

Guest Editorial

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A juicy, sweet peach; a cool slice of delicious watermelon; a vine-ripe tomato. Those words conjure up thoughts of the delicious and abundant supply of fruits and vegetables grown by Alabama farmers. For farmers, these crops have been months in the making. For consumers, summer is an opportunity to enjoy a freshness that can only be experienced when those items are purchased directly from a farmer.

That's the idea behind the new Buy Fresh, Buy Local campaign that recently was launched by the Alabama Farmers Market Authority and the Alabama Farmers Federation.

Local food is fresh and tastes better than food shipped long distances from other states or in some cases, other countries. Alabama farmers can offer produce varieties grown for taste that are ripe with freshness instead of those grown for shipping and a long shelf life.

Buying local isn't just about purchasing a box of strawberries or other produce from a market, it's about savoring the local varieties of the season in Alabama.

Locally grown foods are available and easy to buy from farmers markets, roadside stands and u-pick operations. We've even created a new website to assist consumers on how to find them – www.BuyLocalAlabama.com. This website lists producers in your county or a county near you where you can find some of the freshest fruits and vegetables available. Locally grown fruits and vegetables are usually sold within 24 hours of being harvested.

Buying local also helps support your local economy. When you buy food directly from a farmer, your dollars circulate in your community. When you buy locally, you ensure that family farms and businesses in your community will thrive.

There has never been a more critical time to support your farming neighbors. Knowing where your food comes from and how it is grown enables you to choose food from farmers you can trust. You can have confidence they are concerned about the safety of your food and the environment.

So as you enjoy Alabama's bounty of fresh fruits and vegetables this summer, remember to Buy Fresh, Buy Local. Look for the label and taste the difference. –30–