

Farmers' Markets – Building Back our Sense of Community

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COVID-19 has clearly indicated the challenges of how unstable our global food system is. The pandemic has disrupted global supply chains, and resulted in border closures, trading regulations and a general increase in food prices. Today, globalization has taken the world by storm, and more now than ever our world has become interconnected in ways we never thought imaginable. One of the main benefits of globalization undoubtedly is the sharing of agriculture and production practice and the efficacy of trading across borders. Although we have become so advanced in society in terms of the international goods and services that we are able to access from supermarkets, it's important to examine the consequences of the kinds of effects that this has on our local producers at home.

As we look to the future, it is critical to determine how our food production and consumption will be maintained in a sustainable way. The pandemic has indicated the call for a more localized, ecological, and resilient food system where the needs and wants of local producers, consumers, land, and ecosystem-services are prioritized ahead of profit. Therefore, when you get a chance to head to your local farmers' market, you are doing much more than just supporting local. You are getting a chance to interact and know your own community. This helps to build the critical 'social capital' we need within our communities to thrive together. With that in mind, one of the biggest questions we can ask ourselves as consumers is: How can we best support our local producers right at home? What are the benefits of shopping at your local farmers' market? Below are just a few of the many reasons to go out and support your local farmers' market when you get the chance.



Supporting Local Communities

First and foremost, supporting your local farmers' markets truly means you are supporting regional producers.

For example, the [St. Norbert Farmers'](#) market located in St. Norbert, Manitoba, is hyper-local. Meaning that everything sold at their market comes from only Manitoba producers. All of their vendors are inspected to verify that they are making, baking and growing their own products.

Unfortunately, like many businesses, farmers' markets were extremely impacted by the pandemic.

Various farmers' markets across Canada have experienced severe financial devastation due to COVID. Many have had to maintain very expensive safety procedures to keep their market up and running. Restrictions imposed because of the pandemic are causing farmers' markets to lose their interesting flair, [said Maxime Gauvin](#), executive director of Really Local Harvest, which operates the Dieppe Market. Farmers' Markets were not considered an essential service by Public Health and were forced to close during the pandemic. Therefore, if you can take the extra time to support your local market, it will help local vendors get back on their feet.

Getting to know your local farmers

There's nothing quite like knowing exactly where your food comes from. When you get the opportunity to speak one-on-one with your local farmer, you can better understand who, where and how the product is made. Buying from a local producer brings clarity. It is an opportunity to interact with the farmers from your region and to ask questions you normally may not be able to ask in your local supermarket. In other words, it brings much needed transparency to the food value chain. It may offer a new sense of perspective, or perhaps offer a better understanding of what sort of sustainable methods each farmer is using to produce their goods.



Fresh and in Season

The proximity of the farms to the market allows the farmers to pick produce at its peak ripeness and sell it immediately to the consumers, usually within a very close radius. This keeps food fresh while protecting it from nutrient loss. This is why a strawberry that's in season tastes better than one you get in the middle of winter here in Canada. Many individuals prefer to buy food locally for these reasons, first in their own neighbourhood and then expanding to the area, province, country, and so on.

To make it easy for consumers to locate local farmers' markets and other sources of fresh, local produce, many provinces have their own programs to support their local producers.

- Manitoba champions their regional producers with '[Love Local Manitoba](#)',
- Saskatchewan encourages local with '[SaskMade](#)'

- Ontario keeps it local with their slogan '[Good things Grow in Ontario](#)'
- Alberta educates consumers with '[Alberta Local Food Week](#)'
- Nova Scotia celebrates with "[Taste of Nova Scotia](#)" and '[Nova Scotia Food](#)'
- Prince Edward Island promotes local treasures with '[Canada's Food Island](#)'
- Newfoundland & Labrador supports local food security with '[NL Food Action](#)'
- British Columbia supports local with '[Buy BC](#)'

Diversification of Food Offerings

Because Canada is such an international melting pot consisting of many cultures and ethnic backgrounds, the diversification of food offerings at farmers' markets have drastically increased over the past years.

[A study of Ontario's Greenbelt](#) surrounding Toronto shows that Canadian agriculture, dominated by generations of European-based farmers who have traditionally passed on their farms to family members, has been changing and opening up new opportunities for others. Canada's shifting ethnic profile has been influencing new ways of food production and markets that offer a wider range of foods.

At the [St. Lawrence Farmers' Market](#) in Toronto, Ontario, you can find many different cultural artisans selling their handmade goods and food. You can find traditional Pashmina shawls, hand-picked, first-cold-pressed, unfiltered olive oil by a Cretian Greek family-owned business as well as many fresh European baked breads and deserts, and so much more.

At the Granville Island Market in Vancouver, you can purchase local indigenous art, glass and metal work, ceramics and pottery and various sculptures and décor. You also have the opportunity to explore and try various speciality foods such as La Tortilleria, serving authentic Mexican dishes and Omi Japan, offering a wide range of Japanese cuisine. When you visit your local farmers' market, you are bound to come across a wide selection of diverse foods and speciality hand crafted goods.

Lowering the Ecological Footprint

It's important to analyze the ecological footprint that our globalized food system has placed on our environment. Do you ever wonder how pineapples, mangos and other tropical fruits make their way onto shelves during a Canadian winter, out of season? Buying local, fresh and in season produce is the best way to lower your ecological footprint.

According to the [David Suzuki Foundation](#), the average meal travels 1,200 kilometres from the farm to plate. Food grown closer to home produces fewer transportation emissions, is fresher and supports local farmers. As the distance food travels decreases, so does the need for processing and refrigeration to reduce spoilage. For example, the fresh produce sold at BC farmers' markets usually travels less than 300km to get to you. Compare this to the average North American meal, which travels almost six times more than the local average to get from field to plate and contains ingredients from five countries in addition to our own.

Visiting your local farmer's market allows you to reduce plastic use by bringing your own reusable produce bags. Producers are also able to reduce the plastic packaging needed to keep food fresh, since the time between harvest and consumption is greatly reduced.

So next time you're in the mood for something local, think of your farmers' market!