

# FOOD *for* THOUGHT

SPRING 2015

## Mindful Eating Mindful Living

Sustaining the Earth  
and All Living Beings

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## About The Center for Mindful Eating:

### Our Mission:

The mission of The Center for Mindful Eating, also known as TCME, is to help people achieve a balanced, respectful, healthy and joyful relationship with food and eating. By providing an easily accessible source of information and opportunities to interact via the web and in other ways, we seek to train and encourage professionals who can then foster this capacity in others.

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## Board Members Corner: Sustainable Eating



**Lilia Graue**

*MD, MFT*

There is currently a wealth of information about topics surrounding food, eating, and mindful eating from many sources. Having followed some lively debates and conversations about these topics, The Center for Mindful Eating considers it essential to get across a clear message of what we understand as mindful eating and relevant topics affecting its practice for our growing community around the world.

This issue of *Food for Thought* is dedicated to sustainability, which we believe is a very fitting topic to accompany the release of our first two position statements, one on meditation and the other on healthy eating. Sustainability is about clearly seeing the impact of our choices on our bodies, other participants in the food chain, other living beings around us, and the Earth itself.

Just as we human beings are intimately connected with other beings and elements, the practice of mindfulness meditation and the cultivation of healthy eating are closely linked to sustainability.



The following position statements are in alignment with the mission, vision and values of The Center for Mindful Eating. They might not reflect all of our members' views/opinions. It is the hope of The Center for Mindful Eating that these position statements will provide opportunities for meaningful reflection and conversations along the path to a healthy and joyful relationship with food and eating to the benefit of all beings.

**Lilia Graue, MD, MFT**

*Vice President, TCME Board of Directors*

## TCME Rejoices in Cheryl Wasserman



The Board of Directors of The Center for Mindful Eating dedicates this issue of *Food for Thought* to our colleague Cheryl Wasserman, former TCME board member.

"Cheryl's soft-spoken voice seems never to quiver when she speaks from her heart. Cheryl has many passions

including family, grandchildren, dogs, sustainability and mindful eating. Her compassion is expressed in the generosity of her kindness and wisdom. I am thrilled she has chosen to care for herself and seek greater life balance by stepping down from the board, yet her absence on the board of TCME is sorely missed."

~ Megrette Fletcher, MEd, RD, CDE

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## rejoicing

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“Cheryl’s voice in the world of mindful eating is one worth listening to.”

*~ Char Wilkins, MSW  
TCME Advisory Board*

“Whenever I think of Cheryl I get a feeling of calm. Her very presence is soothing. What better feeling could a person receive from a teacher of mindful eating? Thank you, Cheryl, for your contributions to, and passion for, the field of mindful eating.”

*~ Marsha Hudnall, MS, RDN, CD*

“Cheryl is a dear colleague with whom you feel her love for life. As a board member, her mission was to connect mindful eating with sustainable living. Her compassionate call to pay attention to our environment and the food offered by the earth was an inspiration for the *Food for Thought* Spring 2015 issue. Her wonderful guided meditations offered precious moments to bring us all in contact with our inner nature. Cheryl, your wise mind and big heart will definitely inspire many other professionals.”

*~ Caroline Baerten, RD*

“I was so glad to welcome Cheryl onto the board, and am sorry to hear she had to make a difficult decision to leave. Yet, I expect that she will continue to place her energies as much as possible toward the spirit and substance of TCME in her own work with her patients. I do hope we will be able to welcome her back at some time, but regardless, I hope we can support her in whatever her personal and professional goals entail.”

*~ Jean L. Kristeller, PhD*

## TCME Position Statements: *What we understand as mindful eating*

The current board of The Center for Mindful Eating considers it essential to communicate what we understand as mindful eating and relevant topics affecting its practice for our growing community around the world. We are delighted to release the first two of our position statements, one on meditation and the other on healthy eating. This year, we will be releasing further position statements on the topics of sustainability, weight, and food security.

