

## CHAPTER ONE

# Making a Difference

**H**ow many times do you wind up at the end of a day feeling burned out? Wishing someone else, for once, could plan, shop, and cook? How often have you drawn a blank when trying to figure out what on earth to have for lunch, never mind what you're going to cook for dinner? If you're time challenged and living on a tight budget, like many women, you've probably become bored and totally disillusioned with food, diets, and cooking. You know you should be preparing healthier meals, but what exactly does that mean? And how can you fit it into your already frazzled day? Many of us would love to be the perfect nontoxic mom/girlfriend with a washboard tummy and a gourmet organic dinner waiting, but reality hits. We're aching to do the right thing for ourselves and our planet, but how exactly do we go about this?

Although I try my best to lead a Gorgeously Green life, it's easy to become stressed, tired, and frustrated. There are days when I wind up galloping through my day, grabbing sugar-laden snacks, barely chewing my food, desperate to get the next thing ticked off my to-do list. I realize that on these rushed days, I'm only half living my life because I'm missing the very tastes and textures, the details that should be bringing me joy. It's become my passion and mission to change this, because ultimately I always want my eating choices to be the best they can be. I also want to be bursting with sparkling energy. I want to celebrate my love of great food with every mouthful I take. Food is the source of life, and yet, for the most part, we have totally lost that connection. Zipping through the grocery store, throwing garish convenience packets into our cart, has become a deadening experience. Not to mention our confusion about what we should and shouldn't be eating and, most notably, what, oh horror of horrors, will make us chubby. The irony is that, in our attempt to do the right thing, we are unwittingly eating the very foods that are making us fat, tired, and sick.

Unless the food you buy is minimally processed and packaged, unless it's locally produced and organic—in short, unless it's Gorgeously Green—it's likely to be lacking in vitamins and loaded with toxins that could inhibit metabolism and lead to obesity. Convenience food might taste good for a few seconds, but the price we have to pay in terms of feeling worn-out, sluggish, and empty is just not worth it. Low-quality food is overstressing the planet and making it dangerously sick, too: Millions of pounds of pesticides and herbicides leach into our soil and dwindling clean water supplies, and our landfills are maxed out with obscene amounts of unnecessary food packaging. What we do to the planet, we do to ourselves, and vice versa. It's high time that we put our health first so that we can heal our worn-out bodies and our depleted planet. Now is the moment for change, and I have a great deal of hope that we can, one day at a time, take small steps to bring our health, energy, and even our skinny jeans back, while helping to make this planet habitable for our children's children. How we eat affects every day of our life and is the legacy we leave behind.

The other day, I was compelled to slow down as I found myself in the ramshackle kitchen of Bill Spencer on his organic farm in San Luis Obispo, California. I had dropped in on him, unannounced, as I had heard that he grew the most delicious heirloom tomatoes on earth. Bill was out on his tractor but assured me that he could chat when he was done with the field if I didn't mind watching him cook, for it was baking day. I stood waiting in his sunny living room, looking out onto grapevines, olive trees, and apple orchards beyond. Time suddenly stood still, and all I could hear were the baby lambs bleating in his front yard and the woodpeckers stashing acorns in the massive oak tree outside. Later, as Bill and I chatted, the aroma of his sourdough loaf, baking in the tiny oven, wafted over us, cozy and healing. We later ate it, still warm and slathered in soft, yellow butter. He handed me a slice of his award-winning Golden Girl tomato.

I savored each mouthful— it would have been rude not to, for each bite brought different subtle tastes of sweet summer bliss. I know that I can't have a Farmer Bill experience very often in my crazy, challenged- mommy lifestyle, but I do acknowledge that I have to slow down more often. Part of the problem is that eating low- quality food makes us want to rush. I sat down to eat a salad at the airport recently, and as much as I tried, I couldn't even nibble at the thick, cold slab of pale tomato perched atop a chunk of uninviting iceberg lettuce. No wonder people wolf this sort of thing down, I thought, as I guiltily shoved the plastic container into the trash. I am fortunate enough to love salads, but I need taste and texture— dark green leaves bursting with nutrition, and sweet, fruity tomatoes drizzled in olive oil and sprinkled with herbs.

