

# The History of the Farm to Table Movement



Cinnamon Janzer | June 22, 2018

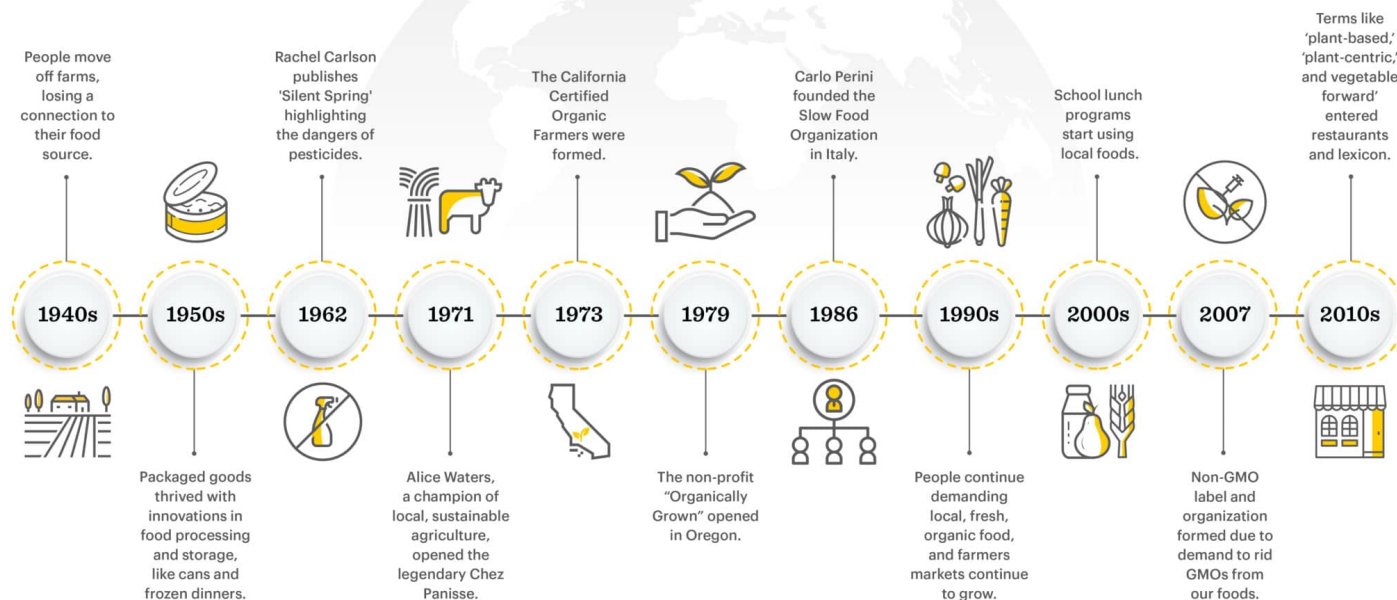


There's no cut and dry definition of farm to table. If you find yourself wondering "What is the farm to table movement *really*?", it boils down to this: the farm to table movement broadly refers to food made from locally-sourced ingredients, often natural or organic. Even though there isn't an exact definition that restaurants have to adhere to in order to call themselves a farm-to-table joint, those that self-proclaim that label can be found almost everywhere, from small midwestern locales to urban centers.

Farm to fork is another way to refer to the same thing as farm to table. As Rutgers puts it, farm to fork is "a food system in which food production, processing, distribution, and consumption are integrated to enhance the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of a particular place." While most of us see the term used in restaurants, it can be applied much more broadly than that.

But it wasn't always this way. It's only been in recent years that farm-to-table has become the full-blown movement that it is today.

# The History of the Farm to Table Movement



## The Movement's Beginnings: A Farm to Table History

It's impossible to talk about the rise of farm-to-table without discussing the fall of the processed food empire.

Packaged goods thrived after innovations in food processing and storage, and peaked with the ubiquity of canned food during the 1950s. Processed food continued to reign supreme until the 1960s and 1970s. At that point, the hippie movement—comprised of constituents who were fans of local and organic food—swept the States.

