

New Interest in Local Foods

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In response to the recent pandemic, there has been an increased interest in locally and regionally produced foods, as well as home production. Folks who've been gardening and including local foods in their diet for a while have a general understanding of how to find what they want, although some supply chains may have changed or stopped. Those who are new to gardening or shopping for local foods may wonder where to start. The good news is it's spring, and there couldn't be a better time to think about and find the gardening resources sources of local food that will meet your needs.

Farmers Markets can be found in most counties and many towns, and while the usual crafters may be missing, you should still find producers with an assortment of spring fruits and vegetables, as well as remaining stores of winter crops. Look for spring crops like rhubarb, lettuce and greens, radishes, peas, and scallions, and winter storage crops like potatoes, onions, carrots, winter squash and turnips. You may also find cheese, yogurt vendors and meat vendors.

Farm Markets are sometimes open year around and will carry most of the same items you find at farmers markets. You may also find non-local or out of season foods, like bananas and tomatoes. If these items are on your shopping list, consider purchasing them here, as the owners and the farmers they represent will benefit directly from your money.

Direct Marketers such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and livestock farms may be a little harder to find. Often these farms have websites or Facebook pages, but how do you find them if you don't know their farm name? Try your County Extension office or website – they may have a list for you. Both types of farms will offer typically offer a variety of ways to purchase their products; if you have multiple options, consider which farms may best suit your needs.

Home Gardening may be an option for many people, even those with limited sunny spots to plant. You may have enough space for a full-size family garden, or just a small kitchen garden of greens and herb – or perhaps only enough room for a few containers. Unfortunately, gardening is a skill that has been lost to many over recent generations. For those with interest in learning about home gardening, and even preserving the harvest, there are many on-line resources available. Also check with your County Extension office, as there may be classes for beginning farmers, or at least a staff member able to answer questions or provide guidance.

Backyard Chickens are a way to provide a family with protein. A small flock of hens will provide eggs for a family, and some to share in all likelihood. New York State requires a minimum purchase of six chicks, who will eventually lay an egg a day each, so if 35 eggs a week sounds like more eggs than you can handle, consider sharing a flock with a neighbor. Again, there are many on-line resources to learn about chicken husbandry, as well as the 4-H program at your County Extension office.

Producing some of your own food can be very satisfying, although it is also a lot of work. To augment what you produce, or instead of producing your own, consider other local and regional food sources mentioned above. You may not be aware that many farmers lost major marketing channels when restaurant sales and hours were reduced. Adding purchases from local food producers and vendors to your weekly shopping list builds your resilience in times of feed insecurity, and helps the producers stay in business.