

April showers bring...Farmer's Markets. It doesn't quite roll off the tongue, but it is true, showers or not. Many of our local farmer's markets will begin in April and continue well into the fall. These open air markets are a wonderful opportunity to come face to face with local farmers, and purchase fresh produce. Fresh green beans, crisp and sweet, bear no resemblance to canned. A ripe peach, that oozes juice down your chin when you take a bite, is an experience unto itself. Before you pack up your family and head to one of Shawnee County's Farmer's Markets, consider some market etiquette tips first.

- 1) **Shop seasonally.** Not all produce is available year round! Kansas weather doesn't permit strawberries in April and you won't see asparagus in July. If you aren't sure what's in season—ask! Farmers would love to tell you what they have to offer, and when you can expect to see your favorites. Farmer's markets aren't always a substitute for going to the grocery store, but fresh produce is a great addition to every meal.
- 2) **BYOB—bags that is.** Bringing reusable bags from home helps farmers keep costs low by skipping the paper or plastic. Bags you bring from home should be washed to avoid contamination. Many farmer's markets are banning the use of plastic bags, as they can spread pathogens when re-used. Keep it clean, folks.
- 3) **No Dogs.** When you grab the bags, leave Rover at home. Although some markets encourage four-legged friends, many do not and some ban them all together. Farmer's markets may be outdoors, but no one wants their food taste tested by a dog. Along with helping themselves to sniffs, dogs can congest market flow and slow down your shopping. Service dogs are the exemption to this rule.
- 4) **Ask questions!** Do you want to know which farms are certified organic? Are you looking for a specific variety of tomato? What is a kohlrabi and how do you eat it? Farmer's know the answers to all of these questions and more! Building a relationship with these farmers is one of the biggest draws to farmer's markets so take advantage.
- 5) **Respect the produce.** No one wants to buy a tomato that has been poked, prodded and smelled, that's just gross. Pick what you like without touching every tomato in the box. If you aren't sure what's ripe, ask the vendor to help you out. They may have boxes in the back with produce to suit your needs.
- 6) **Bring cash and pay sticker price.** Some markets accept credit cards but many do not. Bring cash, especially smaller bills. Also, don't assume that bargaining is an option. Stroll the market before making a purchase to seek out the best deal. Remember, market produce is fresh and local. A local farm employs local help and getting the produce to market is no simple task, especially for small to medium sized operations who can't afford the automation that larger farms have.