

# What food says about class society in the U.S.

By Lisa Miller, Newsweek

For breakfast, I usually have a cappuccino–espresso made in an Alessi pot and mixed with organic milk, which has been gently heated and hand-fluffed by my husband. I eat two slices of imported cheese–Dutch Parrano, the label says, “the hippest cheese in New York” (no joke)–on homemade bread with butter. I am what you might call a food snob. My nutritionist neighbor drinks a protein shake while her 5-year-old son eats quinoa porridge sweetened with applesauce and laced with kale flakes. She is what you might call a health nut. On a recent morning, my neighbor’s friend Alexandra Ferguson sipped politically correct Nicaraguan coffee in her comfy kitchen while her two young boys chose from among an assortment of organic cereals. As we sat, the six chickens Ferguson and her husband, Dave, keep for eggs in a backyard coop peered indoors from the stoop. The Fergusons are known as locavores.



Alexandra says she spends hours each day thinking about, shopping for, and preparing food. She is a disciple of Michael Pollan, whose 2006 book *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* made the locavore movement a national phenomenon, and believes that eating organically and locally contributes not only to the health of her family but to the existential happiness of farm animals and farmers–and, indeed, to the survival of the planet. “Michael Pollan is my new hero, next to Jimmy Carter,” she told me. In some neighborhoods, a lawyer who raises chickens in her backyard might be considered eccentric, but we live in Park Slope, Brooklyn, a community that accommodates and celebrates every kind of foodie. Whether you believe in eating for pleasure, for health, for justice, or for some idealized

vision of family life, you will find neighbors who reflect your food values. In Park Slope, the contents of a child's lunchbox can be fodder for a 20-minute conversation.

Over coffee, I cautiously raise a subject that has concerned me of late: less than five miles away, some children don't have enough to eat; others exist almost exclusively on junk food. Alexandra concedes that her approach is probably out of reach for those people. Though they are not wealthy by Park Slope standards—Alexandra works part time and Dave is employed by the city—the Fergusons spend approximately 20 percent of their income, or \$1,000 a month, on food. The average American spends 13 percent, including restaurants and takeout.

And so the conversation turns to the difficulty of sharing their interpretation of the Pollan doctrine with the uninitiated. When they visit Dave's family in Tennessee, tensions erupt over food choices. One time, Alexandra remembers, she irked her mother-in-law by purchasing a bag of organic apples, even though her mother-in-law had already bought the nonorganic kind at the grocery store. The old apples were perfectly good, her mother-in-law said. Why waste money—and apples?

**Read the whole story**