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Only From Montana: A family's experience eating locally

Emily Joan Wendler

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Final Draft of Professional Paper
Emily Wendler
Candidate for Master's in Environmental Science and Natural Resource
Journalism
Department of Journalism
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INTRO:

Imagine yourself walking toward the grocery store. The automatic sliding doors swoosh to the side as you enter. You pull a cart out from the row, lean on the handlebar, and start searching for yummy goods to put in your mouth.

At first you see piles of tomatoes, oranges, grapes and bananas. Stacks of bright and, enticing colors. You want and need these things.

But say, for example, you live in Montana. Well.. grapes, oranges, and bananas don't grow in Montana.

What would the grocery store look like then-- if it only carried things grown in this northern state?

During harvest season—like August and September—farmers could stock the stores with all kinds of greens, apples, corn, peppers, and tomatoes.

But in the winter.. oh man... erase all those brightly colored vegetables, and replace them with piles of squash, cabbage, racks of meat, dairy products, potatoes, wheat products, and well, squash.

Imagine you could only eat these locally grown foods. No chocolate, spices, sugar... *coffee!*

Could you do it?

STORY:

This is the story of one family's experience eating all locally grown food in Montana.

The Bledsoe's--a family of three from Missoula—which is a town of about 60 thousand in southwestern Montana—decided they could give up the excesses of today's food system for a simpler way of life... and a much more time consuming one.

Why? Well—in short—because I asked them to.

A few months ago, I was reading about local food, and different people's opinions on why we should eat locally.

Researchers at Iowa State University say, on average, a meal in America travels 15 hundred miles from farm to plate. That's half way across the United States.

Many advocates say eating locally reduces this mileage and is easier on the environment, and benefits local economies and communities.

I thought, yeah... that all sounds good, but how easy is it to actually do.

So, I looked for a family who was willing to give it a shot. And the Bledsoe's agreed.

Just as kind of a test—to see if a normal family could do it.

And they got through it, together, as a family....

[Nats of Ben and Judith talking...]

Ben and Judith Bledsoe are in their mid-30s, and have a two-year-old son, Wyatt.

[nats of Wyatt playing with trains]

Wyatt loovvess playing with trains... and is also really into watching shows about the mischievous monkey—Curious George. He even has some stuffed animal monkeys to carry around on his own little adventures.

Right now his parents, are preparing for their own adventure... in local food.

Judith: A friend gave me the idea of making pasta... and so yeah...

Ben: You had the one friend who off-handedly referred to it as a dumb idea.

Judith: Yeah, but she didn't really know what she was talking about.

(Laughter)

There isn't an official definition for local food—no specific mileage range. Some people shoot for a 100 mile range, others 400 miles.

But for this experiment: All the food the Bledsoe's eat—for two weeks in September and two weeks in January—has to come from Montana. Meaning it has to have been grown and processed in Montana. And if there's an ingredient in a meal that isn't from Montana—they cant eat it.

Ben says they're in to this kind of thing. They have chickens in their back yard, and a green house with herbs and some vegetables growing in it. They also order bees every summer and harvest their honey. [nats of chickens in the back yard]

Judith agrees eating locally wont be a totally new concept for them. When Ben and Judith were in the Peace Corps, and lived on the small island of Tonga- east of Australia- most of the food they ate came from the island.

But currently, Judith says her family isn't concerned with knowing where their food comes from.

We're just not, we buy a package of something or we just buy something from the grocery.

Normally, Judith does most of her shopping at Costco, and before the local food challenge, most of the food in her fridge was from there.

Costco grapes, Costco apple sauce, Costco pesto.... Costco garlic in bulk. Black olives from the good food store.

She pulls some olives out of the fridge to give Wyatt for a snack, and wonders what it will be like to withhold certain foods from her child.

When do you get olives in Montana? it's not going to happen.

For the next couple of weeks we're going to be olive free.

[nats of Wyatt going nom nom nom]

I don't know how you will do with that, Wyatt. He's a big olive fan.

And Judith is a big chocolate fan. The lack of it worries her a little.

