How far do your fruit and vegetables travel?

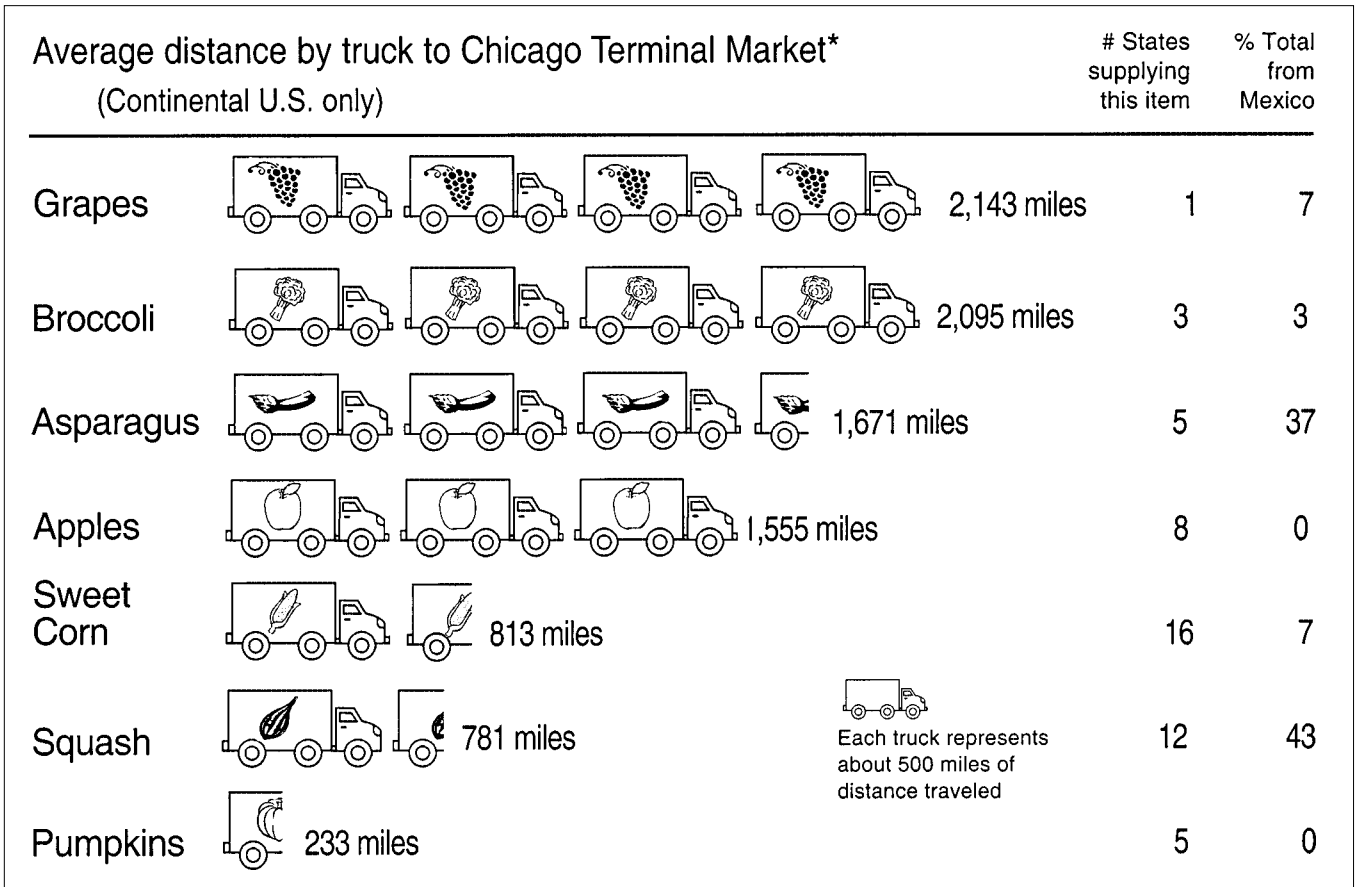
The fresh fruits and vegetables you buy at the grocery store probably have logged quite a few miles since they left the farm, but some items spend far less time on the road than others. That's what Leopold Center marketing and food systems coordinator Rich Pirog and ISU student Tim Van Pelt found when the two dug deeper into data they collected for the "Food, Fuel, and Freeways" report issued by the Leopold Center in June 2001.

