

# Locally Grown Food





# Shopping at a Farmers Market

Open-air farmers markets are more than just a quaint snapshot of yesteryear. The direct-from-the-farmer freshness these markets offer is growing more popular. Here are some hints for how to get the most out of your farmers market trip.

## BRING CASH

Most of these vendors aren't going to take cards and, if they do, they may choose to increase the cost of their tasty produce.

If you're lucky, the market may provide an ATM or an exchange system for you to use, but don't count on it. Come prepared.

## BRING YOUR OWN BAGS

Shopping locally for food pares your carbon footprint because the food you buy at the market typically isn't shipped a long distance. But you can cut it even more by bringing your own reusable shopping bags for your purchases.

## TRY SOMETHING NEW

The farmers market is where you're likely to find a tasty local honey, an heirloom variety of tomato or a fancy baked good. Don't be afraid to



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ask questions and definitely, definitely branch out. The farmers and vendors there usually eat their own produce, too, and can tell you how best to prepare each of their offerings. Many also won't balk at offering a sample if you ask.

## WALK AROUND FIRST

Before you buy anything, unless you spy something about to run out, make a lap around the market first. Several vendors may offer tomatoes, but maybe you want the heirloom purple variety. Don't just grab the first ones you see; take

a gander at what everyone has.

## PLAN WELL

Farmers markets, like tasty fruits, are usually best first thing in the morning when supplies are bountiful. But be sure you can take your purchases straight home for stor-

age, especially if it's very hot or cold outside.

## BUY IN BULK

Farmers may have their strawberries or beets out in cute containers, but if you've got a recipe or enough storage room, negotiate for a bulk deal.



# How to Start a Farmers Market

So your town or neighborhood doesn't have a farmers market. Well, that's easy to fix. Here are some tips from the University of Florida Extension Service for how to start a farmers market in your community.

## FIND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Get community buy-in from stakeholders like community organizations, churches, government and residents alike. The more people that support your market, the better your chances for success.

## FIND A LOCATION

Find an open location with plenty of parking that's in a central, easily accessed area. Also make a plan for inclement weather and for seating for events.

## FIND YOUR VENDORS

Look for vendors by talking to community organizations, your local extension service or the chamber of commerce.

## BY THE BOOK

Your fledgling organization will need bylaws and rules to govern it as it gets started and,



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hopefully, grows. Turn to other farmers markets or to your extension service for help in coming up with some basic rules and a plan for the future. Next, apply for nonprofit status with the appropriate state

and local agencies.

## FIND A MANAGER

At first, your manager may be a volunteer (or maybe even you), but keep in mind that as your market grows, you may

need a professional manager to take over. Start cultivating those leads and prospects now.

## GET INSURED

Talk to your extension ser-

vice or local insurance professionals about how to insure the market in case of loss, accidental injury or a host of other scenarios. Protect yourself, your organization and your volunteers for liability.





# Seasonal Fruits and Vegetables

Farmers markets are a celebration of the season's bounty. Here's a list of what's typically available when (and therefore probably more inexpensive) from the USDA.

## **SPRING**

Asparagus, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, celery, collard greens, garlic, kale, lemons, lettuce, limes, mushrooms, onions, peas, radishes, rhubarb, spinach, strawberries, Swiss chard, turnips.

## **SUMMER**

Beets, bell peppers, blackberries, blueberries, cantaloupe, cherries, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, green beans, honeydew melon, lima beans, mangoes, okra, peaches, plums, raspberries, summer squash, tomatoes, watermelon, zucchini.

## **FALL**

Apples, beets, bell peppers, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, collard greens, cranberries, ginger, grapes, green beans, kale, lettuce, mushrooms, onions, parsnips, pears, potatoes, pumpkin, radishes, raspberries, rutabagas, spinach, sweet potatoes, Swiss chard, tur-

nips, winter squash.

## **WINTER**

Beets, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, collard greens, grapefruit, kale, leeks, lemons, limes, onions, oranges, parsnips, pears, potatoes, pumpkin, rutabagas, sweet potatoes, Swiss chard, turnips, winter squash.

Remember, much depends on the climate in which you live. States in the deep South can generally manage a crop of fall tomatoes, but not in northern states where winter comes earlier. If you have questions about what's in season, ask your local grocery store's produce manager or your extension service.



# Consider Joining a CSA

Financing is always a problem for farmers. By the very definition of what they do, they start spending on seed and equipment well before they see a profit. And they're just one storm or drought away from losing the whole thing.

## WHAT IS IT?

Shopping at a farmers market helps. But you can also join a CSA, which stands for community supported agriculture. In a CSA, you give the farmer the money upfront in return for a regularly delivered box of their crops.

## WHY DO IT?

It's not just good for the farmer, it's also good for you. CSAs guarantee a steady supply of fresh, local produce delivered straight to you. If you find yourself eating green beans or corn every night, a CSA box is a great way to break out of a rut. Many CSAs will also hand out recipes with their boxes, so you're not stuck with something you can't prepare. It's the ultimate meal delivery service.

## GET YOUR HANDS DIRTY

Some farms may allow you to come work at the farm, or, if you'd rather not, just to visit. You and your family can get to know the farmer that grows



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your food and see the crops in the ground.

## KEEP EXPECTATIONS REASONABLE

You're experiencing the same weather your farmer is. If it hasn't rained in weeks, don't

expect boxes bursting with leafy greens. Some CSA farmers will vary their crops to protect against this, adding honey or eggs to the rotation, but bear in mind that farming is a risky business.

