

# Shop Farmers Market

What's your biggest obstacle to healthy eating? Do you think fruit and vegetables are too expensive, or just don't like the way they taste? Academy of Nutrition and Dietetic Spokesperson Joan Salge Blake, MS, RDN, LDN, says your local farmers markets will overcome both complaints with one bite of a tomato.

The best thing about produce from farmers markets says Salge Blake, is that it's grown locally so it can be picked at peak ripeness, transported fewer miles and generally sold at lower prices. She says she once conducted an experiment in which she bought two heads of lettuce at a farmers market near her home in Boston, and then two heads of lettuce at nearby supermarket. "The two heads at the farmers market were half the price and twice as big," she says.

Not only is the food in many instances cheaper at a farmers market, it tastes better too, says Salge Blake. "When it's picked ripe that's when it's at peak freshness, peak flavor and peak nutrients," she says. "We know most Americans are not consuming enough fruits and vegetables, and we know taste is the number one motivator for eating them. We have the best of both worlds [at a farmers market]: We have great price and great taste. It's just a fabulous combination."



## Talk to the Farmer

Farmers markets are wonderful places to find ideal specimens of your favorite summer foods like tomatoes, berries, beets and herbs, but market-goers will find joy in discovering new foods as well. And, according to Salge Blake, when you encounter a new fruit variety or heirloom vegetable you've never seen before, you're in the exact right place to find out more about it — you can ask the farmer who grew it! "These are their babies so they love to tell you all about it," she says. "And they could even tell you how to prepare it, cook it and eat it."

Talking to the farmers is also a great idea if you want to know how your food is grown.

## What's in Season?

To find your local markets and learn what your local farmers are harvesting right now, Salge Blake recommends using websites like [LocalHarvest.org](http://LocalHarvest.org) and the USDA's Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food program. Even experienced farmers market patrons will benefit from these resources "Get on one of these websites and get the alert so you know what's happening in your area," she says.

## How to Shop

While many markets have sellers offering items like free-range eggs, fresh milk, rare cheeses, amazing breads and pastries, local honey, grass-fed beef and fresh-cut flowers, Salge Blake says she always heads straight to the produce. "I am going for taste and for freshness," she says.

For the cunning shopper, there are two strategies to get the best results out of farmers market, states Salge Blake. If you want your pick of the most beautiful, magazine-shoot quality produce imaginable, you'll need to arrive before the crowds. If you want deals, however, go ahead and sleep in. However, if you wait until the end of the day, the tomatoes might not be the prettiest, and there may not be any left."

*Source eatright.org - Reviewed by Sharon Denny, MS, RDN*