

## Extension Notes

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AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

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### Shop Smart at Your Farmers Market

Farmers markets are flourishing. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, more than 8,000 exist across the country and there are some located in your neck of the woods.

Many of Kentucky's popular "homegrown" offerings are now available as markets around the state have opened for the season. Time spent perusing the booths at your local market is a fun way to spend a morning (or afternoon), and the bonus is flavorful food straight from the garden to the table.

Here are a few tips to help you get the most from your trip to the market.

1. Shop early. First of the season offerings like sweet corn will quickly disappear from market tables. Arrive shortly after the market opens for the best selection.
2. Make friends with farmers. The person selling you produce is likely the person who grew it. Growers are full of information including everything from when the product was picked to the best way to prepare it for the table. This is your opportunity to find out about what you eat, where it comes from and who you are supporting with your purchase.
3. Shop for produce that is in season. Smaller markets offer fruits and vegetables that are ripened on the vine right in your own community or surrounding area. Larger markets might include produce from no more than 100-150 miles away. Climate will determine what is in peak season. Eating in season means eating the best that nature has to offer at any given time. This is the most efficient way to take advantage of the earth's bounty.
4. Learn the difference between heirloom varieties and those mass produced for large markets. The charm of a farmers' market is finding a source for that special tomato your grandmother grew. Heirlooms are meant to be ripened on the vine and your local market is the place to find variety and flavor not available just anywhere.
5. Ask about growing methods. Many small farms employ organic growing methods but are not able to afford the expense of becoming certified under the National Organic Program. An apple grown locally without pesticides may be a better choice than a certified organic one that has traveled across the globe. Keeping pesticides out of our water supply and using sustainable practices that prevent erosion help care for the local environment and ensure the land will be usable in the future.
6. Buy for value but don't quibble over price. Some crops may cost less than their grocery store counterparts but other specialty or hard to find items may cost more due to economies of scale. Often, produce found at your local market has been hand raised with lots of TLC and the difference in flavor and quality should be evident.

7. Take cash and a reusable shopping bag. Some market vendors do accept debit/credit cards but many vendors aren't equipped for electronic transactions. By bringing your own reusable shopping bag, you help eliminate the need for excess plastic which allows for a more organic experience all around.

Remember, locally grown foods are picked at their peak for freshness and flavor. They are full of vitamins and minerals and don't have to travel far from the field to the table. Eating or cooking the foods after they have just been picked allows you to retain those nutrients, too. A visit to your farmers market supports your local farmer, your community and your local economy and provides a flavorful experience at the family dinner table.

The Grayson Farmer's Market is open on Saturdays from 9:00 AM until noon and on Thursdays from 2:00-6:00 PM. The market is located in the shed behind the Extension Office at 94 Fairground Drive. The Olive Hill Farmer's Market is located in the Save-a-Lot parking lot (131 Jessica Lane) and is open on Saturdays and Wednesdays at 8:00 AM and Mondays at 3:00 PM until sell out each day. There will be a pop-up market on the first Tuesday of the month in the Friendship & Chapel House parking lot from 6:00-8:00 PM.

For more information about farmers markets in your area, contact the Carter County Cooperative Extension Service. Educational programs of the Cooperative Extension Service serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expressions, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, or physical or mental disability.

#### **Upcoming Events:**

- **Hike & Learn** – Friday, July 5<sup>th</sup> @ 9:00 AM – Carter Caves State Resort Park Horn Hollow Trail