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Duram serving on food and farm task force

[By Andrea Hahn](#)

CARBONDALE, Ill. — When Leslie Duram, chair of the Geography and Environmental Resources department at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, urges people to eat local foods, she doesn't just mean patronize your local restaurant.

She means eat food grown here in this state. A simple prospect in Illinois, known nation-wide as an agricultural state, it would seem. On the contrary, says Duram. Illinoisans import more than 90 percent of their food, from an average of 1,500 miles away.

Duram is part of the handpicked Local and Organic Food and Farm Task Force, a group appointed by Gov. Rod Blagojevich earlier this year and mandated by the Illinois Food, Farms and Jobs Act. The task force's charge is to make policy and funding recommendations for expanding and supporting a state local and organic food system, and for identifying obstacles to an increase in locally grown and organic food production. The task force is to present its recommendations to the Illinois General Assembly on Sept. 1.

"It's an amazing group of people from all over the state," Duram said, adding that the 31 task force members are volunteering their time. Other Southern Illinois residents on the task force include Chuck Paprocki, manager of Dayempur Farm near Cobden, and Tom Grant, the city of Carbondale's building and neighborhood services manager.

Duram said the push to get more Illinois agricultural products on more Illinois tables may especially benefit Southern Illinois, where farm fields are often smaller than the huge spreads in the central part of the state, and where hilly countryside in some areas lends itself to agriculture besides the corn and soybean staples for which Illinois is famous.

"People might not think about where their food comes from," Duram said. "But at a time when our small farmers are going out of business and unemployment is growing – and we are losing \$47 billion a year statewide by importing food – it is time for action."

The task force committees, addressing such issues as education, productivity, farming interests and consumer information, are going on the road with listening sessions as they harvest information about what people really think about their food and food safety and the feasibility of switching a small farm from cash crops to produce or even livestock.

"We need to build a local food community," she said.

Duram is also chair of the Carbondale elementary school district's School Nutrition Action Committee, a localized effort to get food from the local farm directly into the cafeteria. She is editing the "Encyclopedia of Organic, Sustainable and Local Food" for Greenwood Press. The book is due in 2009. So far, Duram includes 148 topics. She also wrote the book "Good Growing: Why Organic Farming Works" in 2005. Her research and teaching specialties at SIUC include agricultural geography, organic agriculture and rural land use.

Duram is available at 618/453-6084 or at duram@siu.edu to answer questions about the Local and Organic Food and Farm Task Force, or related topics.

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