

Shopping at the Farmer's Market

What You Need to Know

There are more than 4,000 farmer's markets across the United States and the number is growing. Farmer's markets are growing in popularity as more consumers discover the many benefits and pleasures of shopping for both familiar and unique foods directly from their local farmer.

To find a farmers market in your area, use the clickable map set up by the United States Department of Agriculture at the following website: <http://search.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/>

Some of the benefits include:

PERSONAL HEALTH

- Fruits and vegetables eaten soon after harvest often have higher levels of nutrients because they have not been lost to oxidation or destroyed during long-distance transport at improper temperatures.
- Consumers can buy interesting varieties of fresh fruits and vegetables that might otherwise be damaged during long-distance transport. Greater variety may lead to greater consumption.

COMMUNITY

- Consumers have access to locally grown, farm-fresh produce as well as the opportunity to personally interact with the farmer who grows the produce.
- Farmer's markets bring a sense of community to a village, town or city.
- Supporting and shopping at farmer's markets helps preserve the rural landscape.

SAFETY

- Smaller food production systems, such as small farms, make it easier to troubleshoot, locate and solve problems in the food chain.
- Large food production plants make it difficult to trace and remove contaminated foods, as was the case with the E. coli contaminated pre-cut spinach in September 2006. The plant thought to be responsible washes over 26 million servings of salad every week and is one of two plants in the US to process 75% of pre-cut salads.

EARTH-FRIENDLY: LESS FOOD MILES = LESS POLLUTION

- Local and regional food purchases can reduce carbon emissions since food purchased locally has traveled fewer miles compared to the long distances typical for other produce.
- Over the past few decades, the average distance food travels from farm to supermarket has increased dramatically. According to one source, estimates range from 1,500 to 2,500 miles.

Shopping Tips at the Market

- Shop early for the best selection. The USDA website lists hours of operation, as well as dates and locations of farmers markets in your state.
- Take along some of your own reusable shopping bags.
- Bring cash. Farmers markets do not honor checks or credit cards.
- Be adventurous; don't be afraid to try something new. Ask the farmer or regular shoppers how to prepare and cook it.
- Don't plan your meals ahead of time. Wait until you shop and see what is available.
- Browse around, take your time and have fun!

Food Safety First

There are a few foods you may find at a farmer's market that may pose a risk to certain individuals. While some healthy adults may be able to tolerate some of the high risk foods listed below, infants, children, seniors and adults with a weakened immune system may become seriously ill if they consume even a small amount.

- **Raw milk** is milk that has not been pasteurized. It is unsafe to drink, according to the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Where raw milk is sold legally (in about 25 states), some states require raw milk to carry a warning label stating, "This product has not been pasteurized and may contain harmful bacteria."
- **Raw milk cheese**, also known as *queso fresco*, carries the same danger and warning as raw milk, *unless the cheese has been aged more than 60 days*. The aging process makes it more difficult for microbes to survive, especially in hard cheeses.
- **Unpasteurized juice and cider** are becoming harder to find, but may still turn up at a roadside farm stand or farmer's market. Most juices and cider are flash-pasteurized to preserve the taste while killing bacteria like *E. coli* that may have been present on the skin of the fruit.

Once You Get Home

Keeping Produce Fresher Longer

You may find that produce purchased from a farmer's market stays fresher longer than store-bought produce. That's because it's not unusual for farmers to pick the fruits and vegetables they sell in the market the morning of or day before you buy it. Whether you buy at a farmer's market, green grocer or supermarket, here are some tips to keep produce fresher longer:

- Wash just prior to use.
- Wrap unwashed veggies in a paper towel and wrap loosely in plastic wrap or place in a plastic bag.
- Consider using produce storage bags. They allow air and gas exchange that prevents moisture buildup that speeds spoilage. Produce storage bags are great for lettuce and other leafy greens, as well as herbs and fruits. They can be purchased from natural foods supermarkets or on the Internet.

Wash all produce thoroughly under running water. Scrub root vegetables and thick-skinned fruits and vegetables with a produce brush. You'll often find a large variety of fresh greens and herbs at farmer's markets. They typically require more thorough cleaning at home than greens purchased elsewhere.

How to Clean Greens

Place a large colander into a very large bowl. Fill with cool to cold water. Pull greens apart, if necessary. Break off and discard stems. Place greens into water, swishing them around allowing the water to circulate. Lift the colander out of the water and discard the water. Rinse the dirt out of the bowl. Fill the bowl with cool water again, swish the greens around and repeat the process until there is no dirt left in the bowl.