

## **Buy from local farmers, help your community**

Ever wonder where your produce dollars go when you shop at chain stores? Some of the money stays in the community in the form of wages paid to employees but much of it goes to corporate headquarters many miles from your community. How would you like to keep almost 100% of these dollars locally? You could if you shopped at local farmers markets, roadside stands and directly at the farm.

In today's article, Linda Landrum, UF/IFAS Area Agent with North Florida Research & Education Center - Suwannee Valley, encourages us to buy from local farmers and provides online resources to locate produce in your area.

By buying from local farmers, they in turn spend your dollars with other local businesses contributing to better economic stability within the region. Additionally, if producers continue to be profitable they will keep farming therefore maintaining open space which benefits wildlife, reduces pollution due to less transportation of product and promotes responsible land development. Other benefits to you the consumer might include:

- The freshest produce you can buy as it's usually harvested within 24 hours of it going to your table.
- Better tasting food as it's picked at the peak of flavor to be enjoyed by you.
- Longer lasting produce which has been handled with "tender loving care" by the person who spent months tending it.
- Reconnecting with the seasons as grandma and grandpa did by eating what's in season locally.
- A wider variety of produce including local favorites and heirloom varieties.
- Feeling more comfortable about who and where your food is coming from-your neighbor, the farmer, etc.

To help you know what's in season, check out this new website from the Florida Department of Agriculture at [http://www.florida-agriculture.com/shopping\\_list.htm](http://www.florida-agriculture.com/shopping_list.htm). With your shopping list in hand, seek out a venue where local produce is available. A good place to start is at <http://www.localharvest.org> or [http://www.florida-agriculture.com/consumers/farmers\\_markets.htm](http://www.florida-agriculture.com/consumers/farmers_markets.htm). If you'd like to pick your own product, go to <http://www.pickyourown.org> for a list of u-pick farms in the region. You will enjoy your meal even more by knowing that you helped to support a local farmer and your community.

Larry Williams, UF/IFAS Extension Agent, Okaloosa County, July 21, 2009