

Vouchers are Good at Farmers' Markets

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Leon County's local Farmers' Markets offer a variety of fresh and locally-grown fruits and vegetables. Several United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs provide produce vouchers to qualified participants in an effort to insure that all people have resources to purchase fruit and vegetables directly from farmers' markets.

- The Elder Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (Elder/FMNP) provides limited resource adults ages 60 and older with coupons to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables from approved farmer's markets.
- The Women, Infants & Children's Program Farmers' Market Program (WIC/FMNP) also distributes vouchers to eligible participants of the Women, Infants & Children program so they can make similar purchases from authorized farmers.

Statistics show that only 25% of American adults meet the recommendations for vegetable consumption and only 33% reach this goal for fruit consumption. Children are eating even less from these two very critical food groups.

Consuming more fruits and vegetables makes sense for all of us. Fruits and vegetables provide nutritional health benefits without the fat, sodium and sugar typically found in highly processed foods. In addition, fruits and vegetables are *nutrient dense*; they are *low* in calories and *high* in important key nutrients such as complex carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals and fiber vital for our body's health and maintenance.

Whether you are shopping at a Farmer's Market or the grocery store it is possible to fit vegetables and fruits into any budget. Buying seasonal fresh fruits and vegetables usually costs less and the produce is at its peak of flavor and quality.

However, fruits and vegetables are just as nutritious when purchased and used in other forms such as frozen, canned or dried. Many fruits and vegetables can also be purchased already pre-washed and pre-cut, ready to eat, pureed or as 100% fruit or 100% vegetable juice.

Vegetables and fruits don't just add nutrition to meals. They can also add color, flavor and texture. Explore easy, new and interesting ways to prepare and enjoy old favorites. Try an exotic new fruit or vegetable, like calamondin or radicchio, each week including it in recipes for main or side dishes, desserts and snacks.

The **2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans**, which provides science-based advice on food choices for health, describes a **healthy diet** as *one that emphasizes fruits and vegetables*. The recently introduced MyPlate icon encourages us to take advantage of delicious and nutritious fruits and vegetables by starting with plates half full of produce.

To help you find local Farmers' Markets, know what fruit or vegetable is in season and learn more about nutrition check out the following websites:

A list of Florida Community Farmers' Markets and status of participation in the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) can be found at [florida-agriculture.com/consumers/farmers\\_markets.htm](http://florida-agriculture.com/consumers/farmers_markets.htm)

To see when favorite produce is available fresh see [florida-agriculture.com/pubs/pubform/pdf/Florida Produce Seasonal Availability Chart.pdf](http://florida-agriculture.com/pubs/pubform/pdf/Florida_Produce_Seasonal_Availability_Chart.pdf)

Visit [ChooseMyPlate.gov](http://ChooseMyPlate.gov) and [cnpp.usda.gov/dietaryguidelines.htm](http://cnpp.usda.gov/dietaryguidelines.htm) for more nutritional information.

If you have a question, write to Heidi Copeland, Extension Agent Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Florida/IFAS Extension--Leon County, 615 Paul Russell Road, Tallahassee, FL 32301-7099; or call the Extension Office 487-3006, between 8 a.m. to noon or 1 to 5 p.m. weekdays.

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