

AN INTRODUCTION TO FARMERS' MARKETS IN BRITAIN

At farmers' markets, food is sold by the producer directly to the public in the area close to where it was grown or produced. There is usually a limit on the distance from which producers can come to the market and the food must be sold by the people producing it. No bought-in produce is permitted without having been processed into another product. Processed products such as jams, bread or cakes should contain local ingredients.



Farmers' markets provide the public with good quality food that is fresh, local and sold at a price which is fair to both producer and consumer. The markets provide an opportunity for local small-scale producers to sell directly to the consumer. Consumers are able to ask questions about the production of their food, or about how to prepare it, and to obtain truly knowledgeable responses.

Although this was the traditional format for food selling in British market towns, most food is now sold through the major supermarkets. With the growth of out-of-town or edge-of-town supermarkets and the related loss of small food shops such as butchers and greengrocers, it is increasingly difficult to buy good fresh food in villages or town centres.



Food sold at supermarkets is being transported over longer and longer distances, this does not just apply to air-freight - food is also travelling further on roads within the UK. The cost of these foodmiles include pollution and carbon emissions from transport, refrigerated storage and packaging to protect the food on its long journey. There is also the loss of the link between producer and consumer and with it the loss of an understanding of farming, seasonality and food culture.

Farmers' markets have been very successful in the United States, supported by the Department of Agriculture. The concept returned to the UK with the initial farmers' markets founded in Bath and Bristol in 1997 and 1998 followed by rapid expansion initially through the south-west of England and then nationally. By the start of 1999 about 35 farmers' markets had been set up, mostly in the south-west.

In 2009 there are over 500 farmers' markets, of which over half are members of FARMA (the National Farmers' Retail and Markets Association) signed up to national standards. Some markets are held on a monthly basis while others are twice monthly, fortnightly or weekly.

"Farmers' Market" is not a legally protected term, and as the real thing has become popular, poor imitators have also become more common. Certification was established to distinguish genuine farmers' markets and to protect public confidence.

FARMA's standards are a framework of principles which all markets have to agree to follow, but each market defines its own rules, such as the distance they define as local. FARMA certified markets are independently inspected and recognised by the certification logo shown here. They are listed on the FARMA website www.farmersmarkets.net.