*“The counterculture is always ahead of what’s happening in mainstream culture,” explains Lucky Peach’s Peter Meehan.*

After a few years, hippie preferences began showing up in formal food structures. In 1979, the non-profit “Organically Grown” opened in Oregon. In 1986, Carlo Perini founded the Slow Food Organization in Italy. Back in the States, pioneers like Alice Waters arose. Alice, a champion of local, sustainable agriculture, opened the legendary Chez Panisse in 1971. In 2003, Kimbal Musk started The Kitchen in Boulder, CO.

*See How Seasonality Can Impact Business*



## The Principles Behind Farm to Table

The main driving forces behind the farm to table or farm to fork movement, whichever you prefer to call it, have to do with the ethics of food production. A Rutgers outlines, there are four pillars to the movement:

- **Food security.** The farm to table movement increases the scope of food security to move beyond the food needs of individuals or families and look at the needs of both the larger community, with a focus on low-income households. “It has a strategic goal of developing local food systems,” the article notes.
- **Proximity.** The farm to table movement hinges on the notion that the various components of a food system (or a restaurant) should exist in the closest proximity to each other as possible. The goal is to develop relationships between the various stakeholders in a food system such as “farmers, processors, retailers, restaurateurs, consumers” and more. Additionally, proximity reduces the environmental impact of transporting ingredients across states or countries.
- **Self-reliance.** One of the goals of farm to table is to generate communities that can meet their own food needs, again eliminating the need for outside resources or long distance transportation of food.
- **Sustainability.** The core idea here is that farm to table food systems exist in a way that doesn’t stifle “the ability of future generations to meet their food needs,” meaning that it doesn’t destroy resources in the process.

That said, the farm to fork movement includes other goals as well, such as increasing the health of a community and increasing access to food across an entire community.

## Farm to Table Movement Booms

The farm to table movement, with its lofty goals and ideals for how our food systems and the restaurants that operate within them, wouldn't have become what it is today without similar progressions in separate sectors began to taking foot. "Five years ago, the farmer's market wasn't as vibrant and it attracted just nine local farmers that sold a few different kinds of veggies. Today, there's a fourfold jump, with 36 farmers who regularly show up with a dizzying array of eggplants, blueberries, pecans, home-churned butter, and meat from animals raised on the farms encircling the town," notes Pallavi Gogoi.

**Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was the accompanying environmental awakening that ushered in such exponential growth.**

It occurred in a similar way to the farm-to-table movement. The two quickly grew hand in hand, propping each other up, because of their overlaps and similarities.

*"Consumers who have been educated by movies like An Inconvenient Truth now pore over 'food miles' and 'carbon footprints.' The message seems to be: if you buy organic, you care about your own body; if you buy local you care about your body and the environment," explains Gogoi.*

Today, "as many as 1,200 school districts around the country, from Alabama to Iowa, have linked up with local farms to serve fresh vegetables and fruit to children. Last year, Iowa's Woodbury County mandated that its food service suppliers buy from local farmers," Gogoi concludes.

What's clear is that the farm to table movement is not a passing trend. It's designed to change the culture around how we eat.



## A Plant-Based Future?

According to the Menus of Change 2016 Annual Report, “in the past year, terms like ‘plant-based,’ ‘plant-centric,’ and ‘vegetable-forward’ all started to enter the mainstream of the national lexicon.”

The publication continues to explain that the most noticeable food trend in 2016 was not just menus, but entire restaurants putting “plants first” in their food (here are 5 plant-based restaurants from around the world).

