

MANAGING IN TOUGH TIMES

FAMILY FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

Planning Your Farmers' Market Shopping List

Summer is prime time for shopping at your local farmers' market. From early May to late October, the farmers' market is a great place to find fresh fruits and vegetables, and shopping locally is a great way to ensure that you are buying the highest quality produce and food products while supporting your community.

Shopping seasonally at your local farmers' market will provide you with the opportunity to cook fruits and vegetables that are at their peak, leaving your recipes bursting with flavor. Additionally, many market vendors enjoy answering questions and providing recommendations about the food that they are selling, which allows you the chance to learn more about the foods that you are consuming.

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Because of the extensive selection of fruits, vegetables, and other local food products at your local farmers' market, it may be tempting to stray from your shopping list. However, planning a shopping list in advance of your shopping trip will help you avoid overbuying and exceeding your food budget. Listed below are several tips for planning your farmers' market shopping list:

- **Know your seasons.** Learn more about your favorite fruits and vegetables before planning a trip to the farmers' market. Doing so can help guarantee that you are eating your favorite local produce when it tastes best, is most readily available, and is least expensive. Also, be sure to learn about the ideal color, size, and texture of the fruits and vegetables that you are planning on purchasing.
- **Do your homework.** Before heading to the farmers' market, look to see if your local market posts a listing earlier in the week about which fruits, vegetables, and local food products will be available. Use listings like these to plan your weekly meals and write your shopping list.
- **Have fun browsing!** When you arrive at the farmers' market with your list in hand, make an initial loop around the vendors to see what is being offered and at what price. Some booths will contain higher quality produce at lower prices.
- **Get to know your local vendors.** As you plan summer shopping trips, get to know the market vendors. They will usually share information about what they are growing and when it will be available.
- **Go early.** If you have a specific list of products that you are hoping to buy, go early. During the hot summer season, many shoppers often go early in the morning when it is cooler outside. You'll find the best selection of produce early in the day.

- **Try something new!** Consider leaving space in your budget and on your shopping list to try something new. Don't be afraid to ask the market vendors for a sample or to ask questions. Market vendors are often excited to share their knowledge, recipes, recommendations, and cooking tips!
- **Be willing to pass up some items on your list.** Avoid buying produce with any signs of bruising, tears, or soft spots. Produce that is overripe will spoil easily and may leave you throwing out food.

Be sure to keep these considerations in mind when planning your trip to the farmers' market. Shopping with a list is a great way to ensure that you will get everything needed for your weekly cooking needs while avoiding overspending. Remember that you will have the largest selection earlier in the day but will likely get the best prices later in the day.

While you are at the farmers' market, start thinking about your future shopping trips. Ask the market vendors about what they plan on selling in the coming weeks so that you can take advantage of the best deals. Before you know it, you will be an expert farmers' market buyer!

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By:

Kristyn Jackson, LMFT, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Family Sciences,
University of Kentucky

Jennifer Hunter, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor / Extension Specialist in Family Financial Management
University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service
(859) 257-3290 / jhunter@uky.edu

Layout by:

Jonathan A. Stanley
Extension Associate
University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service
(859) 257-2097 / jonathan.stanley@uky.edu

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