Despite her affinity for sweets, Judith is a petite, and strong woman who looks like she works out often. She has shoulder length brown hair, a broad face with fair skin, dimples in her cheeks and sparkly brown eyes.

[nats of Judith just being Judith]

She spends most of her time raising Wyatt, but also works as a writing coach at The University of Montana two days a week.

Her husband, Ben, is the CEO of a home health care company. He travels frequently, and is very busy, so Judith does most of the cooking for her family.

I feel like I used to do some when we were first married, but I feel like I've kind of faded out since we were first married.

I guess it's kind of like the traditional male fantasy where I come home from work and there's a hot meal on the table.

Ben is about 6 feet tall, with a thin but strong frame. His hair is short and dark with specks of grey coming in around the forehead and sideburns. He has a boxy chin, thin lips and kind, brown eyes, framed by crow's feet.

Ben says neither he nor Judith are big coffee drinkers- so that won't be much of a problem.

But he does like to drink beer.

They've been doing research—looking up what they'll have and what they'll have to go without.

There's a lot of meat options.

Sounds like we're going to be able to get some of the larger things, but its smaller stuff that we're confused about. Like salt, pepper..... oil.... Sugar.

Ben and Judith say, if there's a salt lick anywhere in Montana, they will find it.

[NATS FROM THE GOOD FOOD STORE]

[Transition to first day]

The weekend before the Bledsoe's started their local food challenge they went to a wedding in Portland, Oregon.

They got back Sunday evening—and hustled to the Good Food Store---an independent organic and natural foods store in Missoula-- to pick up whatever local items they could find. Otherwise, they hadn't really prepared.

If the Good Food Store knows the origin of the product- they label it. And things from Montana have a sticker with the shape of the state on them.

This helped the Bledsoe's as they rushed through the store tossing random, but local items in to their cart. It was late September—so there were still plenty of things like leafy green vegetables and tomatoes.

However, it was during this first shopping experience that Judith realized buying local isn't as cut and dried as it seems.

Cheese, for example, requires cultures, or bacteria, that help ferment the cheese.

Judith, an avid cheese maker herself, stared at the locally-marked cheeses wondering if the cultures were local too.

She asked a store employee- who told her they probably weren't, but Judith decided she wanted cheese, and granted herself this exception.

The next day—the first day—Judith ran in to a similar problem. .

I realized as I was shoving fries in my mouth that I had accidentally eaten salt. With the fries.

The potatoes from the café were grown in Montana. But the closest salt mines are in Utah.

She struggled again, when Wyatt saw some goodies in the fridge he couldn't have.

He opened this and started demanding what he saw.. I don't want to say it too loud... ice cream sandwiches.

But Judith was resourceful and reconciled the situation.

It was fine. I ended up giving him a piece of cheese. A dairy substitute.

That night they made tacos for dinner and Judith and Wyatt had to hand make tortillas.

Right away, Judith noticed that eating locally took more time.

It does take more preparation. Normally I wouldn't make my own tortillas, but you know, it was fun. Wyatt enjoyed it.

She says this project will probably cause her to learn many new cooking skills.

I think when you have limitations like we're talking about now it forces you to learn how to cook and really get yourself fed. So you tend to learn more skills.

The second night Judith roasted a whole chicken.

The chickens are raised in Choteau, Montana by a religious colony called the Hutterites, and the Good Food Store carries their products.

Judith mixed herbs from her garden with butter, let it soften, and then spread it on the chicken.

[nats of Judith preparing the chicken]

She doesn't normally cook whole chickens. Usually she buys frozen chicken breasts in bulk from Costco.

They're individually frozen and not huge. And you can just take out what you need. So it's also very economical. But you don't get the stock. They're just nice for convenience.

But with a large, whole chicken, Judith's plan was to have lots of leftovers.

However, this chicken didn't turn out so well. It ended up being bloody because she accidentally left the giblets and the neck inside the chest cavity.

She tried putting it back in the oven the next day, but said it still tasted too fleshy, so she threw it away.