### Healthy Eating

It is the position of The Center for Mindful Eating (TCME) that healthy eating is enjoyable eating that meets nutritional needs. It utilizes the practice of mindfulness by intentionally bringing awareness to the internal and external environment while eating. This means both being aware of the feedback from the body about what supports its health, including the impact of pleasure, and also of the best available scientific evidence related to nutrition and individual health concerns.

The blend of pleasure and nutrition is important for consistency in eating healthfully as well as to optimize digestion, absorption and metabolism of nutrients.

TCME endorses eating, whenever

possible, food that is whole and prepared using oils, fats, sugar and salt in moderation. TCME recognizes that individual choices are affected by factors that may limit food choices. Eating with mindfulness can include extending our awareness to the impact of food choices upon the environment and the impact of factory farming upon animals and farm workers.

### Meditation

The Center for Mindful Eating endorses a formal mindfulness meditation practice as a valuable support for the practice of mindful eating. It supports awareness of craving, emotional and physical hunger, and satiety cues to help guide decisions on when to begin and end eating. Meditation cultivates attention and awareness of thoughts, feelings, and all the senses without judgment. It encourages curiosity and cultivates compassion, thus providing a foundation for mindful eating.

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*We welcome the comments and suggestions of our TCME community. Current members of The Center for Mindful Eating are invited, and encouraged, to share their responses to these position statements. <http://www.thecenterformindfuleating.org/TCME-Members-Survey> (log in required)*

“While we eat we can be mindful of the food and mindful of the community. It is a chance to receive the many gifts of the Earth that we would not otherwise benefit from if the mind is elsewhere.”

Caroline Baerten, RD  
*Food for Thought*  
Spring 2015: Sustainability





# Food, Sustainability and the Role of Mindfulness

**“The ecological crisis may be the result of a collective perceptual disorder in our species, a unique form of myopia which it now forces us to correct.”**

~ David Abram



**Caroline Baerten**

MA, RD

### The skill of ecological perception

I take Abram’s statement at left quite literally. Our “collective myopia” is one manifestation of psychic numbing – a psychological defense against witnessing the pain of the Earth.

Full awareness can hurt. In response we build defenses, or we choose among a variety of convenient distractions. We become numb to our feelings, to what we might hear and see, and our myopic defense blinds us to the severity of current Earth conditions.

In his book *The Voice of the Earth*, Theodore Roszak presents a theory in which he explains that the roots of our collective behavior toward the Earth can be found in the split between “in-here” and “out-there.” This thinking creates a large gap we feel between ourselves and the nonhuman nature (animals, plants, minerals). If we would experience ourselves as interconnected and with fluidity of boundaries, this would manifest in more empathy with family, friend, community, humanity and similarly with the whole of the nonhuman world.

It is a shift of perspective from attention of my suffering (I, mine) toward more environmental, contextual awareness.

Our sensory capacities – taste, smell, sight, hearing and touch – are the fundamental avenues of connection between self and the

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## role of mindfulness

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world. The deadening of our senses is at the heart of the environmental crisis and reawakening them through mindfulness is an integral step toward renewing our bond with the Earth and all living beings.

## Slowing down and learning to attend

Attending is the flip side of psychic numbing. Focused attention produces a richness of color, a depth of sensory experience. The ability to fully use our attentional capacity is a learned skill, requiring the practice of mindfulness and awareness. When we slow down and eat quietly, we can really enjoy our food on a sensual level.

We make behavioral (and subjective) choices based on what we see, smell, hear...

In the context of our ecological situation and the need for sustainable choices, it would be wise to become more mindful of where we place our attention.

According to Vietnamese Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, the first step is learning to attend, the cultivation of a “wakeful presence.” When the mind isn’t present in the body, we look, but we don’t see; we listen, but we don’t hear; we eat, but we don’t know the flavor of the food; we breathe, but we don’t feel alive.

