

## Buying from Farmers – Some Questions to ask

Sue Beckwith adapted from an article by Judith McGeary of the Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance

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Please note that this list isn't intended as a judgment on a farm's practices. The biggest issue is transparency and knowing what you are getting, so that you can choose among the many options to make informed choices for yourself and your family.

- 1) Is the person at the farmers' market booth the farmer or a farm worker or simply someone hired to work the booth? You want someone who really knows the answers to your questions.
- 2) When did the farmers' market manager last come out to your farm to do an inspection? (A good market manager does this about once a year.)
- 3) All farms: were these products raised on the farm? How far away is the farm? (some markets allow re-selling or distant producers to compete with local)
- 4) For fruits and vegetables - what inputs are used? If the farm is not certified organic, do you use any synthetic fertilizers, herbicides or fungicides? If yes, how often or under what circumstances?
- 5) When were the vegetables harvested/ how fresh are they?
- 6) For livestock products:
  - were the animals born on the property and live their whole life there? If not, where do you source your young animals from and what are the standards on the source farm? (i.e. are the source farms organic, grass-fed, chemical-free, etc?)
  - are the animals 100% grass-fed, with no grain supplement? (For dairy, that's often not an option. And I know some goat producers who are not in a position to go 100%. The most important thing, though is transparency -- "pastured" or "grass-fed" does NOT necessarily mean 100% grass fed!)
  - Note: poultry and hogs are never 100% grass fed
  - what other feed or supplements do they get?
  - For poultry, hogs, or any other animal that gets grain -- do you feed corn or soy? If yes, how do you avoid GMOs? (Note: if they are feeding conventional soy or corn without actually testing the seed, odds are it is heavily GMO)
  - how many animals do they have on how many acres?
- 7) What are your key values that inform your work as a farmer?

We have many wonderful options for high-quality local food. The key is always knowing your farmer.