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Want New Year's resolutions success? Visit a farmers' market



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By Melanie Raskin; Carrboro Farmers' Market

CHAPEL HILL — It can be depressing: 90 percent of us fail to keep our New Year's resolutions — many of us fail within the first month. Ready for a little success, fast, in 2013? Look no further than your area farmers' market. It's a great place to achieve those good intentions. Below is a list of some of the top traditional New Year's resolutions and a fun way to keep them all.

1. Get smart with money.

Nothing stretches a dollar like buying local foods; you can save as much as 20 percent to 50 percent on grocery store prices if you buy fresh food in season. Right now, area farmers' markets are showcasing beautiful winter veggies including carrots, greens, onions, spinach, winter squashes, mushrooms, fresh ginger, sweet potatoes, broccoli, lettuce, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, turnips and beets as well as meats, cheese and honey. Along with boosting our personal economy, shopping farmers' markets can also help improve the overall economy. NC 10% Campaign, launched in 2009, helps stimulate economic development, creates jobs and promotes our state's agricultural offerings. According to the NC Center for Environmental Farming, if all North Carolinians allocated 10 percent of their food expenditures to locally produced food, we'd generate \$3.5 billion for the state's economy.

2. Eat Healthy.

Nothing says "vibrant good health and vitality" like farm-fresh vegetables. But, just because it's winter doesn't mean you can't find a plateful of luscious, fresh food. Even in winter, local farmers' markets are offering a bounty of tasty, easy-to-prepare vegetables. Best of all, these veggies combine few calories with hearty, stick-to-your-ribs flavor and a heaping helping of good-for-you vitamins and nutrients. Add these healthy habits to your menu:

Roast a vegetable medley with a little olive oil and your favorite spices till lightly browned in a 425-degree oven.

Toss fresh greens and cheese with hot pasta.

Add grated carrots to meat loaf and muffins.

Stir sweet potato or winter squash cubes into a pot of soup or chili.

Augment casseroles like chicken and rice, mac n' cheese and lasagna with greens, squash and broccoli and cauliflower florets.

Make kale chips: bake dry, de-veined leaves spritzed with pan spray and sprinkled with kosher

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salt in a 425-degree oven for 15 minutes.

Top pizza with tender spinach, cubed roasted squash and broccoli, fresh green onion, local cheese and sausage – even thinly sliced, sauteed potato wedges.

Build a monster salad using lettuces, greens and spinach. Add sliced scallions, fresh broccoli, grated carrots and sauteed mushrooms.

3. Exercise.

Skip the treadmill and head outside. A couple of brisk circuits around your local farmers' market on a chilly winter morning can be a good cardiovascular workout, especially if you're hoisting tote bags laden with produce, meats and cheeses.

4. Get a hobby.

Cabin fever got you down? Cooking is a fun, all-weather activity that promises an immediate endorphin rush, thanks to the sheer joy of getting to eat what you've created afterward! There are a number of new cookbooks featuring from-the-farm and home garden recipes, including the winter season. Do what makes you happy: try ethnic recipes, test-drive a new food like kohlrabi or bison, make it all about soups, go pasta crazy (er, is there a way to get kale in a cake?).

5. Do good.

What better cause to adopt than protecting the environment and preserving peaceful countryside? That's what farmers' markets do. By buying from local farmers, you not only preserve beautiful green spaces but you also reduce the carbon footprint of foods shipped and trucked from around the world. Best of all, you support local families and keep important tax dollars in your community.

6. Get social.

Ask anyone who goes to a farmers' market: The pleasure is equal parts buying yummy foods and visiting with people. According to The Project for Public Spaces, shoppers enjoy an average number of 15 to 20 social interactions at a farmers' market versus one to two at a grocery store. Face it, it's a positive, uplifting, convivial atmosphere. (Hey, who can't have fun shopping for and talking about food?) Farmers are open and receptive to discussing how and why they grow what they grow. And, don't be bashful: A farmers' market is a great place to channel your inner kindergartner with a total stranger – "Hi, my name is Melanie. What are you going to do with those turnips?"

Plan a Market Meet-Up: Gather friends and walk a local farmers' market. If you're ambitious, buy food and cook brunch together. Better yet, make it a chopped experience and invite friends to buy whatever they like, then head back to the kitchen and make magic with a market basket of secret ingredients. The best ingredient of all? Fellowship, of course!

Melanie Raskin is one of 35 volunteers at the Carrboro Farmers' Market, which has been bringing local foods to the community for more than 30 years. Open year-round, 60 farmers and artisans sell vegetables, fruit, meats and fowl, canned and baked goods, dried flowers and greenery, cheese and crafts at the Carrboro Town Common on winter Saturdays, 9 a.m. to noon. For more information, go to carrborofarmersmarket.com.

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2828 Pickett Road

Durham, NC. 27705

[919-419-6500](tel:919-419-6500)