Cooking whole chickens is one skill Judith will work on.

[mini transition]

The Bledsoe's had to step out of their comfort zone in many ways during this project—leaving convenience behind, and doing things in a more time-consuming way.

Thursday night they went to a small farmer's market in a church parking lot away from the city center.

It was a cold and windy fall day, and Judith hoped to find herbs, or anything flavorful- to replace salt.

She explained her dilemma to a farmer at one of the booths, seeking insight.

We're doing a local food experiment, for two weeks, where we're only eating locally foods, and its going well except for the salt, there's no salt in Montana....

No there's not...

But we thought peppers would at least add some flavor... even though salt is not present.

While Judith bought peppers, Ben bought some garlic powder that the farmers made.

Oh nice garlic powder. Oh wow, that's pungent.

Judith also bought 5 pounds of tomatoes from the farmers because she's got plans to make salsa and a large batch of marinara.

I spent a long time yesterday making tomato sauce, making marinara sauce. It was sooo good, but it took alllll day

She wants to make a huge batch this time so she doesn't have to keep making it.

The tomatoes were so good, but I used more than I thought because they simmer down so much.

While Judith was buying tomatoes, Ben had been scouring the rest of the tables.

"I got squash, potatoes, and pears..." [Wyatt is all yelling in the background]

Judith says these are all things they'd normally buy, but they would just buy them at a grocery store closer to where they live.

This farmer's market in particular is out of the way for them, but they wanted to see what else was available besides the food at the Good Food Store.

So Judith is trying to stock up.

I'm trying to decide whether we should buy some meat while we're here.
We have a roast going at our house and it smells UNREAL. ..
Wyatt laughing...

In the end, Judith thought sirloin steak sounded like a good idea.

Just so you know, the beef has not been fed any grain... all grass.

[nats of getting back in the car]

On the way home the Bledsoe's talked about their experience.

They ended up buying pears, potatoes, plums, 5 lbs. of tomatoes, peppers, spicy peppers, garlic powder, broccoli, and beef.

And Ben was really tempted by one woman's homemade sweets.

She had a bunch of fudge samples, that was tempting! I said how do you make the fudge? She said with marshmallows and chocolate chips, and a whole bunch of other stuff... andddd too bad.

The Bledsoe's said they learned things about the food they bought—Things they normally don't know, like who grew it, and how and where.

The guy told us about the beef. That's information you can almost never get.

Judith says this kind of information is becoming more important to her, but also says her past buying history would reveal that she never gave it a thought.

It was funny, I kept going back and forth in my mind about coming here to get food, thinking, "gosh that's all the way across town, that's a lot of gas to use to get there."

And then I really thought about it, and I was like, "well where does my food usually travel from? South America, perhaps? Peru? This is not a big deal to drive across town.

She says meeting the people who grew her food makes him appreciate it more.

I think I would feel more guilty letting this broccoli go bad than I would letting my Costco broccoli go bad.

That's very true. I doubt that had we ever bought kale before we would have eaten it. It would have sat there and gone bad. But with this we have been eating every single thing.

Ben says putting effort in to his food too, changes the way he thinks about it.

Doing the research and going and finding it and doing the cooking, which is, you know Judith spent a lloooongg time cooking yesterday. You put that much effort in to that, you're going to eat it.

Judith: To be fair its passive time.

[transition]

The following weekend The Bledsoe's dedicated an entire day to cooking food.

They said the first week felt crazy because they weren't prepared.

The first part of the week was very intentional. Everyday I had to think, Ok, what are we going to eat today?? Think ahead. Really put effort in to it. [AfterGFS]

So today, their plan is to cook as much as possible so they have less work to do during the week.

On most weekends the Bledsoe's are usually traveling, hanging out with friends, or doing yard work, but today they are going to make a mess in the kitchen. They have plans to fry squash, make salsa, marinara, broccoli sauce, and breakfast muffins.

[Nats of Ben and Judith working together in the kitchen]

[nats of Judith chopping up herbs]

Wyatt please don't climb on the table!

