

# CottageHouseCall

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## ***Farmer's Market***

**By: Coni Jo Dobbels, Director of Nutrition Services**

The farmer's markets are open and fresh produce is readily available. One of the great things about farmer's markets is the fact that one can buy fresh produce long before our own geographical area is able to produce any. One might ask how is it possible that fresh produce is ready at the farmer's market, when in my garden there are only sprouts starting to come up out of the ground.

During the early part of the growing season the produce may not have come from the Illinois Farmer but rather the west coast or even greenhouses. Still, vegetables grown in any climate or area are essential to healthy and nutritious eating. Fresh produce is certainly more nutritious than vegetables frozen or canned due to the loss of nutrients that occurs during the canning or freezing process.

I encourage consumers to ask produce vendors about their vegetables. I purchased some sweet corn from the Galesburg Farmer's Market. Obviously, it was too early in the season to have been produced in Illinois. The vendor told me it was from Kentucky. It was sweet and juicy and allowed me the luxury of eating one of my favorite vegetables months before it would be produced in Illinois.

A nice feature at the Galesburg Farmer's Market is that some of the vendors post the anticipated dates of fruits and vegetable harvests. That way, consumers know exactly when to go back to their local farmers market in search of their favorite bounties. I even recommend finding a crop growing calendar for the state of Illinois to better assist in planning for future purchases of fruits and vegetables.

For example, a produce calendar indicates the first availability of Asparagus during the month of April and some of the availability dates for more common fruits and vegetables during May including cabbage, and rhubarb. Cherries and potatoes appear during the latter part of May and early June. Also in June it should be easy to find tomatoes, blackberries, raspberries and strawberries. Corn, peppers and blueberries should flourish in July. Towards the end of the summer one will find sweet potatoes, apples, pears, broccoli, as well as watermelon.

It is also helpful to know the growing seasons when shopping at the local grocery store. Produce during the growing season is less expensive and sometimes on sale. There has been much talk about the harsh temperatures and how they will affect this year's crop. With damaged crops and huge crop losses the cost of some produce may increase, which is just another compelling reason to shop at the local farmer's market.



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