Strawberries say it all: When I was young, they were a precious treat that was available only in season and so around for just a couple of months a year. I remember sitting on our doorstep with a bowl of freshly picked berries still warm from the sun. Covered in thick, clotted cream and crunchy brown sugar, each bite was a delectable taste of creamy caramel, followed by thick, juicy sweetness. In comparison, if I bite into a nonorganic, grocery store strawberry in December, its watery texture and bitter tang completely fail to satisfy and leave me craving something sweet. To add insult to injury, those seemingly innocent strawberries are the most heavily sprayed fruit crop on the planet, so I probably got a good dose of pesticide residue. So did the waterways surrounding the fields, and so did everyone drinking water.

## CHAPTER TWO

# Your Eco- Impact

One of the most powerful ways you can make a difference is by changing your diet. This is because the way you eat involves so many different choices that directly affect the health of our planet. What is your eco-impact? Do your daily actions regarding food have a positive or a negative impact on the environment? These are questions I ask myself every day because the most powerful legacy I can leave behind is to have lived with the lightest footprint possible. It's unachievable to be the *perfect* Green Girl; however, I can take simple, powerful steps toward this end: You vote with your dollars, and each day you make hundreds of choices. What to buy?

Where to buy it? How to cook it? The list goes on and on— so why not make every single one of these choices have a positive rather than a negative impact on the environment? The Gorgeously Green Diet takes the middle road. It's all about balance. I'm not advocating that from now on you should shop only at expensive health food stores and buy *everything* organic. On the contrary, this diet is about taking small, everyday steps that make sense for your busy and budget-challenged lives. For many, the closest we'll ever get to an organic farm is a picture in a magazine. We can, however, bring elements of that farm to our own backyards and window boxes by planting heirloom tomatoes and baby salad leaves, even a little olive tree. Moreover, we can allow those glossy pictures to remind us that farming methods still exist that value quality over quantity and health over profit. My mission is to create outrageously delicious food with the freshest ingredients possible at the lowest price. I haven't got time to fiddle around in my kitchen for hours, so part of my mission also is to create meals that are speedy and fun. It can be thrilling to throw together a beautiful, organic soup in twenty minutes (to feed a family of four), rather than to open a couple of cans. The Gorgeously Green Diet is all about creating mouthwatering and inexpensive meals.

Eating the Gorgeously Green way is simply a win/win situation because it's:

Better for your health

Better for your pocketbook

Better for maintaining your ideal weight

Here are just a few ways in which we can lighten our footprint: If every American bought just one minimally packaged item out of every ten food purchases, the waste eliminated from landfills each year would be enough to cover New York City's Central Park with a twenty- sevenfoot-high layer of garbage.

If every American shifted just *one* day per week's food calories from red meat and dairy to chicken, fish, eggs, and vegetables, the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions would be equivalent to 760 miles of driving per year. If they shifted just *one* day a week's food calories from red meat to fruits and veggies, that would be equivalent to 1,160 miles of driving, and if they became vegetarian, the impact of their driving would be entirely negated!

If every American used just one reusable tote for each shopping trip, we could save more than 60,000 trees.

As you can see, small changes can wind up making a big difference. We can all cut out red meat for just one day a week, and by doing so we invest in our health, our planet, and our savings accounts. When hearing these statistics, my sister- in- law, Kay, decided to cut red meat from her diet completely. "If it's that easy to make such a difference," she said, "I'll do it." She's also thrilled that she's cutting her grocery bills down considerably and has even lost weight.

## DIETS

Overwhelmed and confused, many of us have spent years on a feast- or- famine yo- yo diet. We've lost our love of food and our connection to its source. We've unwittingly abused our bodies, our souls, and our planet. Reaching for a zero- fat, zero- carb packet containing a tasteless and empty promise is downright depressing. It's time to get back to savoring the startling crunch of a fresh apple or the unbelievable comfort of a bowl of buttery mashed potatoes. When is the last time you bit into a coffee bean just because, or sank your hand into a bowl of polished, uncooked rice? When is the last time you popped a square of dark, velvety chocolate into your mouth and let it melt, really slowly, as you let your thoughts wander? Foods like this aren't what make us fat. It's how we eat them. This is what is killing us, and the planet.