Ben is making his mother's recipe for breaded squash. After slicing the squash he dips it in egg, then a flour and herb mixture, and fries it in butter.

[Nats of them hanging out in the kitchen]

Ben says eating locally has been good so far, he feels good about the food he is eating and everything has been really tasty. But he's had to let go of that instant gratification mindset.

A lot of times I think the lifestyle is.. lets get some to eat ... NOW. I'm hungry.. give me food. And now it's a little more... it takes thought. And last night we had to take inventory....

Judith was really excited because Ben helped her do some meal time strategizing.

AND BEN, FOR THE FIRST TIME, COLLABORATED WITH ME ON A MEAL PLAN!! IT WAS SOOO FUN.

Ben: it was the first time in a long time....

Judith: I hold it was the first time ever.

After a few hours of cooking the Bledsoe's took a break to eat lunch.

[nats of Ben talking to Wyatt]

They had local beef with melted cheese on top of it, and some of the squash. Ben said the yellow squash tasted the best.

[nats of them eating.... Forks and knives clanking.]

[transition]

The next week-- the Bledsoe's said preparing all that food, helped things go more smoothly.

However, they both struggled in social situations.

There were a few times at work, where Ben's co-workers invited him out to lunch and he declined and just ate food in his office. Or told them he would go, but he could just drink water.

Judith "cheated" one day when she went out to lunch with her friend. Her friend wanted to go out to eat after they ran in a race—and picked a restaurant downtown.

AfterGFS02 I asked the waitress, what do you have that's local? And the waitress said, "We don't do that here."

I realize that's the reality of so many restaurants... and I've never asked the question before.

My guess is 90 percent of restaurants would look at me in a very similar way.

Both Ben and Judith said if they were to try something like this long-term they would create a social life clause. Meaning, when they went out with friends, all restrictions were off.

It was kind of an internal struggle because I didn't want to cheat.

Judith said this was her least favorite part about the project—always asking people where food was from. She said it made her feel like a snob.

It feels like such a privileged conversation to have: like I'm choosing to just have local foods. I could buy anything that I want but instead I'm selectively choosing these foods... that is hard.

They're judging you because they feel like you're judging them. Like oh my god are you really that person.

And they think we think we're better than them because we're making this very positive decision.

I'm very self-conscious about that.

Ben and Judith thought about it for a minute, and concluded that knowing where your food comes from shouldn't be a pretentious thing.

It's funny that it's pretentious... back in the day that would have been so normal.

You wouldn't even ask the question.

Back in the day it was like.. obviously the food was grown somewhere close to us because how else would it get here?

You would think it would be the opposite. Where it's the affluent thing is being able to eat chocolate because it's from so far away and drinking coffee... and all those things....

But now its like its expanded to everything... we're gonna eat some chicken that was from Georgia... the other side of the country... its just odd to think that that is the cheaper way to do it.

[transition]

Ben and Judith are on to something here.

A lot of the food we eat travels further in a week than some of us have in our entire lives.

Food regularly travels between states, nations and continents. But just a few decades ago, things were very different.

The USDA says until about 1950, 70 percent of the food Montanans ate was grown in Montana. But by 2006 - only 10 percent of the food Montanans ate came from within the state.

Due to new agricultural production systems—bigger tractors and chemicals that make plants grow faster and easier—farmers can produce more food than they ever could before. Also with the development of global transportation, Montana became a major exporter of food, and also a major importer.

People now have access to fruits and vegetables from all over the world because of refrigerated trucks and airplanes.

The manager of a local, educational farm, and a lecturer at the University of Montana—Josh Slotnick-- is opposed to the transfer of perishable food items over long distances.

He is one of the chief local food advocates in Missoula.

I don't know if you could find a stronger local food advocate than myself.

But Slotnick says eating 100 percent locally, like the Bledsoe's are doing, is a little crazy.

He tries to follow—what he calls-- the Marco Polo rule.