## Cherish all life and fall in love with Earth

Cultivate compassion and learn ways to protect our people and the planet. When fueled by beauty and sensuality, our relationship with the visual world may move our hearts. As what we see and

perceive becomes meaningful and vital, we feel it in our bodies. The sensory world thus becomes directly embodied in us. We fall in love with Mother Earth and all living beings.

Participation is felt by sensation in our bodies and shifts in our hearts. Participation in this way is essential if we are to care enough for the Earth; we need to take time to look and to view her through “love eyes.”

## The bread in my hand contains the universe

While we eat we can be mindful of the food and mindful of the community. It is a chance to receive the many gifts of the Earth from which we would not otherwise benefit if the mind is elsewhere. Nothing comes from nothing. Bread comes from the wheat fields, which need rain and sunshine.

So every slice of bread also contains sunshine, the clouds, the Earth, time, space, and the hard work of the farmer, supplier and the baker. The whole universe has come together in the piece of bread. Eating mindfully is a way of showing appreciation for all the hard and loving work that has gone into creating this meal.

## Interconnectivity and compassion

Having the opportunity to sit with our family and enjoy wonderful food is something precious, something not everybody has because many people in the world are hungry

Realizing this makes us aware of the unique eating moment, and care and gratitude naturally arise.

This awakening through the energy of mindfulness and compassion is what we

need to live in a sustainable way.

It is only through clear understanding of the impact of our actions that we can see how unwholesome food patterns create suffering for the body and mind. Insight into what the short- and long-term impact will be for the body will bring a shift in awareness: Becoming aware of the negative tendencies, especially greed and the feeling of “not enough,” and learning to eat the right amount of food. In our Western society, a lot of food waste is often based on ignorance about what the effect may be on our food production system.

Thanks to the correct view of our consumption, we will see more clearly the effect of eating behavior on:

- Our human body and emotional and mental states.
- Our production methods (industrial scale, methods, food supplies, forests, grain prices, global emission).

Eating in a sustainable way is about the quality of our food and the determination to ingest only food that keeps the body healthy and compassion alive. It is eating in a way that doesn’t cover up the stressful feelings but acknowledges them and helps to transform them.

Mindful consumption and eating involve recognizing exactly what we need to consume (in all senses of the word) and what not to consume to keep our bodies, minds and the Earth healthy.

*Caroline Baerten (Belgium) is a mindfulness-based dietitian/RD, qualified chef and integrative psychotherapist (i.t) specializing in work with disturbed eating behavior, weight issues and sustainability. Her passion is urban gardening in the heart of Brussels and organizing farm-to-table dinners in collaboration with local farmers. Comments on this article are welcome and can be reached at [info@me-nu.org](mailto:info@me-nu.org) [www.me-nu.org](http://www.me-nu.org)*

# How Can Mindful Eating Promote a Sustainable Food System?



**Megrette Fletcher**

*MEd, RD, CDE*

The concept of mindful eating encourages awareness. This awareness can include knowing where the food came from, which actually can be a very complex and confusing process. Where your food comes from is called a “food system,” and it comprises all aspects of food production.

Have you ever wondered what people mean when they say “food production”?

Food, like any business, has many parts. These include how the food is produced or raised, harvested, slaughtered, processed, packed and sold to consumers like you. The distribution of food can be divided into two major systems: global distribution and sustainable/local. As the name indicates, global distribution refers to a system by which foods and products worldwide are obtained. A sustainable/local system indicates that there are many producers of food that do not have one geographic area.

## What's the Difference?

In general, the globalization of food requires things to be done on a much larger scale. This means that

the industrial food system relies on industrial agriculture. This larger system is very effective at producing a large number of a few products, often at less cost. The disadvantages of this system include decreased variety; poorer food and nutrient quality; more processing; increased packaging; and higher transportation costs. All of these factors decrease the overall

sustainability of global farming.

Local or regional food producers and farmers rely on the community where the food is produced. This smaller geographic area has

many benefits, including fresher foods; greater variety; greater opportunity to support the creation of open space; and lower transportation costs associated with the food.

