



Shopping Tips

Seasons can be tricky! Growing on the lakeshore means there are so many climate changes in Oceana, Muskegon, Mason, Kent and Ottawa counties that some seasons can be longer than other counties and states. There are also late and early varieties of produce like corn and blueberries so ask questions about your food, know the ideal color, size, and texture. Ask your farmer for tips on storage and recipes they know their products best.

1. Come early

Shop early in the day to get the best food and to avoid missing out on unusual or limited items. Mid-week market days, Tuesday and Thursday are quieter, however fewer vendors attend during the week so know your favorite vendors schedule for the best selection.

2. BYOB (Bring Your Own Bag)

Arrive with cloth bags and small plastic or paper bags for loose items like berries or mushrooms. Bring a basket or backpack to help get everything back home. In warm weather if you are not going straight home we suggest a cooler. Even short stops can cause very fast degradation of produce, breads, and especially fish and meats! *Remember that fresh means no preservatives!*

3. Hit the ATM

Plan to pay cash. Bring more money than you think you'll need, and lots of small bills and change. We do have a 5/3 Bank ATM at the market and PNC Bank is across the road.

4. Bridge cards

If you have a Bridge card (food stamps) come to the office window to get tokens; it really speeds things up at the vendor stalls.

5. Look for the peak of the season

Great ways to save money. First, walk the entire market to check prices. Second, look for foods at their peak of seasonal abundance. Third, talk to farmers about buying in bulk at a discount. This is a terrific idea for freezing, canning, or a party!

6. Shop smart to save money

Shop smart. A head of farmers' market lettuce can appear pricier than at the supermarket, but may also be much larger. A Seattle University study found farmers' market produce cheaper pound-for-pound than supermarket fare. Also the food has not traveled past the Market to a

holding warehouse and back again to the neighborhood store to then be held on a pallet in the back of the store until third shift comes in to stock the shelves. (Whew! Lots of traveling.)

7. Share the market and bring the kids

Farmers markets are a wonderful experience and can go a long way toward educating children to eat their vegetables!

Muskegon Farmers Market has a kids program called the **Power of Produce Club**. Please see our home page for details!

8. Don't be afraid to ask questions

When was the asparagus picked? How do you cook garlic scapes? How "free range" are the "free-range chickens"? Do you grow what you sell? How far has the food traveled?

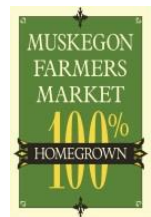
10. Try something new and weird

Markets are the best place to experiment! Our farmers are happy to suggest ways to prepare a food you've never tried before. Be sure to try ugly food too! Strange looking vegetables and fruits are often heritage varieties bred for taste rather than visual appeal.

Be sure to ask about the best way to store foods.

11. Organic?

Although organic food is often a market favorite, don't ignore non-organic growers. In Michigan, organic certification is often too expensive or bureaucratic for small-scale farmers. Ask them what chemicals they use on their food; you may decide to choose low-spray products that are better priced. Organic practices are often observed, however unless they are licensed by the State, the word "organic" is not allowed to be utilized at the Muskegon Farmers Market. We also have a certified 100% home grown program, so be sure to look for the signs!



12. Frozen foods

Plan to go home right after the market, or bring a cooler. Frozen foods such as meat and fish are increasingly common at markets. Safety first!

13. Seasonal finds and recipes

Meal planning? Instead of picking a recipe and then shopping for the ingredients, buy what's in season and look for recipes to match. Many of our vendors have recipes at their booths for you.