Marco polo, a pretty famous explorer, sailed around the world... he would bring turmeric from one side of the globe and rock salt from the other side. If Marco Polo could have brought it around the world, I think its ok for me to participate in the same economy.

But Slotnick only applies this rule to things like spices, chocolate, and grains. Things that wont spoil, and can be shipped slowly.

Now that's an entirely different animal than saying I'm going to get Argentinian bananas for breakfast because its really important to me to eat bananas for break fast... I think that's kinda stupid, and a big giant carbon footprint. There are other ways to meet those same needs.

Slotnick says eating locally—for the most part-- is better for the environment. He also says food tastes better when its fresh, and tasty food brings people together.

There's a great benefit in this!! And it is that the act of cooking, and eating together - -really good food—is spectacularly rewarding. That's it. You're going to eat better food and the quality of your life goes up almost immeasurably through the act of cooking whole food and sitting down with people who care about eating a well-prepared meal.

Slotnick says when you cook a real meal, you care about the ingredients. And the more you care about the food you're preparing—the more you'll want people to sit down and eat with you.

Think about what the table does. It brings together all the food and their various histories, and it also brings the people together that live in that household and their histories.

Instead—use quotes about microwave...

Slotnick says when people eat together, they get to know each other, and therefore start to care about each other.

He also makes an economic argument for local food. He says spending money on local food, or at local stores in general, keeps money in town.

Economists have said that money spent can be spent up to seven times in one locality before it spins out.

Each time it's spent, it covers somebody's efforts, who is remaining here, creating a livelihood, hopefully a righteous livelihood that contributes to our whole betterment. And we know from living here, when the town is doing well and when its not doing well.

And when its doing well you don't see boarded up store fronts and for rent signs all over down town and you go downtown and the streets are full of people. There's just a vibrancy and a quality of life that's deeply enhanced.

I don't think I should have to make the argument why a boost in economics boosts quality of life.

Ultimately local food is about sustainability for Slotnick, and sustainability in his mind is caring for people, and caring for the ground under our feet.

I feel like cooking is a medium to get towards sustainability on a social sense also sustainability on an ecological sense.

He says food produced locally doesn't travel as far, so it uses less fuel producing less carbon dioxide—or greenhouse gas.

He also says when food is grown locally, there is a lot of pressure on the farmer to bypass toxic chemicals. Slotnick says if his neighbors saw him spraying his fields -- they would go nuts.

There's no way... if I got on my tractor in a hazmat suit and started spraying in my farm.. my neighbors would come unglued.. and these are not liberal democrats who love pilates and yoga or something...

There just normal regular people, but their kids are in the back yard and they don't want anything that needs a hazmat suit .. in their back yard.

Slotnick reiterated that eating locally comes with common sense.

I think that , in light of the hard-working noble family you're talking about, I feel like pretty much all the goals that I described, economic, environmental and social-cultural—all those goals can be worked towards effectively through participating in the local food system with out being as dogmatic and intentional as your family is being.

That's silliness ... you don't need to fuss about where the salt came from.

[transition]

Slotnick says eating local food could reduce greenhouse gas emissions—and potentially help thwart climate change. However, some researchers say that is not entirely true. They say... it all depends.

About 16 percent of the total energy used in the United States goes to food production and transport. And this production and transport is mostly powered by fossil fuels—giving the food system a fairly heavy carbon footprint.

However, this footprint can increase or decrease depending on how the food is grown, processed, packaged, and shipped.

Just counting the miles something travelled is not necessarily an accurate way to evaluate its environmental impact.

Plus, the U-S-D-A says transportation only accounts for about 10 percent of the CO2 emissions related to the food system. Most of the greenhouse gases come from the use of pesticides and fertilizers.

BUT.. the type of travel does have an impact.

From most efficient to least efficient type of transport-- it goes: sea transport, railroads, truck transport, air freight, then consumer's cars.

A researcher at the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture in Iowa says small, locally-based food systems are usually most reliant on the least efficient types of vehicles.

He estimated that local food systems in Iowa use more fuel than regional food systems that rely on larger semi trailers and mid-sized trucks. But also said both local and regional food systems use one-tenth the amount of fuel conventional, long-distance distribution systems use.

