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10 compelling reasons for frequenting farmers' markets

Carol Meyer | Apr. 5, 2011 Eco Catholic

Sipping coffee and leisurely reading the paper are nice, but what?s a Saturday morning without a visit to the local farmers? market? It is THE place to be these days. If you aren?t in the habit of regular shopping at a farmers? market, here?s a reminder of why, as an ecology-minded Catholic, you might want to do so.

1) The locally-grown food has come to your table from probably less than a 50-mile radius. This saves a lot of precious energy normally used to ship grocery-store produce halfway across the country.

2) You are supporting local farmers rather than corporate food conglomerateswho care little for the welfare of the land and greatly for profit at any price. You can feel good knowing you are helping some industrious family stay on their farm and earn a decent living.

3) The food is much healthier, retaining its nutrients since it was picked fresh, so you are nourishing your body as a temple of the Spirit, which enables you to have more energy to work for justice and sustainability.

4) You are buying food that comes without packaging, thus eliminating plastics, cellophane wrapping, Styrofoam cartons, and more. And if you bring a cloth bag and forgo the plastic bags merchants offer, so much the better.

5) If you buy organic, you eliminate all the chemical fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides used liberally and uniformly on the fruits and vegetables of mega-farms. I can?t find any statistics on this, but my guess is that non-organic small farmers use less of these products than their gigantic agricultural counterparts. We had a large vegetable garden on our farm when I was growing up, and knowing nothing about organic in those days, my parents sometimes used products to kill bugs, but it was very seldom. There simply was no need. The soil was not depleted like it is on corporate farms. Good growing practices kept the need for toxic chemicals at a minimum. I suspect it is true for the farmers that proudly present their wares at the local markets.

6) You can talk to the growers and get to know them and ask them questions about their farm and produce. Most farmers welcome visits to their farm. You can be assured that you are not contributing to exploitation of either the land or people. When you buy in a grocery store, however, you know virtually nothing about the ethics of the food companies you are supporting with your dollars.

7) Sometimes you can get great bargains, especially if you buy in volume or are willing to take seconds. I always get a 30-pound box of unwashed sweet potatoes in the fall for about $5-10, store them in my basement where they will keep almost indefinitely, and have delicious, inexpensive eating for months to come. I get boxes of less-than-perfect peaches for a fourth of the price and freeze them for later use.

8) At least in the bigger cities, some of the vendors are immigrant farmers whose main income is derived from market sales. By buying their produce, you enable them to gain a livelihood from the only occupation they have ever known.

9) You are supporting local commerce and ingenuity by buying at farmers? markets. The ordinary person can sell their flowers, homemade soap, flavored pasta, baked goods and who knows what else. It?s the American way, it?s decentralized, it?s democratic, it?s small, and it?s good.

10) Markets are fun and build community. You run into people you know. The whole family can participate. Often there?s music by some local band or another. You can be out in the fresh air AND still have your coffee and maybe a fresh Amish pastry. So what?s not to love about farmers? markets?

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