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News Release

Eating Healthy is Easy When You Shop the Farmers' Market

Even in a drought, summertime brings the promise of locally grown fruits and vegetables. The local Farmers' market opens for business. Roadsides are dotted with colorful stands overflowing with fresh produce. "U-Pick" signs beckon you to come in and try your hand at finding the ripest fruits in the field. My best memories are of family outings when we piled into the car and traveled to the field or orchard to pick buckets full of ripe fruit. One year we picked ninety pounds of Bing cherries. The next week was filled with canning, freezing, making preserves, drying, and eating cherries. We still reminisce about that adventure.

There always seems to be a feeling of excitement at the local Farmers' market. A local band plays music as you exchange pleasantries with the vendors. An Extension Agent may be offering a lecture on growing herbs, a food demonstration or class on food preservation. But most importantly, you know you are purchasing fresh produce if you purchase produce that is locally grown.

There has been a boom in Farmers' markets. The USDA reports an 18 percent increase in Farmers' markets between 2004 and 2006. Is it because there is a greater concern about where our food comes from? According to the Tufts Food Awareness Project, 'the average mouthful of food in the United States travels 1300 miles before it is finally eaten'. Locally grown produce does not travel far before it reaches our table. From a health and nutrition stand point, local produce is usually fresher, without additives, and it is hard to beat the flavor of a piece of fruit that ripens on the vine.

If I shop at the Farmers' market, I tend to plan my meals around the fruits and vegetables rather than the meat. Plant foods do not contain cholesterol and most are low in fat. The 2005 Dietary Guidelines recommend that we limit the intake of animal products especially those that are high in cholesterol and saturated fats. Produce is also loaded with vitamins, minerals, and fiber. It is easier to get your recommended 2 cups of fruit and 2 ½ cups of vegetables a day when you are surrounded by nature's bounty.

What's for dinner? I think I will walk 3 blocks to the Farmers' market and decide what I will be making for dinner tonight. Whatever I decide to make, I know it will taste fresh and be full of healthful nutrients.

If you have questions or would like more information on this topic please contact Cheryl Vasse, Regional Extension Agent-Human Nutrition, Diet and Health with the St. Clair County Extension office at 205-338-9416 or vassecl@auburn.edu .

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