

Food Safety and Selection at Farmers' Markets

Shopping at a farmers market is a great way to get locally-grown, fresh fruit, vegetables and other foods for you and your family.

The United States Department of Agriculture estimates over 1,000,000 people visit a farmers' market each week. The average supermarket produce travels about 2,000 miles to its destination, compared to 50 miles for farmers' market produce. That is like traveling from Los Angeles to Chicago.

As these markets have become popular it is important to consider the safety of the foods purchased. Many markets have their own food safety rules and vendors must comply with them as well as any applicable local and state government regulations. There are some basic guidelines that you should follow to insure the farm-fresh food is safe.

- Before and after preparing fresh produce, wash your hands for 20 seconds with warm water and soap.
- Wash fruits and vegetables under running water before eating, cutting or cooking. It is not recommended to use soap or detergent to wash them.
- Even if you plan to peel the produce before eating, it is still important to wash it first. Any bacteria present on the outside of items such as melons and apples can be transferred inside when you cut or peel them.
- Be sure to refrigerate cut or peeled fruits and vegetables within 2 hours after preparation.

Juices and Ciders

For juices and ciders, check to see whether they have been pasteurized to kill harmful bacteria. Pregnant women, children, older adults and people with weakened immune systems should drink only pasteurized or treated juices.

Milk and Cheeses

- Don't buy milk at a farmer's market unless you can confirm that it has been pasteurized. Raw milk can harbor dangerous microorganisms such as Salmonella, E. coli and Listeria that can pose serious health risks to you and your family.
- Pregnant women, older adults and people with weakened immune systems are at higher risk for illness caused by Listeria. One source of bacteria is soft cheese made from unpasteurized milk such as feta, Brie, and blue-veined cheese. Check the label to make sure the milk has been pasteurized or treated.

Eggs

- Make sure eggs are properly chilled at the market. FDA required that untreated shell eggs must be stored and displayed at 45 degrees F.
- Before buying eggs, open the carton and make sure that the eggs are clean and the shells are not cracked.

Meat

- Make sure that the meat is properly chilled at the market. Meat should be kept in closed coolers with adequate amounts of ice to maintain cool temperatures, 41 degrees or below or frozen 0 degrees F.
- Bring an insulated bag or cooler with you to the market to keep meat cool on the way home.
- Make sure to keep meat separate from other purchases, so that the juices from raw meat do not come in contact with other foods.

Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

- Buy the fruits and vegetables that are free of blemishes.
- Keep separate from other food products.
- Different fruits and vegetables require different temperature and humidity levels for proper storage.

Go directly home from the farmer's market. Avoid side trips. Foods will decline in quality and perishable foods such as meats and eggs can pose food safety problems if left in the ca.

Source: USDA: Food Safety and