

# ISSUES

*In a Nutshell*



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## Ten Good Reasons to Shop at the Farmers Market

1. **Taste Real Flavors:** The fruits and vegetables you buy at the farmers market are the freshest and tastiest available. Fruits are allowed to ripen in the field and brought directly to you - no long-distance shipping, no gassing to simulate the ripening process, no sitting for weeks in storage. This food is as real as it gets - food fresh from the farm.
2. **Enjoy the Season:** The food you buy at the farmers market is seasonal. It is fresh and delicious and reflects the truest flavors. Shopping and cooking from the farmers market helps you to reconnect with the cycles of nature in our region. As you look forward to asparagus in spring, savor sweet corn in summer, or bake pumpkins in autumn, you reconnect with the earth, the weather, and the turning of the year.
3. **Support Family Farmers:** Family farmers are becoming increasingly rare as large agribusiness farms and ranches steadily take over food production in the U.S. Small family farms have a hard time competing in the food marketplace. Buying directly from farmers gives them a better return for their produce and gives them a fighting chance in today's globalized economy.
4. **Protect the Environment:** Food in the U.S. travels an average of 1500 miles to get to your plate. All this shipping uses large amounts of natural resources (especially fossil fuels), contributes greatly to pollution and creates excess trash with extra packaging. Conventional agriculture also uses many more resources than sustainable agriculture and pollutes water, land and air with toxic agricultural by-products. Food at the farmers market is transported shorter distances and grown using methods that minimize the impact on the earth.
5. **Nourish Yourself:** Much food found in grocery stores is highly processed. The fresh produce you do find is often grown using pesticides, hormones, antibiotics, and genetic modification. In many cases it has been irradiated, waxed, or gassed in transit. All of these practices have potentially damaging effects on the health of those who eat these foods. In contrast, most food found at the farmers market is minimally processed, and many of our farmers go to great lengths to grow the most nutritious produce possible by building their soil's fertility and giving their crops the nutrients they need to flourish in the ground and nourish those who eat them.

6. **Discover the Spice of Life: Variety:** At the Farmers Market you find an amazing array of produce that you don't see in your supermarket: red carrots, a rainbow of heirloom tomatoes, white peaches, stinging nettles, green garlic, watermelon radishes, quail eggs, maitake mushrooms, gigante beans, whole pheasants, and much, much more. It is a wonderful opportunity to experience first hand the diversity (and biodiversity) of our planet, both cultivated and wild!
7. **Promote Humane Treatment of Animals:** At the farmers market, you can find meats, cheeses, and eggs from animals that have been raised without hormones or antibiotics, who have grazed on green grass and been fed natural diets, and who have been spared the cramped and unnatural living conditions of so many of their brethren on feedlots.
8. **Know Where Your Food Comes From:** A regular trip to a farmers market is one of the best ways to reconnect with where your food comes from. Farmers themselves sell their produce at the farm stands. Meeting and talking to farmers is a great opportunity to learn more about how food is grown, where it is grown, when it is grown, and why! CUESA's "Meet the Producer" program and our Farmer Profiles that hang at the booths give you even more opportunities to learn about the people who work so hard to bring you the most delicious and nutritious food around.
9. **Learn Cooking Tips, Recipes, and Meal Ideas:** Few grocery store cashiers or produce stockers will give you tips on how to cook the ingredients you buy, but farmers, ranchers, and vendors at the farmers market are often passionate cooks with plenty of free advice about how to cook the foods they are selling. They'll give you ideas for what to have for supper, hand out recipes, and troubleshoot your culinary conundrums. At the Ferry Plaza Farmers Market, you can attend cooking workshops such as Shop with the Chef - a weekly program featuring seasonal ingredients prepared by leading Bay Area chefs - with free recipes and samples!
10. **Connect with Your Community:** Wouldn't you rather stroll amidst outdoor stalls of fresh produce on a sunny day than roll your cart around a grocery store with artificial lights and piped in music? Coming to the Farmers Market makes shopping a pleasure rather than a chore. The Farmers Market is a community gathering place - a place to meet up with your friends, bring your children, or just get a taste of small-town life in the midst of our wonderful big city.

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## How Far Does Your Food Travel to Get to Your Plate?

On the Hawaiian island of Maui is a sugar museum. It is next door to a sugar processing plant, and surrounded by acres of sugarcane growing. The museum tells the story of the history of sugarcane production on the island, and is a fascinating testament to the power of one crop to shape the cultural make-up of a place.