However, economist for the Sustainable Business Council in Missoula—Sue Anderson—says these studies are not one size fits all. She says fuel consumption rate and green house gas emissions depend on how far the farmers are driving, and how far the people are driving to get to the market.

There are some studies out there—there was actually one in the economist—that show farmers markets use more fuel than the local grocery store.

(In an area like London that makes sense.) In an area like Missoula where your farmers market is as close as your grocery store, then those comparisons don't necessarily hold up.

Anderson says if we redeveloped our local food system- meaning more growers and processors right here in the state- our carbon footprint would be greatly reduced.

So we grow a lot of stuff, ship it out of state to process it, and bring it back and we need to redevelop that.

For example, there are many ranchers in Montana that raise cattle, but there aren't any large-scale butchers or processors in the state to handle that much beef, so the ranchers ship their cattle out of state, and then some of the beef is shipped back to us.

Anderson says if local farmers grew more food—there will be a greater need for processors in the state—and food wouldn't have to travel as far.

So by redeveloping local production systems, do we then get ourselves in a better place for the future at a point in time when transporting things is going to be very expensive as fuel prices will continue to go up for a variety of reasons.

Over time, Anderson says the price of fossil fuels will go up, and the less reliant we are on them, the cheaper our food will be.

Yeah it may be cheaper right now, but are we building a system that will last long term, or are we going to have some abrupt changes at some point in time that are going to be very painful.

Oil is a finite resource, and in Anderson's opinion it would be a good idea to prepare for the day when access to oil is limited.

If we're going to use fossil fuels, we ought to be using them to set ourselves up for that steeper curve. So, a good use of fossil fuels in my mind is to build more solar and to build more wind, and to build more of the tools that we need to survive through that.

[transition]---

It's this same mentality that intrigued Judith to want to participate in this project.

One of her major inspirations was The Transition Handbook by Rob Hopkins—The Handbook calls for more resilient communities—or communities that can depend on themselves for things they need to survive--

The transition movement is based on the realization that peak oil, if it hasn't passed already is imminent. Probably has already passed though.

I had never heard the term peak oil before, so that was a new concept for me to think about... that this is finite. And we've already had our heyday. **Firstday15**

The author suggests the next step is a local resilience—including a resurgence in local food—creating food security.

Judith says after she read the Transition Handbook- she was really motivated to heed its words.

I totally bought it. Ah common sense. I love when people apply – really use logical solutions that aren't really political, that aren't really driven by anything other than this makes sense.

However, she didn't really change her lifestyle much at first.

Then this local food challenge came along, and she thought it was the perfect opportunity for her to practice what she learned.

Even if it meant only eating potatoes, meat, squash and cabbage during the wintertime.

[mini pause]

It's now January in Montana and the Bledsoe's are ready for round two: round two of eating nothing but local food.

On the second day, Judith went to the Good Food Store to pick up a few things.

[nats]

But Judith is hopeful she will find some green produce.

[nats]

The lady working in the section says they have cabbage and a few other things, but that's it...

The beets are the only thing here... although onions... the cipolines and shallots and garlic.

Judith says they have plenty of beets at home, which they are struggling to eat because no one in her family likes them.

They paid 100 dollars in late fall for 100 pounds of winter crops—like beets, potatoes, carrots, onions, and squash—and still have quite a bit left.

Like she said, she's mainly here for dairy products.. and honey, but puts a large green cabbage in her cart before moving on.

As she fills her container with honey she talks about her plans for the week.

I actually have quite a bit of cooking to do. Pumpkin cookies, we're going to strain yogurt that we made in to Greek yogurt, oh and granola.. I'm not sure how to make granola yet, but we'll find out.

Next, she stops by the dairy section.

And to her surprise - Kalispell Creamery- a local dairy- now makes cream!

Yesss! This is brand new!

And at the right price.

Judith says its little things like this that make her life a lot easier.

