

# Sorting Through the Local Foods Options

HOW DO I KNOW WHAT KINDS OF LOCAL FARM PRODUCTS AND SERVICES ARE RIGHT FOR ME AND MY FAMILY?

## FARM STANDS

For regular shopping, find a nearby stand where you can easily stop on the way home from work. On days when you're at home, try one that's near the lake you're taking the kids swimming in, or on the way home from your friends' house. Some people find it helps to keep an empty, clean cooler in the car to keep food fresh, especially if you're going to pick up cheese, meat, poultry, or milk while you're there.

## FARMERS' MARKETS

Farmers' markets are so well loved, not because you can't get farm products anywhere else, or because of their convenience (imagine a store that's only open four hours a week), but because for millenia humans have gathered in communal places to trade. Market day is a chance to see neighbors, casually meet and talk with farmers, peruse all the choices that day, and find everyday foods and something special. Often there is even music to enjoy!

To make the most of a market, don't be shy about walking around, seeing what there is, and asking questions first. Once you have toured the whole market, come back and select exactly what you want. A cooler may be helpful here, too, especially on hot days or when out for several hours.

## GIFTS

Whether it is Mother's Day, Father's Day, graduation, baby shower, wedding, birthday, or get well present, there is a local farm product that can delight someone. If you like to give gifts that stand out, get something that feeds them twice: once with the gift and once with the story behind it.

## GROCERS

Getting local farm foods at your regular grocery store is by far the simplest way to work it into your busy life. If you haven't tried it yet, just ask the staff/manager/owner what they carry that is grown around here. Try one thing. Next time try another. It's painless and easy.

## PICK-YOUR-OWN

PYO can be a very economical way to get lots of great, fresh produce. Because you are providing the labor to pick it, it is often cheaper. You also get the exhilarating experience of being outdoors, getting a little dirty, and if you're lucky, maybe a wagon ride.

Pick more than you need for eating fresh. Make applesauce, freeze strawberries, make grape jam. Not only do you teach your kids to enjoy being fully human (was there ever a time humans didn't pick berries and fruits?), but you get fresh air, great exercise, laughter with strangers and friends, and the freshest food at the best price.

## RESTAURANTS

The restaurants that are really committed to local farms put the farms right on their menus. That makes it easy for you to try ordering a local dish. But there are lots of others that are dabbling with buying from local farms, uncertain how much their customers care. So ask the waitstaff in any restaurant if they use any local farm ingredients. If they don't know, they'll ask the chef. Then the chef will know you care.

It's easy to find restaurants that use local produce, and even local milk. It's especially exciting when one offers local cheese, poultry, eggs and meat. Ask.

## CSA's: Community Supported Agriculture

CSA's are a great option for some families. [See description of how it works on page 50.] If you mostly stay in the area during May-September for your weekly pick-ups, that's a plus. (If you travel, you can donate your share to a friend or food shelf.)

Also, receiving a CSA is best if you enjoy cooking with "what there is". If you want to follow a pre-arranged weekly menu, and always use a recipe, a CSA might not be best for you. Perhaps you're better off buying exactly what you desire. A CSA share gives you what the farm has produced that week, so it can be a delightful adventure if you enjoy a little surprise with your food.

Finally, please don't worry if you receive more in your share than you use. Make friends with a new neighbor by bringing them some extra tomatoes, drop them by your town's food shelf, or even (gasp!) compost them. Remember: if you didn't buy it from the farmer, it might have sat in the field uneaten, too.

## CATERERS

Whatever event you have coming up, ask the caterer what they can provide that originated on farms here. There may be a price difference, so be sure to ask. Perhaps you can offer slightly smaller servings, to offset the cost. Remember that flowers can be locally grown too.

## FARM RETAIL

Farmers that offer meat, cheese, eggs, milk, or poultry may not have a farm stand for vegetables and fruits. Instead they have "on-farm retail", meaning that the items are stored and the farmer fetches them for you. Usually they are refrigerated items. Don't hesitate to stop

## *Flavors of the Valley*

Be sure to come to our annual **tasting, informational and buying event for locally grown foods. First Tuesday in May, it's a chance to meet dozens of farmers at once, ask your questions, sample their products, and find out where you can buy your favorite items. To get info on it each year, subscribe to "Tidbits" or call us for times and location.**

by a farm that offers on-farm retail. However, keep in mind that the farmer may not be available at all times. For an out-of-the-way trip for you, call ahead.

## FARM STAYS

Farms can be wonderful places to spend a night, a weekend or a week. Some are in quiet, rural settings, offering a peaceful getaway and a chance for kids and adults to enjoy the best of farm life. Others are in town, with convenient locations for day trips.

Having guests? A farm can be a great place to put them up, rather than a cookie-cutter hotel.

Planning a vacation near home this year, to avoid expensive driving and time-consuming plane travel? Consider taking a farm vacation, to a part of the river valley new to you. Let a farm be your week-long home.

## TIDBITS

You can subscribe FOR FREE to our e-mailed local ag bulletin, called "Tidbits". Every two weeks it will tell you what's in season right now, and where and how to get it. We'll also inform you of every farm event we hear about, so you can spend a few hours on a weekend exploring and having fun. Call or email us to sign up. Our contact info is on page 15.