



MACHANE YEHUDA SPECIAL: Fresh from California?

By Liore Milgrom-Elcott

From whole-wheat challah to pure pomegranate juice, I navigate the narrow streets of Jerusalem until my backpack is full and my wallet empty. So when I was visiting my grandmother in Jerusalem and she asked me to pick up golden raisins, I put on my walking shoes and made my way to Machane Yehuda, the Jerusalem open-air market that is filled with spices and herbs, fresh produce and dried goods, meat and fish.

After examining a number of stalls, I settled on a beautiful one in the corner, one piled high with figs, dates, raisins, almonds and all other varieties of edible local goods for which Israel is famous. Each pile had a sign behind it, stating its type and cost. I was intrigued that there was a sign behind one of four varieties of raisins that said in Hebrew, "Organic California raisins."

Raisins shipped from California to Israel? I asked the vendor if the raisins were, indeed, imported.

"Yes," he said. "As are most things here."

I could not speak for a minute as I tried to understand the implications of the man's statement. As I see it today, there are two – one centered on the global environment and one on the local environment.

Global environment

Israel is about 7,500 miles from California, and transporting goods consumes energy and emits pollutants. Using an informative report published by the Natural Resources Defense Council, I estimated that for every 100 tons of food transported from California to Israel, 9 tons of greenhouse gases are emitted. If we are truly committed to halting global climate

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change and reducing our overall consumption of greenhouse gases, sourcing locally in Israel is a great way to start.

Local environment

Years ago Israel sourced most of its food locally, but with Israel's expanding role and place in global markets, the country's food sourcing has been shifting. For example, grape production in Israel has been declining since 2006. Consequently, land is being transitioned away from grape farming and grape-farming jobs are disappearing.

Beyond stats of global climate change and agricultural indexes, there is an emotional component as well. Israel and Israelis are known for being able to fend for themselves and supply all that they need – and we take pride in that. Yet, in the most basic of needs – food – we are moving toward a system that is forcing us to rely on others.

The good news is that, as consumers, we have the opportunity to vote with our wallets. Next to the California raisins in the Machane Yehuda stall was a raisin variety grown in Israel. So I returned to my grandmother with a kilo of those beautiful, plump, locally grown Israeli raisins.

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