I looked for this everywhere in September, and with CREAM you can make crème freiche or sour cream, or anything. I was going to try to make it with their half and half, but this means I don't have to.

Score!

They just started carrying this. Just in time! Its kismet! It really is.

She continues to saunter around the store, picking things up and reading labels, seeing if there's anything else that will make her life easier for the next two weeks.

... OOOH

Judith picks up a bag of dried beans and peas prepackaged into something you'd make soup with....

"Let's see where these are from... it doesn't say!!! It's organic..."

The package has a made in Montana label on it, but Judith knows from experience, this doesn't necessarily mean all the ingredients are from Montana.

do you think that means grown in Montana?? that's hard to know. I could look at their website.

My guess is that this is marketed here, and put together here, but probably not necessarily grown here, because they're not saying that.

Lets go get some lentils... because I know we can source those...

Judith got some lentils, checked the sausages, and considered getting another chicken, but decided against it because she didn't like the last one.

She added a few packages of local cheese to her almost empty cart, and headed out to pick up Wyatt from day care.

[Nats of waiting in line, just the grocery store in general.]

[mini pause]

Back at home-- Judith is cutting up the cabbage she just bought... She's going to make her mother's cabbage with cheese recipe.. and steak.

The Bledsoe's bought a quarter of a cow from a local rancher in preparation for this winter session, they also had to buy a freezer to keep it in.

Judith also tried canning some vegetables, but it didn't work like she wanted.

Our beets went bad... waiting for the wine to become vinegar.

Judith tried to make some red wine vinegar to put her beets up in—but somehow it got all moldy.

Judith said she feels like she's living in Little House on the Prairie sometimes. She just re-read the series last year.

They are fascinating... for many many reasons. But one of the reasons is their description of food and cooking. ..

They planned a lot. And they almost died one winter... they almost starved... so its unpredictable.. the long winter...

Both Ben and Judith agree, the winter time is much more difficult.

There aren't really any fresh fruits or vegetables. Wyatt's been eating nothing but huckleberries.

Wyatt's been eating nothing but huckleberries and carrots.

I'm worried that we'll eat our favorite things and then have to eat all the things we don't really like, but we're not going to starve.

The Bledsoe's made it through the rest of the winter by hand slicing and frying potato chips, eating a lot of meat, and making bread with local Missoula yeast.

They say eating locally saved them about 50 dollars a week, but only because they couldn't go out to eat as often as they normally do. In general food was more expensive—but they were happy to find that the beef from their cow was relatively inexpensive—only 3-85 a pound.

Again, the winter session was harder than the fall session. During the winter there were a few slips-- Ben went out to eat with his employees, and Wyatt got to eat some things that weren't local because his parents decided he's a normal kid- and they shouldn't withhold normal kid things from him like popcorn and cookies. Judith got to leave a few days early from the project to go on a trip with her friends, and couldn't stop talking about how she wanted to go to the sushi restaurant. AND during the winter session—they let themselves eat salt.

Ben and Judith lost 5 pounds each during the fall session, and 5 pounds during the winter despite eating a lot of meat, cheese, butter, and bacon fat.

They said they both felt healthier, but don't plan on doing another local food challenge any time soon.

Judith does plan on changing the way she shops, and eats though.

I don't think you can go back... once you know something in a really personal first hand way.. It's really hard to pretend you don't know that already. [last day fall]

A week after their winter session ended—I caught up with Ben and Judith, just to check in.

Judith said she cancelled her Costco membership because she plans on buying fresher food from now on.

And Ben was excited to have the beer drawer in their refrigerator stocked again.

They both said challenging themselves to eat locally was fun, and very educational.

It wasn't the most scientific experiment-- Nobody took a measurement of the CO2 emitted from the project—

But they do feel that some of the environmental, economic, and social claims that local food advocates make—might be true.

most of their food came from farms within 100 miles.

Judith said during the project, her Costco bill changed to a farmer's market bill.

And Ben said they threw out a lot less trash.

BUT this is just one family's experience eating locally—in Missoula, Montana.

This has been Emily Wendler reporting.

