



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

‘Guiding’ You to Fresh and Healthy Foods

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Senator Ritchie’s Weekly Column

Here in Central and Northern New York, there are certain things that let us know summer is right around the corner. One of my favorites? The opening of farmers markets across our region. From fresh fruits and vegetables to flowers and handcrafted items, local farmers market offer something for everyone.

To make it easier for you to find the fresh, healthy foods and unique locally-crafted items you’re looking for, I have once again put together my “2015 Farmers Market Guide.” [Available here](#) and also by calling my office (315) 782-3418, the guide lets you know when and where to find farmers markets throughout Jefferson, Oswego and St. Lawrence Counties. My annual guide makes it easy for people who are looking to eat fresh—and local—to find markets nearby, where they can purchase healthy foods and so much more.

If you’re a fan of farmers markets, you already know that they’re the perfect place to shop if you’re looking for locally grown and produced foods. But, that’s not the only benefit. Here are a few of the other reasons to shop at a local farmers market:

Getting face time with farmers: Where else can you go and chat with the person responsible for growing your food? Buying directly from farmers gives you an opportunity to ask questions and learn more about how to best prepare the foods you're purchasing.

Supporting local agriculture: When you buy directly from the person growing your food, you cut out the middleman, therefore providing a higher profit that helps our farmers continue to grow and produce the foods we rely on.

A variety of vendors: From colorful cauliflower to new varieties of apples, your farmers market is the perfect place to find an array of produce that you won't typically find at the supermarket.

Farm fresh: The freshness of most items at farmers markets is second to none, with most fruits and vegetables being sold within a day of being harvested. And, there's an added bonus—freshly picked, in-season produce is typically at its peak when it comes to nutrition and flavor.

As Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, it's a priority for me to strengthen connections between farmers and consumers. Just recently, we passed a new State Budget that included record funding for agriculture programs, including new initiatives to bring more locally produced fruits and vegetables to schools and low-income seniors. This final budget adds more than \$12 million to the Governor's original plan, restores budget cuts to 33 different programs, and includes funding for key components of my "Grown in New York" plan to strengthen connections between farmers and consumers who are seeking to increase their purchasing of healthy, fresh, local foods. In addition, the budget also allows for the expansion of the successful "Harvest NY" program, which aims to increase the availability of locally produced fruits and vegetables, as well as makes major investments in programs to help farmers market products ranging from dairy to apple, and maple syrup to award-winning New York-produced wines, among others.

With the weather getting warmer, there's no better time to get outside and visit your favorite farmers market, or one of the new markets launched this year. If you're looking to put more fresh, nutritious foods on your table—and support our hardworking local farmers at the same time—I encourage you to check out my 2015 Farmers Market Guide.