

JUGGLING LESSONS

One evening in 2008, I happened to be in a restaurant near Boston, trying to order dinner. As long as I was in New England, I figured that I ought to sample a local specialty. That also would be good for the environment, because big trucks wouldn't have guzzled tons of gas transporting the raw ingredients here from their original locations. But the menu didn't specify which foods were local. The only items I was pretty sure were from Boston were lobster and clams, which I can't eat because I keep semi-kosher, and haddock, which usually is caught by trawling methods that damage the seabed and other species.

Okay, how about a nonlocal but safe type of fish instead? I knew that tilapia, a flakey, white fish, wasn't endangered. It wasn't on the menu, however. Moreover, all the fish dishes were either baked in bread crumbs or fried, which would be fattening.

So forget about fish. Anyway, I really craved a salad. That would be nice and healthful and low-calorie. Another point in salad's favor: it cost about two-thirds the price of the haddock. However, I wanted some protein in my salad. I'm not vegetarian or strictly kosher, so I could have the tossed salad with grilled chicken. But since the menu didn't indicate any particular farming methods—nothing about being organic or free-range—the chicken probably came from some industrial farm in Maryland, where it would have been pumped full of antibiotics and salt, jammed with thirty thousand others into

a dark, dusty shed reeking of their own waste, crippled by inbreeding to produce breasts so unnaturally large that it could barely walk, and finally ferried several hundred miles to Boston. While the salad greens might be healthy for me, the chicken wouldn't be, not for me, the earth, or the chicken itself.

At that point, the wisest thing to eat seemed like the chocolate cake.

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