Appendix II
Sustainable Buying Guide

The Sustainable Buying Guide is essentially a condensed version of the Food Guide, designed to help individuals and institutions when you are actually buying your food. It can be a challenge to buy food for yourself, your family, or your institution when weighing a number of competing factors such as cost, kashrut, nutritional value, and sustainability and ethical practices. We have put into nine pages the most essential information and structured it to help you overcome any confusion that may come with purchasing food that is aligned with Jewish values.

Sustainable Buying Guide

Whether you're buying food for your family or an institution, you will often weigh a number of competing factors, such as cost, kashrut, nutrition, and sustainable and ethical practices.

When it comes to cost effectiveness, as Michael Pollan (and others) have suggested, we should not shy away from paying more than we're used to for good-quality food that fits our values. That said we have to make our food choices fit into our overall budget.

Making purchasing decisions on the basis of sustainable and ethical practices is challenging, as you will often be faced with a range of possible choices. This guide strives to help clarify the confusion that comes with purchasing food that is holistically "healthy" and aligned with Jewish values: fresh, nutritious, and grown locally with care for the well-being of the land, workers and animals.

Just as the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch program helps consumers and businesses make choices for healthy oceans, we've laid out Hazon's recommendations for purchasing food that is produced with sustainable, humane, and healthy practices.

Best Choices are those produced with the highest standards of sustainability and animal welfare.

Good Alternatives are options to consider when the best is unavailable, or when the best choice is cost prohibitive, but be aware that there are concerns with how food is raised or farmed in this category.

Avoid the practices that are most damaging to the environment, inhumane to animals, and present known health risks to people. Food in this category is often the cheapest, but comes with bigger environmental and societal costs.

Institutions that purchase food on a large scale may use this guide in developing a relationship with food growers, producers, and distributors, by knowing what questions to ask and what red flags to look for.

Individuals will find this guide most useful when engaging with farmers and growers at the farmer's market, or when seeking out a CSA.

All Food

What to ask:
Where is your farm located?
What size is your farm?
What are the labor practices and policies of your farm?

Best Choices
The definition of "local" will vary depending on your location and what is available to you, though it is often defined as coming from within 200 miles, or a day's drive. Don't just get hung up on "food miles" -- it's most important to be aware of the overall journey your food takes from farm to fork and consider the environmental impact of fuel emissions to import and transport food. When feasible, prioritize hyper local food from within your city or county.

Like the term "local," the definition of "family farm" or "small farm" is fluid. Rather than measure in acres, look for farmers that own their own animals or land, participate in the daily labor and management of their farms, and get a good portion of their livelihood from their farms.

All workers should (at minimum):

1. Be paid fair, livable wages

2. Have dignified working conditions: reasonable hours, fair treatment, good training, safe conditions, and proper washing facilities

3. Receive employee benefits and perks: collective bargaining rights, rest days, overtime compensation, and unemployment insurance

The agricultural sector often depends on seasonal work and on migrant work, and abuses of workers have been widely documented. Unfortunately, there is no single certifying agent who evaluates labor practices on farms.

Good Alternatives
Food that is from your region, or within the United States.

Farms should, at minimum, meet federal labor standards: minimum wage pay, and OSHA standards for training and safe working conditions.

Avoid
Food that travels across international borders, such as goods imported from China, Latin America, and South America.

Food grown and handled in farms and facilities with less than minimum wage pay, unsafe working conditions, or a lack of washing facilities are unacceptable labor practices for food and farm workers.

Fruits and Vegetables

What to ask:

Do you grow your produce with organic or agroecological production methods?
How do you manage pests?
How do you promote soil health? How do you fertilize your soil?

Best Choices
"Certified Organic" by the USDA or other third-party certifying agency. Food is grown without the use of chemical pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizers.

Transitional organic, or in the process of becoming certified. The farmer is using organic methods but has not reached the three-year pesticide-free requirement and cannot yet use the Certified Organic label.

Farmer can speak to organic and sustainable farming practices used, but is not certified or in the process of becoming certified. Some small farms grow their food organically but choose not to become certified due to the cost and paperwork load associated with doing so.

Encouraging soil health is a primary practice for managing pests. Healthier soils produce crops that are less susceptible to damage by pests, and are friendly to beneficial insects. By building soil health as a foundation, farmers eliminate the need for chemical pesticides, fertilizers, and herbicides.

