



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Leslie Forsyth and Susan Finkelstein display the abundant locally grown fruit and vegetables available now.

Farmers, markets offer healthy options

BY MICHAEL POWER
Staff Writer

Like interior design or fashion, those shopping for fruits and vegetables shouldn't be afraid of a little colour.

Health Canada's recently revised food guide recommends you get at least one serving of orange vegetables and one dark green veggie each day. And what better place to start looking than a nearby farm market?

"Before you go to a farm market, people should definitely call the farm to see if they have what you're looking for," said Susan Finkelstein, a public health nutritionist with York Region Health Services.

REDUCE DISEASE

She explained what is available using Forsythe Family Farms, at 10539 Kennedy Road, north of Major Mackenzie Drive in northern Markham, as an example.

In the orange category, produce to look for at this time of year includes carrots and orange squash, Ms Finkelstein said. Yams are also a good choice, but aren't in season now. Available fruit includes peaches and apricots.

As for dark green veggies, beans, green peppers and broccoli are currently in season, Ms Finkelstein noted. However, availability of produce can vary each year

depending on factors such as the weather.

Orange and dark green produce contain anti-oxidants such as folate and beta carotene that protect the body's cells from damage.

In fact, the colour in fruits and vegetables, such as greens, purples, reds and blues, comes from the anti-oxidants and other chemicals vital to good health.

"That, in turn, can reduce our risk of heart disease, diabetes and cancer," Ms Finkelstein said. "The end message is the more variety and the more brightly coloured, the better."

As well, locally grown produce doesn't travel as far as imported fare, she said.

Fruits or veggies from overseas lose some of their nutritional value and may have been sprayed with chemicals during the voyage, she said.

"And it's going to taste better (if grown locally)," she said, adding shoppers should wash fruits and vegetables before eating them no matter where they come from.

And buying farm fresh produce means that what is sprayed onto your food follows provincial guidelines, said Forsythe Family Farms co-owner Leslie Forsythe.

Ontario farmers must be certified to spray their crops, she said.

"You can be more comfortable with how the food is produced, instead of from

another country where you don't know what their regulations are," she said.

And an added bonus of buying local is the taste, Ms Forsythe said.

Regular patrons look for the freshness and quality you can only get from local fare.

"We're in sort of a niche there," she said.

"It's taking off like the organic food market took off. People are looking for something they can relate to."

Farm markets also offer the personal touch shoppers might not get from a large grocery chain, said Ms Forsythe's husband, Jim.

The farm uses older varieties of tomato seeds, called heirloom seeds, that were developed for taste rather than to survive long trips from other countries, he said.

SUPERIOR TASTE

The resulting tomatoes aren't as red and round as some of their imported cousins, but the superior taste makes up for that, he said.

"People come to a farm market because they want freshness," Mr Forsythe said. "They're never the prettiest looking things but they have got the taste."

Forsythe Family Farms is open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. every day of the week.

For recipes, call 1-888-428-9668 or visit foodland.gov.on.ca

LATE SUMMER TREATS

Here are what fruits and vegetables are fresh in August and September:

- ▶ apples;
- ▶ green and wax beans;
- ▶ blueberries;
- ▶ broccoli;
- ▶ corn;
- ▶ cucumbers;
- ▶ garlic;
- ▶ leeks;
- ▶ mushrooms;
- ▶ onions (green and cooking);
- ▶ peas (snow and green);
- ▶ peppers (green, yellow, red and hot);
- ▶ spinach;
- ▶ tomatoes and;
- ▶ zucchini.

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