More than one-third of the asparagus, cucumbers, eggplant, squash and tomatoes was imported from Mexico.

Pirog and Van Pelt examined 1998 data (the last year data were collected) for 30 different fresh produce items arriving by truck at the Chicago Terminal Market from across the continental United States and Mexico. They calculated a weighted average source distance that produce traveled from where it was grown to reach the Chicago market (using a formula representing both distance and weight of load transported). They found that only pumpkins and mushrooms traveled less than 500 miles to reach the Chicago market, while six fruits and vegetables (broccoli, cauliflower, table grapes, green peas, spinach and lettuce) traveled more than 2,000 miles to reach their destination. Their figures include only distance to the Chicago Terminal; distances to retail outlets are in addition to these estimates.

Their study also showed that cabbage, cucumbers, onions, sweet corn and tomatoes originated from 15 or more states, while green peas and table grapes came from only one state (California). Mexico was a source of 21 of the 30 produce items investigated, with more than one-third of the asparagus, cucumber, eggplant, squash and tomato arrivals originating from Mexico.

For more information on how far food travels, check out the report, "Food, Fuel, and Freeways," at the Leopold Center's web site, http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/teams/localfoods.html, or ask for a copy from the Leopold Center office, (515) 294-3711, or email: leocenter@iastate.edu.



* Information for this chart is based on the weighted average source distance, a single distance figure that combines information on distances from production source to consumption or purchase endpoint. For these calculations, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service arrival data for 1998 were used to identify production origin (state or country). Distances from production origin to Chicago were estimated by using a city located in the center of each state as the production origin, and then calculating a one-way road distance to Chicago using the Internet site Mapquest (mapquest.com). Estimations do not include distance from the Chicago Terminal Market to point of retail sale.

Graphic design by Matt Miller

Source: Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

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Weighted average source distance* (WASD) estimations for produce arriving by truck at the Chicago Terminal Market - 1998

Fresh produce type	Distance by truck Continental U.S. only* (miles)	Number of states supplying	% Total originating from Mexico
Apples	1,555	8	0
Asparagus	1,671	5	37
Beans	766	11	10
Blueberries	675	6	0
Broccoli	2,095	3	3
Cabbage	754	17	< 1
Carrots	1,774	6	3
Cauliflower	2,118	3	2
Celery	1,788	4	3
Sweet Corn	813	16	7
Cucumbers	731	17	36
Eggplant	861	8	36
Grapes (table)	2,143	1	7
Greens	889	11	2
Lettuce (iceberg)	2,040	7	0
Lettuce (Romaine)	2,055	6	0
Mushrooms	381	4	0
Onions (dry)	1,675	15	10
Peaches	1,674	8	2
Pears	1,997	4	0
Peas (green)	2,102	1	30
Peppers (bell)	1,261	12	27
Potatoes (table)	1,239	14	0
Pumpkins	233	5	0
Spinach	2,086	6	< 1
Squash	781	12	43
Strawberries	1,944	2	15
Sweet Potatoes	1,093	4	0
Tomatoes	1,369	18	34
Watermelons	791	14	2

* The weighted average source distance is a single distance figure that combines information on distances from production source to consumption or purchase endpoint. For these calculations, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service arrival data for 1998 were used to identify production origin (state or country). Distances from production origin to Chicago were estimated by using a city located in the center of each state as the production origin, and then calculating a one-way road distance to Chicago using the Internet site Mapquest (mapquest.com). Estimations do not include distance from the Chicago Terminal Market to point of retail sale.

Source: Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Rich Pirog and Tim Van Pelt, 2002