*Megrette Fletcher is a cofounder of The Center for Mindful Eating. She is a co-author of two books, including Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat with Diabetes with Michelle May, MD, and Discover Mindful Eating: A Resource of Handouts for Health Professionals, with Frederick Burggraf. Megrette is a professional speaker and spokesperson in both the United States and the United Kingdom. She is a dietitian and certified diabetes educator and works in a diabetes clinic.*



## Finding Local Near You?

If you are interested in promoting a sustainable food system, consider these suggestions:

1) Ask the client what her thoughts and beliefs are about sustainability.

- Learn if she is willing to try less-processed foods, which is an important initial step.
- Create food tasting opportunities. For example: cheese food vs. cheese; orange drink vs. orange juice; snack puffs vs. stovetop popcorn.

2) Ask if the client is interested in how the food is grown.

- Create food tasting opportunities. Meet at a farmers' market and offer taste comparisons between locally grown, organic and non-organic foods.
- Allow the client to connect with his own direct experience.

3) Ask if the client is interested in including more sustainable foods in his diet.

- Explore the Internet for local farms, farmers' markets and community-supported agriculture (CSA).
- Explore the ideas, research and consumer information of nonprofits that promote sustainability: slowfood.org, sustainableable.org and blueoceans.org.

# Sustainability:

## *A Comparison of Mindless Food Purchase and Mindless Food Consumption*



**Cheryl Wasserman**

LPC, NCC

Sustainability can be defined as an ability or capacity of something to be maintained or to sustain itself.

Food waste is one of the major problems that society faces when it comes to sustainability. According to [www.sustainabletable.org](http://www.sustainabletable.org), an American website, it is estimated that every year Americans trash 40 percent of their food supply, valued at about \$165 billion. The average American family of four throws away the equivalent of up to \$2,275 annually in food. Just a 15 percent reduction in U.S. food waste would save enough food to feed 25 million Americans annually.

Do you find you are throwing out food from your refrigerator and wondering, "What was I thinking when I purchased all of this?"

There are two sayings that we might consider when we compare the ways we over-purchase food and the ways we overeat. The first is "We eat the way we live." The second is "We bite off more than we can chew."

We are mindless in the way we purchase food much in the same way we are mindless as we eat.

We stuff items into our grocery cart without reflecting on how (or even whether) we will use the food. It just "looks good and we want it" in that moment.

We might also stuff food into our mouths without asking ourselves if our body is really hungry for food. It just "looked good and we wanted it" when we spotted it in the pantry.



Through the use of mindfulness in the contemplation, purchase and eating of food, we stand a better chance of making wise choices for both our Earth and our body.

### Mindful shopping might involve the following:

- Checking the items that we already have in the refrigerator to make good use of them.
- Planning our menus and checking to make sure that we have all the ingredients so we don't end up unable to make what we had planned.
- Finding a balance between waiting too long between trips to the store and stopping every night at the store.

These suggestions aren't new. Included at right is a World War I poster that encouraged people to become more aware of food waste

### Mindful eating might involve the following:

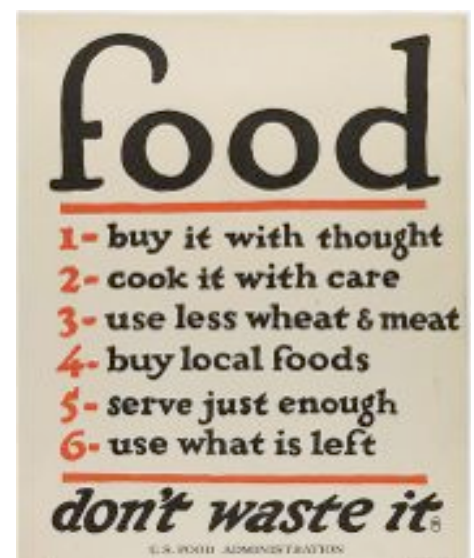
- Pausing before beginning to eat to appreciate the variety of food in front

of you.

