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Eat Right ... From the Farmers Market

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The theme for this year's National Nutrition Month (March) is "Eat Right..." So I would like to discuss eating right by eating more locally-grown foods from farmer's markets. Ever think about where your food is really coming from? Want a different shopping experience outside the grocery store? Could you be doing a little more for your health, your community, or the environment? If you answered yes to any of these questions, then buying foods locally at a farmers market might be a great option for you!

Farmers markets are an excellent place to socialize, learn about new foods, and even enjoy some entertainment in many cases. Plus, of course they are a wonderful place to do some grocery shopping! Buying your produce at a local market has numerous benefits:

- **Experience fresh foods.** Consumers benefit by getting the freshest foods possible, since they are picked at the peak of ripeness and get transferred directly from the farm to the market.
- **Interact with the producers.** The vegetables are not coming from a farm in Chile. The meat is not shipped from a packing plant in Kansas. At a farmer's market, you have the opportunity to meet the person farming or raising your food. They can answer questions regarding what type of farming techniques are being used during production and what animal practices are in place.
- **Save money.** Since food sold at the farmer's market is local, the transportation cost associated with imported foods is not added to the price you pay. You can also save money by eating in season. The local climate and growing conditions dictate the type and time of produce grown locally. You will avoid produce that needs special growing accommodations and therefore skip out on the increased costs.
- **Support the local economy.** Consumers aren't the only ones who benefit from these markets, however. Farmers benefit by making a larger profit, since they don't have to ship their produce through a wholesaler and they don't have to compete with big commercial farms like they would at a supermarket. The local economy profits when money goes back to hometown farmers.
- **Support the local environment.** The environment also benefits because the produce isn't being shipped across the world consuming all kinds of fossil fuel before reaching consumers. Local producers generally tend to adhere to sustainable farming practices because they tend to have smaller farms. This allows for more creativity in protecting the environment such as unique crop and herd rotations and field diversification.

Now that you know what makes farmers markets so great, check out one in your community and have some fun! You could:

- Try a new fruit or vegetable. Produce that is in-season right now includes asparagus, beets, strawberries, broccoli, turnips, and zucchini.
- Ask the vendor his favorite way to prepare a particular type of produce. Many have recipes to share.
- Check if there are any special events being planned at the Farmers Market. Many have cooking demonstrations, tastings, and fun activities for the kids.
- Give your children each \$2.00. Let them explore the world of produce and make a new selection. There is a much better chance your child will try this new food since it belongs to them!

Local markets: The Charleston Farmers Market (at corner of Calhoun & King St.), Saturdays from 8:00am until 2:00 pm, beginning April 11th. The MUSC Farmers Market, in the Horseshoe, is on Fridays from 7am-3:30pm.