

4 Reasons Why Farmers' Markets Boost Health, Body and Soul

(DrFrankLipman – Frank Lipman) In the last decade or so, hundreds if not thousands of farmers' markets have opened their gates, creating a thriving alternative to industrially produced food and the impersonal food shopping experience. And while they haven't totally replaced the supermarket, farmers' markets are definitely taking a bite out of the industrial food business by offering an easy way to connect with beautiful, fresh, healthy food – and I couldn't be more delighted.

With access to this healthy shopping option now easier than ever, here are four essential reasons why I believe farmers' markets are fantastic for your body, mind, and spirit – and why everyone should support them.

1. Farmers' Markets Are ... Good for Your Body and the Earth

There's a lot to like about food from the farmers' market. For starters, it's the farms themselves. Most are small, non-industrial, hands-on, often family-run or cooperative operations with close ties to their land. They tend to value and treat their land right, using low-impact, pesticide-free, sustainable farming methods, which are kinder and less poisonous to the soil and the food that's grown in it. The result is produce that's pretty close to organic, minus the official USDA certification.

When these nearly-organic foods arrive at the market, they're fresh and unadulterated, not having been subjected to the

preservative and ripening treatments used on much of the picked-too-early, trucked-in-from-2000-miles-away produce found at a typical supermarket. Even if you don't count the smaller carbon food-print, you can't ignore the fact that the stuff is *fresh*, having been picked at its nutritional peak, just a *few hours* before it's in your hands – making farmers' market produce among the healthiest you can buy.

2. Farmers' Markets Are ... an Excellent Way to Shed Extra Pounds

Granted it won't happen overnight, but buying the majority of your produce, and when possible eggs, meats, and poultry, at the farmers' market will help you drop weight. How? Simply by preventing you from buying cartfuls of health-sucking, weight-boosting processed crap. You'll be choosing from whole, healthy, unprocessed foods – virtually nothing in a box, bag, or can.

You won't fill your car with a trunk-load of added sugars, sodium, chemicals, or preservatives, thoughtfully wrapped in endocrine-disrupting plastic packaging. You'll be buying and eating clean, nutrient-packed foods, and eliminating a vast majority of the processed food ingredients that have been keeping you fat and sick.

3. Farmers' Markets Are ... an Uplifting Sensory Experience, Not a Depressing Chore

For most of us, a trip to the supermarket is anything but enjoyable; it's just one more mind-numbing chore on our never-ending to-do lists. A visit to the farmers' market, however, is an *event* – and an experience that engages the senses. There are vivid colors to excite the eye, produce to sniff and

squeeze for freshness, and at some markets, on-site musicians adding a live soundtrack to the festivities.

There are the wonderful aromas of produce, freshly-picked, presented in the raw, or handmade, baked, churned, cured, or fermented into wonderful, healthful treats for your table, many of which you can ask to sample before you buy. How many supermarkets provide this kind of an experience – and do it all outdoors, no less?

Farmers' markets deliver not only the freshest, most earth-friendly and nutrient-dense options in town, they also connect us with the simple pleasures of discovering, tasting, touching and smelling whole, real foods in an atmosphere that's inviting and exhilarating, not dreary or exhausting.

4. Farmers' Markets Are ... Good-for-the-Soul Social Events

At the supermarket, there's little opportunity for human interaction, and with the rise of self-serve checkout machines, the shopping experience can wind up being an insular, solitary one as you troll the aisles, stuck in your own head. Not so at the farmers' market, which can be a daily or weekly opportunity to connect with your neighbors as well as the real, live people who *grew your food*.

Amazing, isn't it? The guy (or gal) standing behind your food can tell you about their unique growing processes, how the plants were treated along the way, how to store your purchases and even how to cook them when you get home. When's the last time that kind of knowledgeable exchange happened at your local supermarket? My guess would be never.

Another bonus is the easy interaction and natural conviviality between like-minded shoppers, foodies, and farmers, all sharing their knowledge and appreciation of nature's bounty on

offer that week. In our fragmented and disconnected and screen-obsessed lives, I think of farmers' markets as the ultimate antidote. One of my patients describes her local farmers' market as "a cocktail party minus the cocktails." She stocks up on produce, conversation, and social connection every week.

Locate a Local Farmers' Market

So this weekend, instead of trudging off to the so-called "supermarket," head outdoors to the market that really is super for you. To find a farmer's market in your area, check out [Local Harvest's directory](#) of more than 30,000 family farms and farmers markets. Also have a look at the [USDA's database](#) of more than 8,000 farmers' markets – and don't forget to bring your own tote bags to carry home all your purchases!

For more of my favorite healthy food resources – where to find a farmer's market, get wild fish, find grass-fed meat and more, see my post on "[12 Great Food Resources](#)".