



BC ASSOCIATION OF FARMERS' MARKETS

September 11, 2012

Appreciate local farmers at no extra cost:

This week is Farmer's Appreciation Week in British Columbia — a time to reflect on the importance of our agricultural producers and of buying locally produced food to keep farm families farming and support our local economy.

In recent weeks we have seen both the BC NDP and the Liberal Government demonstrate their appreciation for local food. Adrian Dix discussed prioritizing local agriculture through government procurement policies and the BC government unveiled their plan to launch a local food marketing campaign worth \$2 million.

These are timely announcements, but what can the average British Columbian do to support local farmers? Perhaps make time this week to support farmers directly at a farmers' market, yet critics claim that this will cost more of your hard earned dollars.

However, when it comes to purchasing fruit and vegetables, a study by Seattle University between 2003-2011 finds organic fruits and vegetables in season are either cheaper or of equal value — at the farmers' market.

The BC Association of Farmers' Markets is looking at how our farmers' market prices compare with grocery stores. Preliminary findings in six BC communities indicate that conventional and organic products at the farmers' market are the same price or less than the grocery store.

In Vernon 8 out of 12 conventional and organic fruits and vegetables compared were the same price or less, in Courtenay 9 out of 10 and in Vancouver 11 out of 15. In Hazelton there is only a convenience store with a limited selection making the farmers' market the only option for a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Products were compared at 3 major grocery chains and the majority had very few BC products on their shelves despite being in the middle of BC's prime agricultural season. Only BC owned Save-on-Foods carried a decent selection of BC product — finding these products at the grocery store is another important way to support our farmers.

Farmers' markets often have more organic selection and this can make them seem expensive, but the price of equivalent products is generally the same, or less than in groceries stores. For those on a tight budget most farmers' markets have

conventional producers and shoppers quickly learn which growers they can afford to buy from.

Our research is showing that the critics of farmers' market prices do not have accurate information when it comes to fruits and vegetables. All politicians that want to strengthen local food should work towards correcting this information problem.

This year, Farmers' Appreciation Week is focused on young people in agriculture as farmers in BC have the highest average age in Canada and nearly half of all Canadian farmers' are 55 years or older. Farmers' Markets provide a low-cost and effective marketing channel for new farmers.

We challenge all British Columbians' to buy BC fruit and vegetables at a farmers' market, farm-gate or grocery store this week to support BC farmers.

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