

Food Safety Tips for Shopping at Your Favorite Farmers Market

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The month of May means it's **nearly** time for America's favorite food lovers' tradition: visiting your local farmers market. In addition to all the invigorating colors, exquisite aromas, strong flavors, and spirit of community, the farmers market is also an opportunity to develop one-on-one relationships with the people who produce your food! Their passion for food can be quite inspiring ...

Stop Foodborne Illness (<http://www.stopfoodborneillness.org>), a national public health organization whose mission is preventing illness and death from foodborne pathogens wants to remind you that no matter where you get your food – by supporting friendly local farmers or by shopping your neighborhood supermarket – food safety is always important.

Food that is fresh is a delicious treat! Organic and sustainable farming doesn't use pesticides, chemicals, hormones and other additives, but it isn't necessarily safer when it comes to foodborne illness – because everything is still grown in the dirt, and handled by humans. Pathogens such as *E. coli*, *Listeria*, and *Salmonella* are found naturally in soil, as well as manure. Which basically means, everything needs to be washed.

Farmers and vendors selling food at the farmers market, as well as consumers/shoppers should understand the necessary steps to reducing the risk of illness from food. “It's a good idea to know the signs of safe food handling when you visit each market vendor,” said Deirdre Schlunegger, CEO of Stop Foodborne Illness. “Knowing your favorite farmers and vendors are using safe food practices, definitely boosts one's confidence in their purchases!”

Most states have passed legislation regulating farmers' markets. For example, in Illinois, most home-canned foods other than jams, jellies and preserves cannot be sold at the farmers market. Typically, farmers markets must be inspected by local health departments who make sure each market meets food safety standards, and most vendors, including those from so-called “cottage industries,” must be licensed to sell their products at farmers markets.

For a list of farmers markets in your area click here: www.ams.usda.gov/local-food-directories/farmersmarkets If you're interested in policies and regulations affecting farmers markets in your state, contact the department of health. For more information: www.stopfoodborneillness.org/awareness/food-safety-by-state/ *The Illinois Farmers Market Food Safety Guide* can be downloaded in [PDF format here](#).

What to look for when it comes to safe food handling

The condition of the vendors' booths and their products can tell you a lot about their safe food practices. Here are some things to look for:

- Clean hands. Dirty fingernails or a filthy apron aren't appetizing. For vendors serving food – are they wearing gloves, and is their hair covered?

- A certification notice. Some vendors will display certificates that show they have been trained in food safety. These are good indicators that their foods are handled properly.
- The carton is clean. When buying eggs, look to see if the carton is clean – inside and out, and make sure the eggs are clean and not cracked. Reused egg cartons are fine, if clean.
- Cold foods are cold. Meats, cheeses and other dairy, and eggs should be kept cold. Salads and cold sandwiches should feel like they're straight from the fridge.
- Meat, poultry and fish are cooked to a safe temperature. The only way to determine a safe temperature for meat, poultry or fish, is by using a cooking thermometer. If you're not sure, ask.
- Hot foods are hot. The "Danger Zone" for food (where bacteria multiply quickly) is between 40°F and 140°F. Cooked foods like soups and burgers should be piping hot.
- Samples are being safely handled. Vendors using gloves, tongs, tissues, or other utensils are doing it right! (They shouldn't be using bare hands.) Are knives, serving utensils, dishes, and service surfaces kept clean? If not, take a pass on these foods.
- Ciders, juices, and dairy products are pasteurized. Since unpasteurized foods are serious sources of foodborne pathogens, shoppers should ask when products, including the samples, are not clearly labeled.

On hot days ...

- Be mindful of jars open for sampling —sauces, salsas, jams, pickles and so on —they should not be out for more than two hours at outside temperature. One hour, if it's over 90°F. Many markets have started offering hand-washing stations with hand sanitizer. We encourage you to use them.
- If you're purchasing perishables like dairy, eggs, or meat bring a cooler or insulated bag with ice to the market, so your newly purchased products can be kept cold for the ride home in the hot car.
- Make the farmers market your final stop before heading home. Your fresh veggies and fruit, and other perishable foods, won't have to sit

long in a hot car, and will make it to the refrigerator that much more quickly.

Want to share this information?

[Download](#) Quick Facts: At the Farmers Market.

[Foodborne illness](#) is no laughing matter; serious cases can have severe and long-lasting consequences. Keep in mind that babies, young children, pregnant women, older adults, and people with compromised immune systems are most vulnerable to serious attacks of foodborne illness.

About Stop Foodborne Illness

Stop Foodborne Illness is a national nonprofit, public health organization dedicated to preventing illness and death from foodborne pathogens by promoting sound food safety policy and best practices, building public awareness, and assisting those impacted by foodborne illness.

For more food safety tips please visit www.Stopfoodborneillness.org/awareness/. If you [think you have been sickened from food](#), contact your local health professional. You may subscribe to receive Stop Foodborne Illness e-Alerts and eNews here: www.Stopfoodborneillness.org/take-action/sign-up-for-e-alerts/.

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For questions and personal assistance, please contact Stanley Rutledge, Community Coordinator, by e-mail [here](#) or by telephone at 773-269-6555 x7.