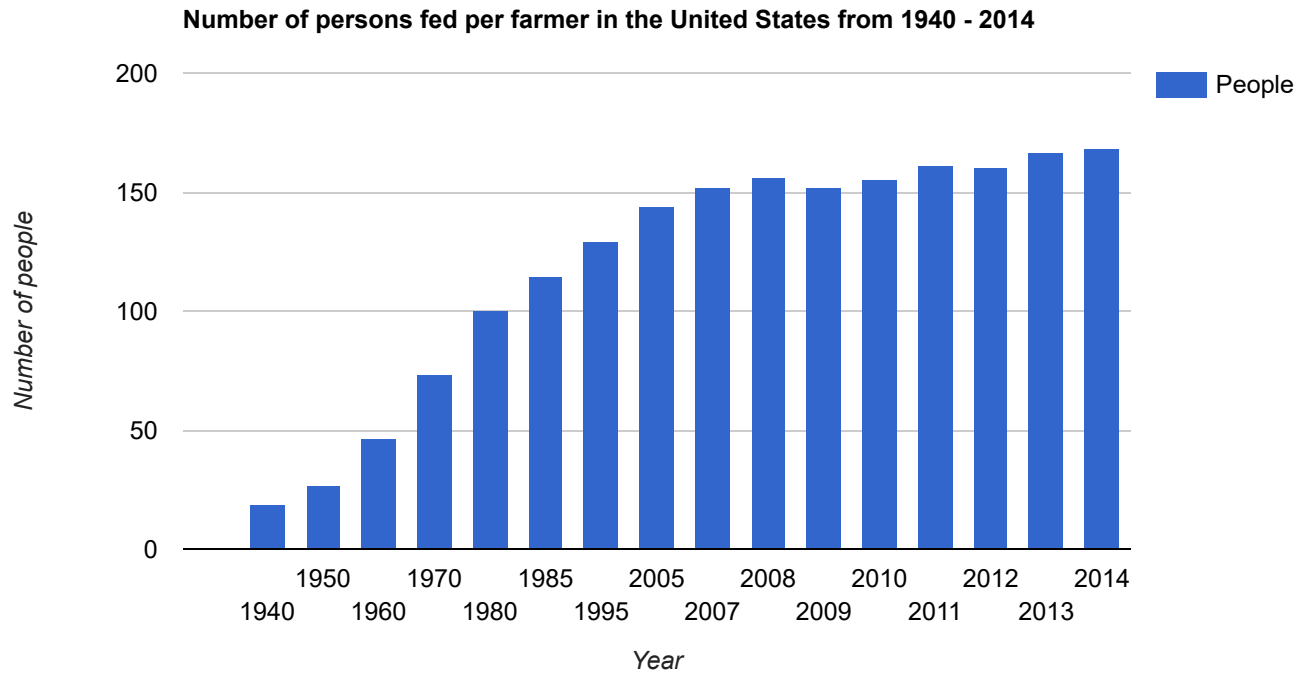
Most recently, the farm to table movement has led chefs and restaurant owners to get increasingly involved in the growing of their ingredients and even buy their own farms. As the Wall Street Journal put it, a shift is underfoot from “simply sourcing to becoming the source”.

[blockquote-right]“Never before has awareness been so strong about the connection between the health of our bodies and the health of the planet with regard to food choices.”[/blockquote-right]

## What’s Next: Fewer Farms and a Growing Population

In 1900, the U.S. population was 76,212,168, and in 100 short years (in 2000) it was 282.2 million. The conundrum here is that the number of farms has actually fallen 63%, while the average farm size has risen 67%. In 1940, each farmer fed about 19 people. In 2013, one farmer fed about 168

people. Gone are the days of small scale agriculture and hello to machine led large-scale farming.



Source: USDA

The population is growing, and more consumers are seeking organic options, and vegetable based diets, the farm industry will have to adapt.

If this restaurant industry trend continues, we can expect a narrowing of the gap between farms and tables, both at restaurants and out.

*Check out some farm-to-table restaurant menu ideas!*

**Written by Cinnamon Janzer | June 22, 2018**

Cinnamon is a Minneapolis-based freelance writer and journalist who paid a large part of her way through college and graduate school by serving. Her work has been published with outlets like National Geographic, the Washington Post, Pacific Standard, and more. You can read more about her at [www.cinnamon-janzer.com](http://www.cinnamon-janzer.com).

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