



farmers' markets/farm sales



what are they?

They're ways for farmers to sell direct to local people, without having to go through an exploitative supermarket system. This could be via a farmers' market, farm shop or café, a pick-your-own scheme, or even vending machines or honesty boxes. The produce on sale could be fruit, veg, meat, eggs - but also baked goods, pickles, jams, sauces, cheeses, smoked foods, dried meats and fish, cooked dishes etc.

History: local food markets and farm sales go back almost as far as agriculture. All markets were 'farmers' markets' until the advent of corporate supermarkets, and in many parts of the world today, trying to explain farmers' markets or direct sales in terms that depict them as in some way out of the ordinary will confuse the locals, who just call them markets. The global trend is towards corporate dominance of our food supply, which makes the recent counter-trend towards local food and direct sales all the more important. The first of the new wave of farmers' markets in the UK was established in 1997 in Bath, and now there are over 550 farmers' markets in the UK.

Some traders at farmers' markets are not farmers - like bakers, smokers, picklers, jam-makers, cheesemakers, brewers etc., but they should source their ingredients from local farmers.

The National Farmers' Retail and Markets Association (FARMA) is a support organisation for direct farm sales, and they provide a certification scheme for farmers' markets, to ensure that they follow their 10 principles of a real farmers' market:

- **Audited:** markets independently audited to give customers confidence that this is a 'Real Farmers' Market'.
- **Champion the farmers:** customers buy from the people who produced the products on sale.
- **Insured:** all traders and markets have suitable insurance in place to protect customers.
- **Knowledgeable:** those selling know how the food has been produced from seed to plate.
- **Legal:** all traders and markets must follow all relevant EU, UK and local laws and bylaws.
- **Local businesses:** markets recruit stallholders from as close to the market as possible.
- **Locally sourced:** ingredients found as locally as possible to the market and producer.
- **Produced by the seller:** only items produced by the business that is also selling it.
- **Promoted:** the market informs customers as to why this is a 'Real Farmers' Market'.
- **Well managed:** systems in place to ensure that the above principles are enforced at all times.



Farmers' markets are vibrant and colourful additions to local economies.

what are the benefits?

Environmental

- Seasonal, fresh, local food reduces food miles.
- Little or no packaging.
- Less refrigeration.
- Kicks against the intensification of agriculture - helps small, mixed farms, rather than large, monoculture farms, which can utilise animal manure on crops, and don't need to use pesticides, because there's a varied, rotating crop that doesn't allow pests to become established. Organic means that pest predators don't die off.

Social

- Loosens the grip of the corporate sector on our food supply.
- Increases local resilience and food security.
- More jobs: between 1948 and 1989, the UK agricultural labour force declined by 70%, as farms got bigger, more machinery and chemicals were used, and markets became oriented towards the national and international.

Farmers

- farmers keep more of the income generated and are able to escape from exploitative supermarket contracts.
- Less wasted - again, because of supermarkets' preference for perfect-looking fruit and veg.
- Reduced costs - e.g. packaging; no transport costs for farm shops or pick-your-own.
- Opportunity to get feedback from the public.

Consumers

- Better food - fresh, local, seasonal.
- Get to meet local food producers.
- Much more pleasant and interesting experience than supermarket shopping.
- Pick-your-own is cheap, and a nice way to spend an hour or two.



Pick-your-own tends to be cheaper, as you're providing the labour; it's fun for kids, too, and you're absolutely sure that it's fresh and local.

A word about prices. It's unfortunate, but those who want to help create a better world are always charged more than people who don't. Hence flying is cheaper than driving, which is cheaper than taking the train; recycled products are more expensive than non-recycled; organic is more expensive than non-organic, etc. It's equivalent to a tax on doing the right thing. However, research shows that organic meat and poultry is on average 37% more expensive at the supermarket, and vegetables 33% cheaper at farmers' markets. But even when local, sustainable food is more expensive, it's worth a bit extra to do the right thing, isn't it? And you might have had the 'organic food is too expensive' conversation with someone with a plasma TV, satellite subscription and £150 corporate trainers. In the end, it's a question of priorities. Plus, if local food is more expensive, it means more money for local food producers, and your community, which gives more opportunity for people to start other local businesses, one of whom might be you. A rising tide lifts all boats.

what can I do?

Consumers

Find your local farmers' market or direct sales outlet: see our links page, or search online for farmers' markets, farm shops, pick-your-own and the name of your town; then use them. Some are attracted to farmers' markets and direct sales for the novelty value. Better to develop relationships with local food producers and wean ourselves off supermarkets, whose policies damage farmers, the environment and ultimately, society. Local producers need support all the time.

Farmers / smallholders

- Talk to the National Farmers' Retail and Markets Association (FARMA) about selling to the public directly (including about insurance). They can help you set up a shop, cafe, pick-your-own, market stall - whatever works for you.
- Contact your local planning dept. about registration and planning permission for a farm shop. Change of use of a building come under permitted development, but not things like selling processed meats; plus your local building control team to talk about fire safety.
- Talk to your environmental health department about legislation and licensing required for selling direct to the public.
- Contact the Food Standards Agency for advice on food safety, hygiene and labelling, and/or a butchery licence.
- Contact Trading Standards for trades descriptions and weights and measures.

Organise a farmers' market

Don't have a local farmers' market? Join Farma, and they'll help you organise one. For farmers or any interested local people. They also have a certification scheme (see above).

resources

- lowimpact.org/farmers-markets for more information, links & books, including:
- William Hood English, *Farmers' Markets*
- Robinson & Hartenfeld, *the Farmers' Market Book: Growing Food, Cultivating Community*
- farma.org.uk, support, certification, listings
- pickyourownfarms.org.uk, listing of pick-your-own farms in the UK by county



Shop and café selling farm produce at Abbey Home Farm, Gloucestershire.

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