Farmer grows diverse crops that are rotated throughout the land each season. Soil is fertilized by composting, composted manure, cover crops, and mulch. These practices build soil fertility by returning nutrients to the soil, building soil structure, and preventing erosion.

Good Alternatives
IPM (Integrated Pest Management). Farmer uses natural substances to keep crops disease resistant. Pesticides are used only at a last resort, when pest damage would keep them from bringing in a profitable crop.

"Ecologically grown" is an uncertified label that signifies a crop is grown without the use of chemical herbicides or fertilizers. Products with this label can be grown using IPM practices, which minimize but don't rule out the use of chemical pesticides.

"Big Organic" or industrial sized organic farming, like Earthbound Farm and Grimmway Farms, follows the USDA's standards for organic certification but produce on an industrial scale.

Avoid
"Monoculture" or growing a single crop over vast acreage, year in and year out. This practice pulls the same nutrients from the soil every year. Even in a single growing season, this practice depletes the health of the soil and increases potential for damaging pests to thrive.

Conventional farms grow using chemical pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers produced from petroleum and nitrogen responsible for greenhouse gas emissions. These fertilizers only feed plants three nutrients, leaving out a whole variety of minerals that are important to plant health.

Dairy, Beef, and Lamb

What to ask:
What do your cows, goats, lamb, and/or sheep eat?
What percentage of their diet comes from grazing on pasture?
Are animals given growth hormones or antibiotics?

Best Choices
Cows and other ruminant animals are meant to graze on grass and be outdoors year round. Their pasture should be free from chemical sprays.

The AGA (American Grassfed Association) certification for pasture-raised animals, which governs ruminant animals only (beef, bison, goat, lamb and sheep) are the most stringent of standards:

1. Diet: Animals are fed only grass and forage from weaning until harvest.

2. Confinement: Animals are raised on pasture without confinement to feedlots.

3. Antibiotics and hormones: Animals are never treated with antibiotics or growth hormones.

4. Origin: All animals are born and raised on American family farms.

Manure is a source of fertility and should be used to fertilize pasture rather than collecting in lagoons that pollute the air, surface water, and ground water.

Good Alternatives
USDA-grass-fed certified animals receive a majority of their nutrients from grass throughout their life, though diets can be supplemented with grain. The USDA standard only partially addresses buyers' expectations for grassfed meat, as the standard leaves a loophole for animal confinement, only requiring access to the outdoors during the growing season.

If some of the animal's diet comes from grain, its meat will often be referred to as "grain finished". Find out what the finish diet is composed of (a finish diet that is 50% forage (grass based) is better than 80% to 90% grain). Conventional beef production takes calves that began life on pasture and brings them to confinement feedlots, where they are brought to weight on grain. It is possible to spin this process and describe it as "grass fed, grain finished."

Rather than treat birds with antibiotics as a routine practice, a "good" solution is one where antibiotics are used only when animals are sick.

Avoid

Cows in CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations)

eat a diet that is designed to be cheap and fatten them up quickly. Conventional grain feed contains antibiotics and animal by-products. No percentage of the animal's diet is from pasture as feedlot livestock is raised in confinement on grain only.

Avoid dairy products, beef, and lamb where use of growth hormone is a routine practice.

Eggs and Poultry

What to ask:
What do your birds eat?
Are your birds free range or cage free?
Are your birds debeaked or force-molted?
Are your birds ever given antibiotics?

Best Choices
Poultry is raised on pasture, allowing animals to roam and graze, with room to peck and eat bugs. Feed is organic and all-vegetarian, which ensures that they are not eating animal by-products, and free of antibiotics.

The practice of "debeaking", or cutting off one-half to two-thirds of a bird's beak to reduce birds' "cannibalistic" pecking (i.e., pecking one another to death), is only implemented in severely overcrowded factory farms. Birds should never be debeaked or force-molted. However, there are humane reasons to allow beak trimming of laying hen, but this must be practiced according to strict guidelines.

Good Alternatives
"Cage-free" or "free range" as defined by the USDA means the birds have "access" to the outdoors. Farmers have to take only minimal steps to provide this kind of access; they may, for example, cut one small doorway in a barn filled with thousands of chickens. Farmers may provide only a yard covered in concrete or gravel, rather than a space with grass and bugs for chickens to graze on.

