

Ebel: Farmers Markets Support Healthy Communities

Joe Ebel, Guest Columnist Published 2:03 p.m. ET June 9, 2018



(Photo: Submitted photo)

We had unusually warm temperatures in May, and now that June is here, we are well into the growing season. That means it's a great time to visit one of Licking County's farmers markets.

By mid-June, vegetables like lettuce, spinach, kale, broccoli, peas, beans, and squash are all in season. Even sweet corn, peppers, and tomatoes are starting to ripen. Fruits like strawberries, blueberries, and cherries ripen in June, with peaches, raspberries, and apples close behind.

Eating fresh, locally grown produce is a healthy option in many ways. It supports local farmers and helps preserve farmland. Eliminating the middle-man and buying direct from producers saves money and stimulates our local economy. Supporting local farmers promotes sustainability and reduces transportation and storage costs.

Visiting a farmers market also supports healthy communities by getting you out for a little exercise and fresh air. You have an opportunity to meet friends and make new ones – including getting to know the local farmers who grow your food. By talking to the vendors, you can ask about their farming practices as well as get ideas for recipes and find out what produce is coming into season next.

Eating healthy is important for everyone but is especially challenging for our lowest income residents. With more markets accepting Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and WIC (Women, Infants, and Children), fresh, locally grown foods are available to families who might otherwise only access pre-packaged, processed foods.

Licking County's farmers markets are located at:

- The Canal Market District, 36 E. Canal St., Newark - Tuesdays and Fridays 4 to 7PM
- Granville Farmers Market, N. Main St., Granville - Saturdays 9AM to Noon
- Granville Tuesday Farmers Market, Ross' Granville Market - Tuesdays 3 to 6PM
- Johnstown, on the Square - Saturdays 9AM to Noon
- Pataskala, Veterans Green - Fridays 4 to 7PM

In addition to the formal farmers markets, there are farms that sell directly to the public from their farm. Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs) may be available from farm to family where the public can buy subscriptions to receive regular baskets of produce. Plus, a variety of pick-your-own operations in Licking County.

Of course, if you don't mind getting your hands dirty, growing your own garden is a great option. Even in mid-June it is not too late to plant some crops. Carrots, beets, parsnips, squash, zucchini, and pumpkins are all good options for June plantings.

The best way to ensure that local farmers markets are successful is to visit their vendors and buy local produce. I urge you to support local farmers and help build a healthier Licking County by visiting a farmers market near you.

Joe Ebel is the Licking County Health Commissioner.

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