## REALFOOD

The Gorgeously Green Diet is primarily about rediscovering the joys of eating real, whole foods so you can become the healthiest Green Girl imaginable. I remember standing gossiping over a steaming mug of tea with my great friend Nancy in her impossibly tidy, newly tricked- out kitchen. It's one of those kitchens that boasts a shiny Viking range that (a) you wish you owned and (b) you know has *never* been cooked on. Suddenly her Jessica Alba lookalike teenage daughter, Zoe, rushed in to "grab a bite" before going out for the evening. Her dinner amounted to a "Stab- Stab." I call frozen convenience meals Stab- Stabs because you basically whip it out of the freezer, stab it twice with a fork, and stuff it into the microwave. Standing in her tiny denim shorts and furry sheepskin boots, Zoe cooked her Stab- Stab on high for two minutes, ripped off the plastic cover, and stood eating it with a fork while checking her text messages. Her mother, whom I adore, didn't bat an eyelash. I try not to judge, because before I had my daughter Lola, I was all about "I'll never let my baby eat sugar or have plastic toys, etc.," and then after, cut to enough sugar on a weekend to make Willy Wonka's hair stand on end. However, I did watch with horror while a teenager, whose body is still critically developing, was not even eating real food. The Stab- Stab in question was a diet mac and cheese. Through my research, I know the brand well and shudder to think what is going into her system: genetically modified wheat, hormone- riddled milk and cheese, and a bunch of chemicals and preservatives. I don't call that real food. It's an imitation of real food that could wind up making this beautiful girl unhappy and obese in years to come if she eats enough of it. This kind of food is also catastrophic for the environment: The pesticides and herbicides that are typically used to grow the wheat devastate the soil and water.

Combined with the packaging, they use an enormous amount of polluting petrochemicals and energy. I'm sure if this highly intelligent girl really understood the eco- impact of that one seemingly innocent meal, she'd change her ways pretty fast. Convenience food is where the food industry makes all of its money. It's the one area where they can keep marking up the price and lowering the quality. You are paying primarily for the packaging and advertising: Almost a quarter of every food dollar you spend goes to marketing. Yes— you're paying for commercials that encourage you and your kids to eat extremely bad- quality food. Another quarter of every food dollar you spend goes on that extremely difficult- to- open package. If you care about the planet at all, which I assume you do because you are reading this book, the packaging that you eventually managed to rip off is winging its way to an overstuffed landfill as you read.

The big food companies also know our every move. They study our lifestyles down to the exact number of minutes we spend in our kitchens on a daily basis. They rub their hands together with glee as they know that the average time spent preparing food in a kitchen is soon to be as little as five minutes. That's a few more Caribbean vacations for them, because we'll need more and more fake food. Thrilled, they can go back to their laboratories and dream up the next vitamin/probiotic infused, low- fat Pop-Tart that cooks in just fifteen seconds. Maybe by then we'll have a micro wave/computer/iPhone gadget so we can check our messages while the tart gets blasted— why not save fifteen precious seconds if we can? I resolutely refuse to become one of those food company "statistics"— and I encourage you to do the same. Let's outwit them. Let's get back into our kitchens and start preparing the sort of food we dream about. It's so much easier than you think.

## POTS OF GOLD

The other industry that is making a mockery of us is the diet food/supplement industry.

These clever guys know that we all want to get thin without doing the obvious: eating less and exercising more. They know that we are looking for an easier, softer way. They know we want a miracle pill or food that will make us shrink down like Alice in Wonderland without changing one of our miserable habits. They also know that we'll pay through the roof for this miracle cure. We give these dudes our money and our power and it never, ever works.

Evolution has programmed us to eat until we are beyond full, because in the days of scarcity when our ancestors were running around in fur skirts, hunting for berries and roots, calories were the thing. You had to find your sources of energy or your muscles would stop functioning and you'd basically drop dead. In times of abundance, when they were able to take down a huge hairy boar, for instance, their bodies evolved to eat and store more food than they needed so that they'd survive times of scarcity, which was every other day. They also evolved a liking for sweet and fatty things, since animal fat and sugar provided the most energy for hunting.

Fast- forward to modern times and we still have the same biology as our ancestors,

The same biochemical processes that tell us when and what we need to eat, yet we have completely different lifestyles. Instead of hunting for eight hours a day, we sit at a Desk or computer. Most of us don't know the meaning of scarcity, and we eat chips, sodas, and frozen meals that are packed with more than double the amount of calories of fresh, whole foods. Wow— we are in deep trouble. No wonder 50 percent of America is now grossly overweight and childhood obesity is an epidemic.

### CONVENIENCE/FAST FOODS VERSUS WHOLE/FRESH FOODS

An apple with 1 tablespoon almond butter = 176 calories

A convenience store blueberry muffin = 310 calories

The great news is that we have a choice. We can take back our power from the \$5 billion-a-year diet industry and from the gazillion- dollar- a-year food industry, and we can start making choices that defy our genetics and sedentary lifestyles.

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