Poultry should be raised, at minimum, with access to the outdoors, and cage size should be considered as an important factor in the humane treatment of the bird.

Rather than treat birds with antibiotics as a routine practice, a "good" solution is one where antibiotics are used only when the flock is sick.

Avoid
Factory-farmed eggs from birds raised in unsanitary and inhumane conditions, like tiny cages or huge, overcrowded barns. Because birds want to peck, farmers debeak them so that they won't peck one another in their packed cages.

Chickens fed conventional grain feed, which sometimes contains animal by-products or genetically modified (GMO) grains. Antibiotics are routinely used to help them fight off the illnesses brought on by their unsanitary living conditions.

Healthy, Sustainable Shopping

It starts with the cart!

You can promote a more sustainable, healthy, and equitable food system by making small, manageable changes to your food shopping routine. Here is a list of tips to overcome the three most common barriers to purchasing healthy, sustainable food at the grocery store.*

"Better food costs more."

At grocery stores, food grown and raised with sustainable practices often costs more than its conventional, industrial counterpart. But cheap food has bigger environmental and societal costs. An organic apple at Safeway is $0.20 more per pound than non-organic of the same type and source ($2.19/lb vs. $1.99/lb), but an organic apple purchased in season at your famer's market is generally cheaper than what you can find in the store.

Don't pay the middleman. Avoid the upcharge on sustainable alternatives by getting as close as you can to the source of your food. Shop at a local farmer's market, purchase a farm share through a Community Supported Agriculture program (CSA), or grow some of your food yourself. This way, your dollar directly supports farmers who grow food locally and in season, offering you the cheapest price possible.

- Hazon has the largest faith-based CSA network in the country. Find a Hazon CSA near you: www.hazon.org/csa
- Local Harvest is a great way to find a farmer's market near you: www.localharvest.org/

Eat lower on the food chain and save meat for special occasions. Purchasing only kosher, sustainable meat will prove challenging to your food budget if you include it in every meal. Transition to eating meat only once or twice a week or on special occasions, and supplementing foods from the bottom of the chain into your daily diet will benefit the environment, your wallet, and your health. Plant-based protein sources such as grains and legumes are lower on the food chain and superior to meat in that they come with disease-preventing fiber and naturally contain a wide variety of vitamins and minerals that our bodies need to thrive. Spend your valuable food dollars on the lowest foods that you can afford to eat more of, like beans, grains, fruits, vegetables, and nuts.

Shift your priorities to free up room in your food budget. If a farmer's market or CSA doesn't work for you, you may need to shift priorities and free up room in your food budget in order to purchase the sustainable alternative at grocery stores.

Figure out what you currently spend on food by tracking your food-related expenses for one month. Save receipts from everywhere you buy food: grocery stores, coffee shops, and restaurants. At the end of the month, organize and tally the totals.

- What surprises you about your food spending?
- Where is the bulk of your money spent?
- What changes can you make?
- Calculate how much you might save each month if you made your coffee and lunch at home. What if you cut out soda, juice, and other empty-calorie foods?

"Sustainability terms are complex and misleading."

Terms like "organic", "grass fed", "naturally raised" and "cage free" don't always mean what they seem to mean. When you make purchasing decisions on the basis of sustainability, you will often be faced with a range of possible choices. Sometimes there is a clear best choice, but most of the time you will be weighing a number of competing factors. Store signage, labels, and packaging offer few, and often misleading clues about where it was grown or raised, and the feeding and handling practices used.

Refer to a reputable source. Animal Welfare Approved created an exhaustive list of the "bewildering range of terms and claims used to promote and label the food we buy" in "Food Labels for Dummies", available for free download on their website.

Beware of "greenwashing", when companies and organizations make themselves and their products sound or look like they're helping the environment, luring you in by creating the perception that you can support sustainability by purchasing their product. In some cases you are helping. In some cases, it's greenwashing.

The Greenwashing Index was created to educate consumers about how to "read" an ad and encourage people to decide for themselves if what they're seeing is greenwashing. Check out their website for tips to spot greenwashing (The Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing But the Truth) and view and rate ads that fellow informed consumers have submitted.

Look for labels from third party certified sources. Some labels (like "organic") are third-party certified—meaning that a grower has to follow a certain set of practices in order to use this label. This is the best available way to know that a company's claims are reliable, and have been substantiated by an independent, outside party.

