

QUICK FACTS: AT THE FARMERS MARKET

Farmers markets have grown in popularity in recent years. Having the opportunity to walk through and purchase a delicious array of locally-produced fruits, veggies, and all kinds of other foods is enriching and rewarding. Sadly, many people tend to think that food safety issues only arise in commercially-produced food, and that locally grown fruits and vegetables are completely safe. All produce, whether it's from a garden or a supermarket, needs to be washed and handled safely. The benefits of farmers markets are enhanced when we take care with our food.



Is there a way to tell if vendors practice safe food handling?

- Ask them. And if you don't understand, ask them to explain.
- Practicing personal hygiene and having clean hands and fingernails are good indicators that the vendor cares about their product and customers.
- The cleanliness of the surfaces in their booth and the utensils used in cutting and serving samples are also good indications of food safety practices.
- With ready-to-eat foods:
 - They use gloves, tongs, tissues, or utensils when handling food. Toothpicks or tongs are be used to serve individual samples.
 - They keep hot foods hot (between 140°F or above) and cold foods cold (40°F or colder) or frozen (32°F or below).
 - They follow the two-hour rule: Discarding food left at room temperature after two hours. If it's 90°F or hotter out, discarding food after one hour. Not sure? Just ask!

What actions should I take to ensure I'm being food safe?

- Don't assume that "organic" automatically means "safe." Organic food is produced without pesticides and under other environmental requirements. These have little bearing on food safety.
- Ask if prepared foods (salsa, pickles, jam, BBQ sauces, etc.) require refrigeration or any special handling.
- Open egg cartons to ensure eggs are clean and the shells are not cracked. Ask if eggs are being kept at 45°F while at the farmers market.



QUESTIONS TO KEEP IN MIND

What actions should I take to ensure I'm being food safe? (Continued)

- **Is it pasteurized?** If you're purchasing milk, cheese, yogurt, juices, or ciders this is the key question you need to ask. Pasteurization kills harmful bacteria without reducing the nutritional value. Unpasteurized (or raw) products pose a dangerous risk, especially to those with immature or suppressed immune systems.
- If you're buying meat, poultry, milk, cheese or yogurt, be sure it is kept chilled in a refrigerator or closed cooler filled with ice to keep the temperature sufficiently cold (40°F or below).
- Exposed or unpackaged meat and poultry should not be purchased at the farmer's market.

How do I safely transport my food home?

- Make the farmers market your last stop before going home, especially on hot days. Purchase meats, poultry, milk, cheese or yogurt last.
- Bring your own cooler or insulated bags to transport cold items, separate raw meats and poultry from other food purchases. This will reduce the likelihood of cross-contamination.
- If your bags are reusable, make sure they're clean and sanitized regularly. If you use cloth bags, think about all those times you've put them on the ground and then your countertops. Throw them in the wash and air dry!
- Avoid putting food in the trunk since temperatures can get very high in there.

And once I get home?

- Once perishable food is home, immediately refrigerate or freeze it.
- Always wash produce. But wash your hands first with soap and water.
- Before eating or preparing fruits and vegetables wash them thoroughly under running water. Even if you plan to peel or slice the produce before eating, it is still important to wash it first. Firm produce can be scrubbed with a clean, dedicated produce brush.
- Eat, cook, or refrigerate cut or peeled fruits and vegetables within two hours after preparation.

Some of the suggested benefits of farmers markets include:

Better flavor and more nutritious.

Food grown in your locale may be more flavorful. Crops are picked at the peak of ripeness and are bursting with flavor and, as a general rule, tend to be the most nutrient-packed.

Environmentally friendly.

By purchasing food from local growers, you help maintain farmland in your community and cut down on energy use for food distribution.

Supports your local economy.

Money you spend with farmers in your area stays close to home.

Get to know your growers.

You can ask questions about the food and safety practices on the farm where your food was produced.

