

40 Years of Farm Fresh at the Farmers' Market!

Summer is on its way to Humboldt County and so are all of your favorite farm fresh foods available at your neighborhood farmers' market. This season the North Coast Growers' Association is celebrating 40 years of operating farmers' markets in Humboldt County. Our local farmers have been hard at work over this past winter planting cover crops to improve the soil, searching for the best seeds to fit our climate, all while still growing produce that thrives in our mild winter weather.

Starting in June, the farmers' markets in Fortuna, Eureka, McKinleyville and Willow Creek will be open for community members to shop for groceries direct from local farms. Every market offers the freshest fruits and vegetables, humanely raised meats and eggs, honey, jams, flowers and plant starts. Depending on the time of year, local goat cheese and fresh caught fish can also be found at select markets.

The sugar snap peas and strawberries have been extra sweet this Spring, which is getting us excited for the juicy berries, plums and pluots that will soon be following. Other summer favorites that are the perfect addition to any meal include peaches, corn, tomatoes, cucumbers, figs and melons. The hot, inland climate in Humboldt County produces the most delicious fruit that are great substitutes for sugary treats or snacks that kids will love. The market is a fun and exciting environment for kids to try new fruits or vegetables, and also receive nutritional education resources that can assist in starting a lifetime of healthy eating habits.

Customers with CalFresh EBT are welcome to shop at the farmers' markets, and can also receive bonus Market Match dollars when using their EBT benefits. Just stop by the Market Info Booth to exchange your benefits for wooden tokens that can be spent directly with the farmers at their booths. A great way to stretch your CalFresh dollars even further is to purchase plants starts or seeds the produce food and start a garden! This way you can enjoy the delicious bounty from your own garden over time for the same price as a basket of tomatoes or head of cauliflower.

Not only is shopping at your local farmers' market the best way to get the freshest foods, but customers are guaranteed to get the most nutritional value possible from their fruits and vegetables. Farmers' harvest their ripe produce the day before or morning of each market. All of these farm fresh foods are grown or raised within Humboldt County and travel no more than two hours to reach the local farmers' market. These factors both contribute to flavor packed, nutrient dense fruits and vegetables that keep longer when stored appropriately at home. Conventional grocery stores often ship produce in from different parts of the state, and even from different parts of the country. This

requires that farmers harvest their produce before it is ripe so that it doesn't go bad during the many hours and days that it can take to reach the store before it is even purchased. This produce loses its flavor and nutritional content the longer it has to travel before it is consumed, leaving fewer vitamins and minerals for the customer. Eating fruits and vegetables that are in season from the farmers' markets ensures that every meal will be nourishing and delicious.

Shopping directly from local family farmers also helps support a thriving local economy and agricultural industry. When you spend your money at the farmers' market, your dollars stay right here in Humboldt County instead of going to a large corporation from out of the area. These dollars support daily operations on local farms, provides an income for farm employees, allows farmers to increase the amount of crops produced in future seasons, and circulates through other local businesses. By choosing to shop at your neighborhood farmers' market you are directly contributing to a prosperous local food system here on the North Coast.

The weekday farmers' markets in Fortuna, Eureka, McKinleyville and Willow Creek are open from June through the end of October, with the farmers' market in Arcata open year-round. Stop by to freshen up your week and say hi to your friendly local farmers!

Eureka, Old Town, Tuesdays 10am-1pm
Eureka, Henderson Center, Thursdays 10am-1pm
Eureka, Friday Night Market, E St. & Opera Alley, 5-8pm
Fortuna, 10th & Main Streets, Tuesdays 3-6pm
McKinleyville, Eureka Natural Foods store, Thursdays 3:30-6:30pm
Willow Creek, Community Commons, Thursdays 5-8pm

To find out more about CalFresh and if you qualify, call 1-877-410-8809.

Colleen Austin is the Outreach Coordinator with the North Coast Growers' Association Farmers' Markets. Colleen is in her fourth season working with the farmers' markets developing and coordinating food access programs, nutritional education, and CalFresh outreach. For more information about the farmers' markets or to reach Colleen, please email colleen@humfarm.org.