Here are some questions to

ask your CSA farmer from Local Harvest:

- How long have you been farming?
- How long have you been doing a CSA?
- Are items in your boxes grown by other farms?

- What percentage of the food you deliver is grown on your farm?
- How did last season go?
- How many members do you have?
- Can you provide references?





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# Farm-to-Table Food

Another way to support local farmers is by patronizing restaurants that buy their food.

Farm-to-table restaurants typically mean the restaurant buys its ingredients directly from the farmers instead of from a grocer or restaurant supply. As the local food movement has grown in popu-

larity, so have these restaurants.

## HOW DO YOU ORDER?

Farm-to-table menus are typically developed based on what a farmer has available on that day. So while you may have had an excellent slice of pork tenderloin over a winter squash puree last month, that same dish may not be available today. Your server can help you order the best dishes for your taste.

## ASK QUESTIONS

Don't be afraid to ask questions about the food. Local farmers often deliver lesser-known varieties of their produce that you may not have heard of or tried. Also ask which farm certain items came from and, as always, be wary of foods that aren't in season or locally available.

## GROWING GREAT TASTE

Some restaurants take the movement a step farther by

planting and using the fruits of their own gardens. Often, you have only to ask to be whisked outside to view rows of fresh herbs and vegetables that are likely to end up on your plate.

## PRICING

Bear in mind that farm-to-table freshness doesn't come cheap. Because these farmers and chefs generally operate on a smaller scale, the menu prices may be a bit of a shock. But part of farm-to-table dining is

the experience of a locally grown plate.

## FRAUD

Yeah, it happens. Investigations by The Tampa Bay Times and San Diego Magazine both found that food labeled farm-to-table was often just the regular old goods everyone else was using, but with a bigger price tag. Use common sense when ordering and ask lots of questions if you're not sure.



# Pick Your Own Food

Visiting a farm to pick your own produce is a great way to get outside, get some exercise and get close to your food. Here are some tips to make your trip full of fun memories instead of trips to the doctor's office.

## FINDING A FARM

First off, you want to find a farm in your area that allows you to visit and pick produce. Ask your local tourism bureau, chamber of commerce or ag extension for a list. Next, call the farm and make sure their produce is in season and that it's safe to pick. Make sure to ask what you should bring with you, pricing and about parking.

## WHAT TO BRING

In addition to whatever the farmer suggests you bring, PickYourOwn.org suggests packing like you would for a day trip, including snacks, wipes and plenty to drink. Also bring containers for storing your fruit in the field and on the way home. Dress comfortably in close you can get dirty, and make sure to plan for the weather, including sun protection.

## FARM ETIQUETTE

Always follow all the rules



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posted by the farmers. This is their livelihood; it's important to respect their property and their plants. PickYourOwn.org also suggests to be sure of charges for picking, including if there's a minimum quantity

requirement. Remember to put your trash in the trash can or pack it out with you and stay away from tractors and farm equipment. Never step on plants and be careful about stepping across rows.

## STORING YOUR HAUL

When you're planning your trip, remember that your newly picked produce will need to be kept cool and dry. So no stopping by the museum afterwards on a hot day.

Once you get home, it's important to immediately process your fruits and veggies into canned goods or bag them for the freezer. Date all food that will go into long-term storage.



# More than Fruits and Veggies

Eating local is about much more than just eating seasonal fruits and vegetables. You can also eat local meats, eggs, cheese, honey, milk, grains, spices and much more. Here are some ways you can find and incorporate more local proteins into your diet.

## SEASONINGS

You may have a great local spice store that specializes in lots of local flavor. When you visit, don't be afraid to ask questions and experiment. The shopkeeper will usually have some great creative ways to use their wares.

If you're not so fortunate, take a trip to your local quality grocery store. Most of them will have tags for locally produced items. If you have a favorite brand that you don't see on the shelf, ask the manager to stock it for you. You can also look for local marinades and dressings to add a kick to your dishes.

## MEATS

Farmers also bring meats to the table, and, like with fruits and vegetables, may even specialize in heirloom breeds of cows, chicken or lambs to pro-



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duce a unique flavor.

Visit your local butcher or quality grocer and ask for meats from local farmers. If you're in a grocery store, they may tag these or use the name of the farm on the label.

If you're visiting a butcher or the farm itself, you may also be able to invest in an animal, like a cow, and get a reduced price on a bunch of meat when the animal is slaughtered. Just make sure

you have ample room to store it.

## EGGS

There's not much that beats a fresh fried egg. As more and more people raise chickens for their bounty of eggs, more people are selling their extra eggs to the public. Most states don't regulate small-scale yard egg sales, but always check with the local authorities.

The University of Minnesota

offers these tips when you're buying fresh eggs:

- Buy eggs with clean, unbroken or unblemished shells. Remember they may be different colors than you see in the grocery store.

- Look for dry eggs; wet eggs can let bacteria through the shell.

- If you visit the farm, look for clean chicken houses that are dry and free of pests. The food should be stored in a way

that prevents contamination from rats and other disease-carrying animals. The birds should have a perch mounted away from the nests for sleeping.

- Either the farmer or the purchaser (or both) should examine the eggs by looking through them with a bright light. This is called candling. Discard any eggs with odd spots, abnormal shapes, cracks or other irregularities.