

# Farm fresh

Succumbing to the selective power of the green, people discover good produce at farmers' markets, but soon find out they can't get everything there.

BY CAROL SMAGLINSKI

Ask anyone how many miles they have on their car, and they can probably hit it right on the nose.

Then ask how many miles they have on their broccoli or spinach purchased at a supermarket, and it could raise a few eyebrows.

Coming from inside and outside of the United States, those vegetables are quite different from ones purchased at a local farmers' market.

A farmers' market is any place a farmer sells what he grows directly to a consumer. This means fresh vegetables off the farm with no extended transportation, no stays in a storage area, and no middleman to interfere — just the farmer and the customer.

One such farmer is Larry Hocking who — along with his wife, Jacque — owns and grows "o'naturale" at Berry Creek Farm in Blanchard.

The couple participates in the Oklahoma State University/Oklahoma City Farmers' Market from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. each Saturday through Nov. 1 at the OSU-OKC Horticultural Pavilion, 400 N. Portland, and from 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. each Wednesday through late September at the downtown market held at Couch Park. Their harvest is also for sale at Blanchard Farmers' Market on Saturdays.

"I love it," Larry Hocking said.

Although more people are making the effort to support farmers' markets, shopping there is not without challenges. For example, they do not have bananas or other out-of-season products.

"People think that our farmers' market is Wal-Mart without the walls, and they are looking for bananas and want watermelon in April," said Hocking. "But these markets show how far we have come from our agricultural roots. People want to eat fresh food and I think people understand the need to buy local. I think they 'get' that you can't get (homegrown) watermelon in April."

Merchants do respond to customer's requests when they feel it is justified. On the other hand, just last Wednesday, Hacking heard people asking for spinach.

"It's too hot for spinach! You're not going to get spinach in August," he said.



Larry Hocking and his wife, Jacque, greet customers at a local farmers' market.

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—Larry Hocking,  
Berry Creek Farm owner

Hocking added that he hears people worrying about prices of produce being priced higher than supermarkets and others saying that lower-income people can't afford to buy good food.

"I don't think supermarket food is the best for them," he said.

Following the laws of the retail jungle, profit is survival. Hocking explained that the price of produce depends upon the labor involved.

"Green beans are hard to pick and require a lot of labor, and it should be more work than picking okra," he said. "That's why there is only one kind of green bean in a supermarket, where I can grow and sell five different kinds. To ship green beans a thousand miles,

they have to pick the green beans hard, and what happens to the flavor when they are in a truck? Mine is real food."

Hocking's calendar for the year, which he calls "the meat of my income," includes strawberries in April, blackberries in June, peaches in July and August, and grapes (he has 400) in September. He diversifies with vegetables such as beets, onions, spinach, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, Swiss chard, peppers, tomatoes, okra and five variations of squash and melons.

And now, with autumn on the horizon, he'll start all over again.

"I've just put in 150 broccoli for the fall," he said.

Take advantage of fresh vegetables that are still in season while you can at area farmers' markets. One perfect recipe, a primavera, is an Italian dish that translates to "spring style." But, just because it's the end of summer shouldn't make you shy about trying the dish. **OKG**