

^{UW} Extension News

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Keep food safety in mind when shopping farmers' markets

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(Appleton)— Shopping at the local farmers' market is becoming a habit for growing numbers of Americans. More than one million people purchase goods from their local market each week, supporting 20,000 American farmers in the process, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

One of the major reasons for the growing popularity of farmers' markets is the availability of fresh-from-the-farm produce. While supermarket produce often travels 2,000 miles before it reaches its final destination, farmers' market produce is usually grown no more than 50 miles away.

"But even though farmers' markets can offer food at the peak of freshness, food safety can still be a concern," says University of Wisconsin-Extension Family Living Educator in Outagamie County, Karen Dickrell.

To help protect the health of your family and to enjoy fresh produce at its best, Dickrell recommends keeping the following tips in mind.

- Go home directly from the market or in planning a busy day, make the Farmer's Market your last stop before going home. "Avoid side trips that may cause food to decline in quality," says Dickrell. "Perishable foods like meat and eggs can pose food safety problems if left sitting in your car."
- Different fruits and vegetables require varying temperature and humidity levels for proper storage. Some of the foods that taste best stored at room temperature include melons, onions, potatoes, sweet potatoes, tomatoes and winter squashes. Store them in a clean, dry, well-ventilated place, away from direct sunlight and areas where meat is prepared.
- Ripen some types of produce on the counter and then store it in the refrigerator; nectarines, peaches, pears and plums fall into this category.
- Most other fresh fruits and vegetables keep best stored in a clean refrigerator at a temperature of 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below. Use your refrigerator crisper drawer for whole produce. And store fruits in a separate refrigerator drawer from vegetables. See "Storing Fruits and Vegetables from the Home Garden" for tips on getting the most from harvested produce (<http://learningstore.uwex.edu/pdf/A3823.pdf>).
- Store fruits and vegetables in a bag or covered container and keep them away from raw meats to prevent cross-contamination.
- Wash your hands before working with produce.
- Wash produce thoroughly. Rinse it under clean, running water just before preparing or eating. "Don't use soap or detergent as it can get into produce and make you sick," says Dickrell. Rub firm produce such as potatoes or apples briskly, scrubbing with a clean brush or your hands to clean the surface. For delicate produce such as berries, rinse well and drain. Dry with a clean cloth or paper towel.
- Aim to buy foods you'll eat soon, while they're fresh. Select an amount you can use within a short time.

Take a few simple precautions as you enjoy all the goodness that a Wisconsin farmers' market has to offer! For more information on keeping food safe, contact Karen Dickrell at the Outagamie County Extension office at 3365 W. Brewster Street, Appleton. Phone: 920-832-5121. Web site: www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/outagamie/