

My Friend, the American Farmer

I've spent extensive time over the last five years in Detroit, Michigan, living there for periods, and visiting family. I can safely say, while I love Detroit, it's not for me to call home.

However, despite knowing that I wouldn't live there permanently, there is one place that lives in my heart forever, that I think fondly of every Saturday, and that is the Eastern market farmers market.

The Eastern market, located just outside downtown Detroit, is hands down the greatest farmers market I have ever been to, and while my dad says there are a *few* out there that are better, he's yet to take me to any of them.

The eastern market is my Disneyland. It's one of my most favorite places on earth, and I can't help but feel like all my friends are in the same place every time I visit.

My friends, the American farmers.

It's no secret to most that the American food system is and has been in jeopardy for a long time. If covid taught us anything, it's that our food systems are weak, and any little bump in the road could cause the system to collapse, leaving many without access to the food they need to survive. The solution to this is simple, but not easy. We have to put the power back in the hands of the people, back into the hands of the consumer, and most importantly we have to put the dollar back in the hand of the American farmer.

There is something so unique and special about the relationship one can cultivate with their farmer when they really get to know them. I was pondering this on my very long

drive from Detroit to Atlanta.

I had a trunk full of food. I came back with a $\frac{1}{2}$ bushel of apples, 15 pounds of beef, four dozen eggs, three bags of flour, three different raw cheeses, a bag of locally made granola, and a few other assorted items. I was so excited about this haul and had been waiting until I could get up to Detroit on a Saturday so I could stock up on the things I had been missing.

I bit into an apple that I bought from Travis and was immediately reminded why I love them-and him- so much. These are the best apples I've ever had. They're sweet and tart with a slightly lemon-y taste. They're reminiscent of the sweet tart candy, truly, and they are appropriately named "Ludacrisp". I have never had a better apple, especially not down south.

As I was enjoying this apple I was genuinely overcome with my love and affection for these people that grow and make my food. I began to think about how truly fortunate I was, how truly miraculous it was that I had just had an extensive conversation with my apple guy about his wife and family. His wife was nine months pregnant, due any day, they were having twins, he was so excited, but nervous, like he was for the first baby, but even more so this time. These are their 4th and 5th babies. We had brought him some old children's books the boys were no longer reading, and he was thrilled. We talked about thanksgiving, the magic of the holidays, the excitement of the new babies, how the other children were feeling about the babies, how my travels had been, and anything else we could think of. Then, I bought my half a bushel of apples, and carried on my way. Not to sound dramatic, but I felt like I could taste the love in the apples. How special it was to know that Travis had grown these apples on his family farm, that they were his favorite apples, although sometimes the kids prefer the less tart varieties they grow, how lucky I was to experience this farm to table

moment.

I came on a mission for four things. Beef, apples, cheese, and flour. I walked up to Hyatt farms, so excited to see Denis, and Emma, but mostly excited for the ground beef. Five dollars a pound for the best ground beef you'll ever eat. Sometimes it feels too good to be true. I lived off ground beef and scrambled eggs when I was in Detroit and I had missed it since leaving.

Dennis and I were happy to see each other as we also talked about my travels and where I was headed next. I told him I had traveled specifically to stock up on ground beef. We laughed and chatted for several minutes and I left with a big full of meat to last me the next few months.

I headed to Randy next, our milk guy. He may have been the most excited to see me. He appreciates my affinity for vintage dresses and says that I remind him of the women he knew in the 90's back when we saw more traditional displays of femininity more often. This was a special moment for me, and from then on, he would often compliment whatever vintage dress I had donned that day. He also grows the best flour and cornmeal I've ever had, and sells the greatest raw cheese and milk. His face lit up when I approached, and we, too, talked for several minutes before I stocked up and left.

The meaningfulness of these connections may seem exaggerated, but this is what food is supposed to be. This is what food was for the longest time. It's only recently that we've begun to lose sight of the connection from the farmer to consumer, and even before then we were the farmers ourselves. In a world where we hardly know where our food comes from anymore, to get to have such close personal relationships with my farmers means the world to me, and I share these stories in hopes that you too can build these relationships with your local farmer as well. Become a regular somewhere. Shop local as often as you can. Frequent the local farmers market. Big changes don't

happen overnight. They happen through small changes over time.