While certification holds growers accountable, it often falls short of a gold standard of sustainability. Other terms, like "naturally raised," aren't certified at all, and the label means very little. The following labels, seals, and insignia have certified backing:

USDA Organic seal says that overall, organic operations must demonstrate that they are protecting natural resources, conserving biodiversity, and using only approved substances. http://www.ams.usda.gov/

Fair Trade Certification is designed and audited to ensure equitable trade practices at every level of the supply chain. http://www.fairtradeusa.org/

Rainforest Alliance Certification seal assures consumers that the product they are purchasing has been grown and harvested using environmentally and socially responsible practices.

www.rainforest-alliance.org

Food Alliance Certification is a voluntary way for agricultural producers and food companies to address customer demands for traceability and social and environmental responsibility. http://foodalliance.org/

Animal Welfare Approved is a food label for meat and dairy products that come from farm animals raised to the highest animal welfare and environmental standards. http://www.animalwelfareapproved.org/

Ask questions. One of the many benefits of shopping at a farmer's market is being able to ask questions of the grower or producer, but grocery store employees can also help. Whole Foods and Trader Joe's have product guides available at customer service and on the web.

Ask the right questions. When you shop at a farmer's market, seek out a CSA, or have the opportunity to engage directly with the grower, producer, or distributor of the food you buy, know what questions to ask and what red flags to look for. We've compiled a list of questions to ask about fruits and vegetables, dairy, eggs, poultry, beef, and lamb on our Sustainable Buying Guide.

"Unhealthy options outweigh the healthy ones."

Grocery store shelves are filled with thousands of unhealthy, packaged, processed food options. These tips will help you set yourself up for success to fill your cart with the healthiest and highest nutrient-dense foods available.

Plan ahead and map your route. Adopt a routine where you map out your weekly meals. Determine how many meals you need to prepare that week and create a list based solely on the ingredients required for the menu. Control spending and avoid impulse buying by sticking to the list.

Assess what you have on hand. Avoid food waste by doing a quick inventory of what you have in your refrigerator, freezer, and cupboards that need to be used up, and fill in your menu plan using these items first.

Set yourself up for success. Carefully choosing when to shop can affect how much you spend and what you bring home.

- Avoid shopping when you're hungry, as your body will be craving sugar and you'll be more likely to make impulse purchases.
- Shop when the store isn't crowded. This saves time and you can concentrate better.
- Leave the family at home if they're likely to distract or cause you to stray from the list.

Priorities first. Fill your cart with the basics first—vegetables, fruit, and protein. These foods are nearly always found along the outside walls of the store.

- **Arrange your master list according to the store layout.** This will save time and prevent backtracking. If you need something in the center aisles, dash in for specific items, then return to the outside walls.
- **Don't even go there!** Avoid temptation and stay out of the empty calorie aisles (potato chips, crackers, candy, soda, deli), usually found in the center of the store.
- **Supplement fresh with frozen.** Stock your freezer with frozen vegetables, fruit, meat, and wild-caught seafood.

Pay for food, not convenience. You save money when you buy the basic ingredients in your recipes/meals rather than pre-prepared items. You also have more control over the quality of your ingredients when you create a meal for yourself.

Make sure what you're buying is food. Understand what's in processed food. Read the ingredients—fewer is usually better. Anna Lappé goes by the "thumb rule": "If the ingredients list is longer than your thumb, put it down." Avoid items that have ingredients that are difficult to pronounce or identify, such as partially hydrogenated oil and high-fructose corn syrup. "Don't eat anything that your great-grandmother wouldn't recognize as food," says Michael Pollan.

Compare the unit price for the best buy. The "unit price" is the cost per weight or volume of a food. It is usually posted on the shelf below the food. Use unit prices to compare costs of different brands of the same food.

Look up, look down. Companies pay to display their products at eye level. Look on higher and lower shelves for less expensive products. Consider purchasing the generic or store-brand, but make sure to review and compare the ingredient list.

Pay attention at checkout. Make sure you got the sale price, the cashier punched in the right code on your produce, and that you leave with everything you paid for. Don't forget your reusable shopping bag!

**This list of tips was informed by research conducted with the Class of 2013 Brandeis Hillel Day School 7th grade students. Learn more about this project: A New Way to Grocery Shop.*