- Eating slowly, mindfully noticing the appearance, the subtle tastes, the smells, the texture of the food in your mouth.
- Noticing when your body lets you know that you have had just enough food and then stopping.

Each of us can make small changes that add up to create food sustainability for the beautiful world we share.

*Cheryl Wasserman, LPC, NCC, TCME board member, is the owner of Alliance Therapy Assoc. and Partner of Westport Wellness Group in St. Louis, Mo. She can be reached at [cheryl.wasserman@sbcglobal.net](mailto:cheryl.wasserman@sbcglobal.net).*



This photo encouraged sustainability during World War I as something civilians could do to help the war effort in the United States.

*Courtesy photo: US Food Administration*



# COMMUNITY WISDOM:

We asked our members to reflect on issues of sustainability and mindful eating:

Do you recall a moment when you experienced the beauty and/or the “pain of the Earth” and perhaps, as a result, began to change the way you relate to the earth and all living beings?

“I cannot recall a pinnacle moment. However, simply watching an insect suffer when they have lost a wing can bring you right into the present moment.” ~ *Natalie Murphy, RDN, LD*

“The pain was the realization of how factory-farmed animals suffer horrifically, just so we can enjoy a meal of meat. Since then, I have refused to buy or eat products from businesses that use inhumane practices.” ~ *Barbara McGonigal, DTR*

“About a dozen years ago, a surgery left me unable to walk. I was angry, confused and overwhelmed. One day, I crawled out to my backyard to lie in the grass and connect. I was aware of such beauty--the warmth, the grass, the sky, the leaves rustling in the trees. I was aware of my own pain, fear and grief. And as I felt the gentle sensations of the rain, I opened to a sense of joy and abundance and connection to something larger. It was at that time that I first understood that peace came from connection to my life and the beauty around me, and it did not depend on my circumstances.” ~ *Cheryl Harris, MPH, RD*

As you practice “wakeful presence” and take time to see and experience Mother Earth and all living beings through your senses and with “love eyes,” what are some ways that you have been able to care for the Earth and its human and nonhuman community differently?

“I call my food “The food of Love.” Love for the Earth, for animals, for myself and others. At every meal I repeat the Five Contemplations from Thich Nhat Hanh.” ~ *Alessandra Pollina*  
*Mindfulness coach*

What are some ways that you have been able to help your clients practice “wakeful presence” and mindful care of themselves, the Earth, and all living beings?

“By being present during my sessions I allow my clients to explore their own space in life. I don’t “feed” them ideas; mostly I share information, tips and techniques and accept them exactly as they are; that is what brings out their own motivation for change.” ~ *Kati Konersman, MS*

“Focus on HOW we eat, rather than what we eat. Being a reformed vegetarian, I know how tiresome and frustrating discussions/debates on sustainable food choices can be, and I think it’s a deeply personal decision.” ~ *Corina Brdar, M.Sc.*

“Suggest they slow down and reflect on the ways in which they live which transfers over to the ways they eat. In other words, do they live fast paced? Are they disorganized or well planned?” ~ *Carla, CINC, CEC, CFSP*

## Five Contemplations

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

1. This food is a gift of the earth, the sky, numerous living beings, and much hard and loving work.
2. May we eat with mindfulness and gratitude so as to be worthy to receive this food.
3. May we recognize and transform unwholesome mental formations, especially our greed and learn to eat with moderation.
4. May we keep our compassion alive by eating in such a way that reduces the suffering of living beings, stops contributing to climate change, and heals and preserves our precious planet.
5. We accept this food so that we may nurture our brotherhood and sisterhood, build our Sangha, and nourish our ideal of serving all living beings.



**Be the first to know about our teleconferences, mindful eating trainings, and other events!**

Visit our website at: [thecenterformindfuleating.org/upcoming](http://thecenterformindfuleating.org/upcoming)

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[thecenterformindfuleating.org/join-us](http://thecenterformindfuleating.org/join-us)