

Healthy Me!



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Everybody (and Every Food) Has a Story

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Did you know that “Kentucky Farmers’ Markets Week” was last week? That declaration was announced by the state agriculture commissioner, who encouraged people to get out and visit local farmers’ markets throughout the month of August.

For some areas of the country, outdoor markets are a way of life all year long. For others, such as Kentucky, the growing season runs from spring to late fall so our opportunity to meet producers and farmers face-to-face is limited. Have you ever been to a farmers’ market? Do you know the stories behind the produce, baked goods, meat products or flowers you may purchase there? Have you ever wondered how much time and planning goes into preparing the foods being sold? We often make our dinner or weekly menu based on the availability of goods at the time of purchase, but for many of the vendors, making food convenient for us to purchase has required more than a year of planning and production.

Kentucky has more than 165 farmers’ markets. One of those is in Owensboro. Recently, I connected with two vendors at the Owensboro Regional Farmer’s Market to ask about the “back story” of their vendor booths.

Suzanne Cecil White with Cecil Farms Produce said it takes close to 80 hours of labor to be ready for a Saturday morning market. (And that’s just the hours to harvest AFTER the vegetables are produced.) Due to the variety and amount offered, six workers pick crops for 12 hours on Friday followed by Friday night vendor preparation and a 5:30 a.m. Saturday start time.

Is it worth the time? According to Suzanne, the return on investment is the time spent with



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her children and the ability to work with her father, a farmer who has always looked for ways to meet the needs of the consumer.

Hill View Farms Meats’ back story is a little different. Though they do not require as much actual preparation time weekly for the farmer’s market (less than four hours), their preparation comes in planning for the production. To offer the quality of meats desired, the process begins at least a year and half in advance, according to owner Jim Gilles III. Jim states that he starts with researching and selecting the type of beef cattle and chickens to be raised. He then provides a nutritional diet for the animals during their life. Once animals are ready for the consumer market, Jim only uses USDA-certified meat processors to ensure the highest food safety standards are followed. For Jim, Hill View Farms Meats has allowed him to expand his father’s vision to a year-round business.

Just like people, our food has a story: like where it comes from, who grew it, why they became a farmer, and where and how they sold it. And just like people, the more we know about its background the more informed and connected we can be.

I like to travel, and when I travel I seldom miss an opportunity to explore a new town, city or country without seeing it through the lens of a local market. That way, I experience local foods while also meeting new people. Supporting farmers’ or roadside markets not only benefits a community’s economy but we all get to know each other a little better. So take some time this month and explore a farmer’s market!

To find a market in Kentucky visit kyproud.com. If you are going to be in another state, check out a list of markets across the country at www.ams.usda.gov/services/local-regional/food-directories.

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