The sugarcane growing on that acreage is processed in the plant across the street, but only to the 'raw sugar' stage. It is then shipped to the C & H Sugar Refinery in Contra Costa County, not far from San Francisco. C & H stands for "California and Hawaii." Here, it is refined into the white sugar that is such a ubiquitous part of our American diet. But that's not the end of its journey: the sugar is then shipped cross-country to New York, where it is packaged into little individual paper packages of sugar to go on tabletops, which are then distributed all across the country, including Hawaii.

So if you drive a mile away from that sugarcane field and sit in a café, the sugar packets on your table have traveled about 10,000 miles: to California, to New York, and back again to Hawaii, instead of the one mile you have. This is not the exception, but rather the rule, in our current food system. Shipping foodstuffs long distances for processing and packaging, importing and exporting foods that don't need to be imported or exported - these are standard practices in the food industry. According to one report, "in 1996, for instance, Britain imported more than 114,000 metric tons of milk. Was this because British dairy farmers did not produce enough milk for the nation's consumers? No, since the UK exported almost the same amount of milk that year, 119,000 tons." Does this make sense? Is it wise?

Nowadays, it is not only tropical foodstuffs such as sugar, coffee, chocolate, tea, and bananas that are shipped long distances to come to our tables, but also fruits and vegetables that once grew locally, in household gardens and on small farms. An apple imported to California from New Zealand is often less expensive than an apple from the historic apple-growing county of Sebastopol, just an hour away from San Francisco. Is it really less expensive in the long run?

It is estimated that the average American meal travels an about 1500 miles to get from farm to plate. Why is this cause for concern? There are many reasons:

- This long-distance, large-scale transportation of food consumes large quantities of fossil fuels. It is estimated that we currently put almost 10 kcal of fossil fuel energy into our food system for every 1 kcal of energy we get as food.
- Transporting food over long distances also generates great quantities of carbon dioxide emissions. Some forms of transport are more polluting than others. Airfreight generates 50 times more CO<sub>2</sub> than sea shipping. But sea shipping is slow, and in our increasing demand for fresh food, food is increasingly being shipped by faster - and more polluting -- means.
- In order to transport food long distances, much of it is picked while still unripe and then gassed to "ripen" it after transport, or it is highly processed in factories using preservatives, irradiation, and other means to keep it stable for transport and sale. Scientists are experimenting with genetic modification to produce longer-lasting, less perishable produce.

Those of us who shop at farmers markets have begun to make the transition to supporting a local food system. At the Ferry Plaza Farmers Market, you are able to buy fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy products, eggs, honey, beans and potatoes that are all grown within a couple of hundred miles of where you live. Living in California, with the Bay Area's Mediterranean climate, the heat of the Central Valley, and the fog of the coast, an amazing array of foods can be grown here. We can eat locally and seasonally with very little sacrifice. Still, some crops simply aren't appropriate for our climate. But we can begin to look at imported foods as things that supplement our local foods, rather than supplant them. We can make a coconut milk curry filled with local seasonal vegetables; we can put local cream into our imported coffee, we can dip local strawberries into melted good quality chocolate from cacao grown in the tropics.

Rebuilding a local food system doesn't mean you never eat anything that has flown overseas, it just means that you start with what is fresh, local and seasonal. Shopping at the farmers market, maintaining a home garden, or participating in a CSA are wonderful ways to support a local food system. At the same time we help build food security for future generations; feed ourselves and our families food that is delicious, fresh, and nutritious; and support small-scale local farmers as they work each day to steward our land.

### Food Mile Comparisons...

A major study called "Food, Fuel, and Freeways" recently put out by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture in Iowa compiled data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to find out how far produce traveled to a Chicago "terminal market" -- where brokers and wholesalers buy produce to sell to grocery stores and restaurants. We compared these figures to our Ferry Plaza Farmers Market to give you an idea of the

difference!

**Terminal Market**

Averages:

Apples: 1,555 miles

Tomatoes: 1,369 miles

Grapes: 2,143 miles

Beans: 766 miles

Peaches: 1,674 miles

Winter Squash: 781 miles

Greens: 889 miles

Lettuce: 2,055 miles

**Ferry Plaza Farmers Market**

Averages:

Apples: 105 miles

Tomatoes: 117 miles

Grapes: 151 miles

Beans: 101 miles

Peaches: 184 miles

Winter Squash: 98 miles

Greens: 99 miles

Lettuce: 102 miles