

## *Sustainability Tip #6:*

# THANKSGIVING

In the hubbub of planning and preparing a Thanksgiving feast for friends and family, it can be easy to forget the environmental impact of our food choices.

Growing, harvesting, and transporting the ingredients for a typical

Thanksgiving meal consumes a significant amount of water and energy and contributes to air and water pollution, habitat degradation, and global warming.

Fortunately, you can make a holiday meal that is not only delicious but also kinder to the environment and your family's health. Here's how:

- **Look for food produced in your region.** Food travels an average of 1,500 miles or more from the farm to the supermarket, consuming fossil fuels and emitting air pollutants and heat-trapping carbon dioxide. Regionally grown meat and produce not only travel a shorter distance to your table and arrive fresher, but may also come from smaller farms that often follow more environmentally friendly practices.
- **Choose organic.** Organic standards prohibit the use of synthetic fertilizers, toxic pesticides, and antibiotics (today's industrialized animal production relies heavily on antibiotics to accelerate growth and prevent diseases that stem from overcrowding). Overuse of these substances generates air and water pollution and makes it more difficult to treat human diseases and ward off agricultural pests. If organic turkey is not available in your supermarket, choose turkey that has been raised without antibiotics. Also look for organic apples, celery, potatoes, and green beans because these holiday favorites are among the fruits and vegetables that typically carry the highest pesticide residues.
- **Support genetic diversity.** Today's large-scale farms focus on only a select few varieties of livestock and crops; for example, of the more than 250 million turkeys sold in the United States each year, 99 percent are the Broad-Breasted White variety. And of the thousands of potato varieties available, a small number now account for the majority of commercial production. As our agriculture system becomes more homogeneous, so does the risk of catastrophic losses if a disease spreads rapidly throughout a plant or animal population upon which our food supply depends. Choosing heirloom (or "heritage") varieties such as American Bronze turkeys and fingerling potatoes helps support biodiversity and ensures a reliable food supply for future generations.