

What consumers can do to support local farmers

Farming has never been a vocation for individuals looking for easy work. Farmers typically work long hours, braving the elements regardless of how unpleasant the weather may be.

All that hard work ensures individuals who live in rural, urban and suburban communities have constant, readily available access to healthy foods. Such devotion merits support, and thankfully there are many things consumers can do to show their appreciation for local farmers.

- Buy fresh foods at your local farmers market. Farmers markets are many foodies' favorite places, but they aren't exclusive to individuals with a passion for food. Everyone needs to eat, so why not eat foods grown locally, which are generally more fresh and appetizing than imported



fruits and vegetables sold at chain grocery stores? Even individuals who don't typically eat fresh fruit and vegetables can find something delectable at a local farmers market, where anything from homemade tomato sauces to locally raised fresh beef and pork might be on sale.

- Order directly from local farms. Some farmers have embraced the e-commerce revolution and begun selling the foods they grow to consumers via their own websites. Research local farms

and determine if it's possible to buy directly from them. Farms may offer delivery or pick-up, and consumers can enjoy fresh foods even more knowing that they helped farmers earn higher profits by buying directly from them.

- Check labels before buying in local grocery stores. Packaging labels will indicate where fruits and vegetables came from. When possible, choose items produced by local farmers. This may include fruits, vegetables, meat, pork, or even desserts like pies. Locally

produced foods often taste more fresh than items sent from overseas or distant farms, and consumers will feel better knowing they helped to support local farmers.

- Spread the word. Get the word out after a satisfying experience with local farms and farmers.

Whether it's buying food from farms or taking advantage of family days that let kids enjoy a day on the farm, sharing positive experiences via social media or word-of-mouth can be a great way to inspire your neighbors to support local farmers as well.

Consumers can do much to support hardworking local farmers. In addition to feeling good about supporting their rural neighbors, consumers also might feel good when they sit down and enjoy a meal featuring locally grown, fresh foods.

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Drip irrigation

Drip irrigation methods deliver water to the roots of plants through a series of pipes or tubes. Because water is not being sprayed into the air through sprinklers and other methods, less is lost to evaporation, and less water overall may be needed to provide for crops.

Plasticulture

Plastic seems like it may not have a purpose on the farm, but recycled plastic, which is used in plastic mulch, can help produce plentiful crops with less water. Plastic mulches raise soil temperatures and insulate against evaporation so plants can grow faster and mature

sooner. Invasive weeds also may be less likely to take root in plastic mulch or when crops are grown on black plastic.

Natural pesticides

Farmers can introduce plants that pests tend not to like to reduce reliance on chemical pesticides. For example, interspersing crops

with natural bug repellants, such as basil, lavender and lemongrass, may keep insects at bay. Alliums, chrysanthemums, marigolds, and other flowers planted nearby also may deter bugs.

Green farming is something more agricultural operations may want to adopt.