



FOOD & SOCIETY POLICY FELLOWS

Popeye Had It Wrong: Local, Fresh Spinach Packs the Authentic Nutritional Punch

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Sorry, Popeye. Your tin can of spinach just can't compete with the brawny nutritional wallop from a bunch of fresh greens from a local farmers' market or home garden.

Too bad Popeye didn't know Angie Tagtow, an environmental nutritionist based in Iowa and a leading advocate championing public access to fresh, affordable, sustainably raised food. "Local food is a dream team blend of nutrients and health benefits," explains Tagtow. "Food's nutrient value starts to decrease right after it is harvested. Local food is picked and then quickly eaten at the peak of ripeness. It's thereby fresh, tastes great and packs a more nutritious punch than what might be shipped and processed 1,500 miles away."

Local, fresh spinach would have also gifted Popeye with a decent long-term health insurance plan. "Increasing access to and consumption of fresh foods decreases the risk of diet-related, chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease," adds Tagtow. "Local food offers tremendous long-term public health benefits. The challenge is for policymakers, public health agencies and nutrition professionals to recognize and initiate programs that support local, fresh food access for all." Tagtow works toward such awareness through her business, [Environmental Nutrition Solutions](#), which takes an ecological approach to food and health by focusing on the public health benefits of sustainable food systems, and through her work as a [Food and Society Policy Fellow](#).

Growing up in rural Wisconsin where her father worked in the medical field, Tagtow saw the connection between diet and health early on. "There's so much emphasis today on treating disease with drugs, and yet there's so much potential for using our food choices as a preventive approach to disease," comments Tagtow. "Realizing the connection between what we eat and the state of both public and planetary health will hopefully lead to a more holistic approach to disease prevention."

As we enter the season of fresh food abundance, Tagtow offers some tips and ideas to get more fresh, local fare on your plate:

- **Connect with a Local Food Source**



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Local Harvest provides a national database that links you to area farmers' markets, U-picks, CSAs (Community Support Agriculture), food co-ops or retailers that sell local food. Plug in your zip code and you may very well surprise yourself with the number of options available in your area.

- **Embrace your Culinary Limitations**

“Know your skill and comfort level in the kitchen and start with food items you are familiar with, slowly learning how to handle fresh food,” advises Tagtow. “Pick a couple of items that you know you like and then experiment as your palette widens. Ask farmers questions on how they recommend preparing different items and for recipe and storage tips.”

- **Choose a Rainbow of Color**

“Anything that has a vibrant color is generally a robust source of vitamins and nutrients, such as dark green Swiss Chard or bright orange sweet potatoes,” Tagtow recommends.

- **Buy Seasonally in Bulk and Preserve**

“Right now I’m buying asparagus at the **Des Moines Farmers’ Market** and freezing it for the winter,” Tagtow adds. “You can’t beat the price, nutrient value and flavor of stocking up locally in-season.”

Tagtow relies on her easy “Garden Fresh Greens Salad” when she needs a simple meal that’s quick on prep and high on flavor and nutrients. Poor Popeye. If only he had ventured out of the can, he and Olive Oyl would have been savoring something like this:

Garden Fresh Greens Salad

Step 1: Start with a bowl of fresh greens, such as spinach mixed with baby salad greens. Tagtow likes to add in some zestier greens for a peppery bite such as red kale, arugula or endive. Sprinkle with a few chopped chives.

Step 2: Add in some fruit, such as a chopped apple or pear or handful of dried cranberries.

Step 3: Crumble 1-2 Tablespoons of flavorful cheese on top. Tagtow picks up blue cheese from **Maytag Dairy Farm** or goat cheese from Northern Prairie Chevre on her weekly jaunts to the Des Moines Farmers’ Market.



Step 4: Sprinkle on 1-2 Tablespoons of nuts or seeds, such as sunflower seeds, walnuts or pine nuts.

Step 5: Drizzle with aged balsamic syrup. Balsamic syrup is thicker and sweeter, which makes a great tasting, healthy dressing.

You can purchase balsamic syrup, or here is a recipe to make it:

1 cup balsamic vinegar

2 scant tablespoons sugar

Stir vinegar and sugar in heavy small saucepan and boil slowly until liquid is reduced to 1/2 cup, about 10 minutes. Mix in 1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme. Store in a small pitcher in the fridge.