



MEDIA RELEASE

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
MARKET DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

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LOCAL FARMERS MARKETS A "GROWING" BUSINESS

NASHVILLE, Tenn. - August 2- 8 marks the 10th annual National Farmers Market Week, and Tennessee could easily serve as the heart of the national celebration. There are approximately 84 farmers markets currently in operation across the state with more "sprouting" up all the time.

When the supermarket concept first caught on in the 1930's, consumers got the opportunity to buy nearly every food item needed for the week in a single stop. Traditional farmers markets seemed destined to go the way of ice boxes and crank-start automobiles. Thanks to ever-increasing interest in local, fresh and trackable foods, farmers markets started cranking back up in the last decade, enjoying a major upsurge in popularity.

Revitalized, bustling markets are now more than a mere quick stop to pick up a few ears of corn or a basket of peaches. The current incarnation of farmers markets, filled with seasonal farm products, is now seen as an anticipated activity and enriching experience. This affordable fun feeds not only local bellies but a national nostalgia for simpler times.

Larger farmers markets offer weekend festivals featuring a particular product with activities aimed at pleasing a range of age categories. Depending on the place or the day, a local farmers market may include a quiet tailgate chat with a farmer in overalls about how weather is affecting a crop, or a party atmosphere with farm-related events and music.

Many markets also have farm-direct items beyond produce: jams and jellies, farm-direct meats, eggs, dairy products, honey and sorghum are all typical market fare. Larger markets offer a choice between conventionally or organically grown, and meats raised and produced according to exacting religious requirements, like Hallal lamb and goat.

Whether indoor or outdoor, humble or hip, however, all farmers markets have in common the goal of placing local growers and makers of food in direct contact with the people who eat those products.

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ELLINGTON AGRICULTURAL CENTER
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PickTnProducts.org

Farmers markets give customers the opportunity to meet and get to know the person who provides their food. People who buy straight from the farmer can find out how those products are grown, when they were picked, and the area where the farmer lives.

It's great for the farmers, too, who get to hear from their customers what they're looking for – a particular pepper, a certain heirloom tomato – so they can start growing those items and be even more competitive, more quickly.

Many of those who would like to eat more locally and seasonally are so removed from farm life and local crop seasons that time spent at a farmers market becomes an education about what grows when. Once a customer knows a crop's season – for instance, strawberries in spring, tomatoes in July, sweet potatoes in October – that person will know a container of strawberries in December could not possibly be local.

For a complete listing of Tennessee farmers markets, visit the TDA Market Development Web site at www.picktnproducts.org.

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