

Imported food's green toll

Sunday Herald Sun (Melbourne, Australia) - Sunday, January 25, 2009

Author: ELENI HALE and MITCHELL TOY

DOZENS of common grocery items are travelling tens of thousands of kilometres and generating hundreds of kilograms of carbon to get on to Melbourne supermarket shelves.

Oranges from California, garlic from China, kiwi fruit from Italy and fish from Vietnam were among foods bought during a Sunday Herald Sun survey this week.

The basket of 17 imported foods travelled a total of 190,144km.

Their transport across the globe created more than 200kg of CO₂ -- the equivalent of driving from Melbourne to Adelaide in a medium sized car.

The carbon figure relates to air transport and does not include road travel or production practices that would increase the CO₂ count.

Experts said food miles were clocking up unnecessarily.

Carbon Reduction Institute environmental director Gavin Pereira said the impact of excessive food transport would be felt by future generations, left to cope with climate change, extreme weather and food shortages.

"People should avoid food that has been flown in. This typically includes expensive, out of season produce with low shelf life," he said.

"We can ease the burden on future generations today by eating local and seasonal produce."

Slow Foods Victoria spokeswoman Kelly Donati said consumers needed to be conscious of the carbon footprint of the food they eat, in the same way they now regarded water.

"Water used to be viewed as an endless resource, but now we know it's not the case. We have to start thinking the same way about carbon emissions," she said.

People needed to get used to less choice at the supermarket.

"I've seen people having a tantrum because they can't get tomatoes in the middle of winter, it's insane," Ms Donati said.

"People no longer know what is in season, we've lost touch with our food."

BASKET OF IMPORTED FOOD

One kilogram of the following products travelling from the country of origin to Melbourne by air freight in food miles:

COCONUT

Samoa

4994 kms

3.4 kg CO₂

LEMONS

USA

12,762 kms

8.7 kg CO₂

GRAPEFRUIT

USA

12,762 kms

8.7 kg CO2

BLUEBERRIES

NZ

2515 kms

1.7 kg CO2

SHALLOTS

NZ

2515 kms

1.7 kg CO2

GARLIC

China

9057 kms

6.2 kg CO2

PRAWN CUTLETS

Thailand

7499 kms

5 kg CO2

DARKBREAD

Germany

16,285 kms

11.1 kg CO2

GARLIC

Spain

17,334 kms

11.8 kg CO2

BASA FISH FILLET

Vietnam

7216 kms

4.9 kg CO2

BARRAMUNDI FILLET

Taiwan

7236 kms

4.9 kg CO2

FETA CHEESE

Bulgaria

15,000 kms

10.3 kg CO2

OLIVES

Spain

17,334 kms

11.8 kg CO2

PISTACHIO NUTS

USA

12,762 kms

8.7 kg CO2

BISCUITS

Germany

16,285 kms

11.1 kg CO2

KIWI FRUIT

Italy

15,971 kms

10.9 kg CO2

ORANGES

USA

12,762 kms

8.7 kg CO2

Total distance: 190,144 kilometres - total carbon footprint: 209.3 kg CO2

One kilogram of the following products travelling from the country of origin to Melbourne by air freight in food miles:

Edition: 1 - FIRST

Section: NEWS

Page: 041

Record Number: SHS_T-20090125-1-041-316739

Copyright, 2009, Nationwide News Pty Limited