



## IFAS Extension

Programs Promote Fresh Produce

Tallahassee Democrat

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Farmers' Markets offer a variety of fresh, locally-grown fruits and vegetables. These fruits and veggies provide our plates with rich colors and textures and our bodies with necessary vitamins, minerals, fiber and phytochemicals.

United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) statistics indicate that more than 20,000 farmers use farmers' markets for selling their fresh produce directly to consumers.

Farmers' markets make sense. They offer great prices on fresh produce for everyone and the carbon footprint is reduced. The average supermarket produce travels about 2,000 miles to its destination as compared to about 50 miles for farmers' market produce.

USDA programs offer produce vouchers to qualified participants in Florida and certain other states to insure that all people have resources to buy directly from farmers' markets. These programs are: The Elder Farmers' Market Nutrition Program and the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program.

The Elder Farmers' Market program provides limited resource older adults, age 60 and older, with coupons to be used to purchase locally grown, fresh Florida fruits and vegetables. Similarly, the WIC Farmers' Market program distributes produce vouchers to eligible participants of the Women, Infant & Children program (WIC) so they can make similar purchases.

In Leon County there are three Farmers' Markets that are authorized to accept the special USDA coupons:

**Downtown Farmers' and Produce Market** – Monroe Street at Park Avenue in the Ponce de Leon Park. Open March to November, Saturday, 8:00a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

**The Grower's Market** – 229 Lake Ella Drive. Open all year, Wednesday, 3:00p.m. – dusk.

**Tallahassee Farmers' Market** - 1415 Timberlane Road at Market Square. Open year round Tuesday, Thursday, & Saturday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00p.m.

Farmers frequently sell out before the end of market hours. Plan to arrive early and take time to shop wisely for the best selection of produce. Look for produce that is free from unusual odors, colors and signs of spoilage such as mold. Handle the produce gently to reduce bruising. Bacteria thrive in bruised areas of fruits and vegetables.

Once you've made your purchases, go straight home from the market – avoid side trips. The quality of fruits and vegetables will decline if left sitting in a car.

Wash produce right before you use it, NOT when you bring it home. Fresh produce has a natural protective coating that helps keep in moisture and freshness. Washing produce before storage causes it to spoil faster.

Rinse under clean, running water rubbing briskly using your hands or a clean brush to clean the surface. Dry with a clean cloth or paper towel. Once the protective skin of fruits and vegetables has been cut, bacteria can enter. So make sure to refrigerate cut or peeled fruits and vegetables within two hours.

More than 1,000,000 people visit a farmers' market each week according to USDA. Farmers' markets are great family outings and a perfect place to get a little exercise while purchasing delicious and healthy fresh Florida produce.

Sources:

Amy Peterson, MS, RD, & Alice Henneman, MS, RD, [lancaster.unl.edu/food/farmar.shtml](http://lancaster.unl.edu/food/farmar.shtml)

[WWW.Florida-Agriculture.com/consumers](http://WWW.Florida-Agriculture.com/consumers)

Florida Department of Elder Affairs