

The Truth About Farmers Markets

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Farmers Market Prices Cheaper Than Stores

Many hip, eco-conscious Seattle shoppers visit their local farmers markets to buy locally grown, fresh, delicious-tasting apples, potatoes, and turnips. Farmers markets are great way to support local farmers and protect local farmland.

People may also come to the farmers markets for entertainment: The markets are host to a range of events, from cooking demonstrations to vegetable races for kids. There is often live entertainment.

The common perception among many shoppers is that the local farmers market offers premium produce, but at a premium price.

To test this perception and find out if farmers markets are, in fact, more expensive than local grocery stores, Seattle University Professor Stacey Jones' business statistics class studied the prices. The class members took their clipboards and headed to the U-District. Students recorded prices at Neighborhood Farmers Market Alliance's [NFMA] university district market, the University Village QFC, and the Roosevelt Square Whole Foods over a two-week period in February.

The results were surprising. The average price per pound of a number of different goods ranging from beets to chard to salad mix was lowest at the farmers market. The average price per pound there was \$2.37 compared to \$2.59 at Whole Foods and \$2.97 at QFC.

On average, prices at the farmers market were only

86% of the prices at QFC. Farmers market prices were just under Whole Foods prices at 99%. After running some statistical tests, the class determined the study showed reasonably conclusive evidence that QFC is more expensive. The evidence for Whole Foods was less conclusive, yet prices are also not likely to be less at Whole Foods.

The results have social significance, because poor nutrition is increasingly looked at as an economic issue. In a study done at the University of Washington and reported in the New York Times, obesity researcher Adam Drewnowski found that one dollar bought 1200 calories worth of cookies or potato chips but only 250 calories of carrots. One dollar would buy 870 calories of soda, yet only 170 calories of orange juice to wash down the snacks.



The New York Times reported that the study, “concluded that the rules of the food game in America are organized in such a way that if you are eating on a budget, the most rational economic strategy is to eat badly — and get fat.”

To help low-income shoppers, all seven NFMA locations accept food stamps, WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition coupons. According to the NFMA website, the markets collectively donated more than 44,000 pounds of fresh food to local food banks in 2006.

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The prices are lower at the farmers market but they are not set with the intention of competing with the local grocery stores. The farmers interviewed at the University District Market said their main costs were labor and seeds.

Stella, a farmer from Nash's Organic Produce in Sequim, Wash., noticed that the prices in Seattle are higher than on the Olympic Peninsula, the result of gas prices. All the farmers interviewed also took note of other prices around the market and referenced the higher quality of the produce available at a farmers market.

The next time you go shopping, remember that your local farmers market offers cheaper alternatives to grocery stores. The food you buy will support local farmers, preserve local farmland, and be fresher, tastier and healthier! •

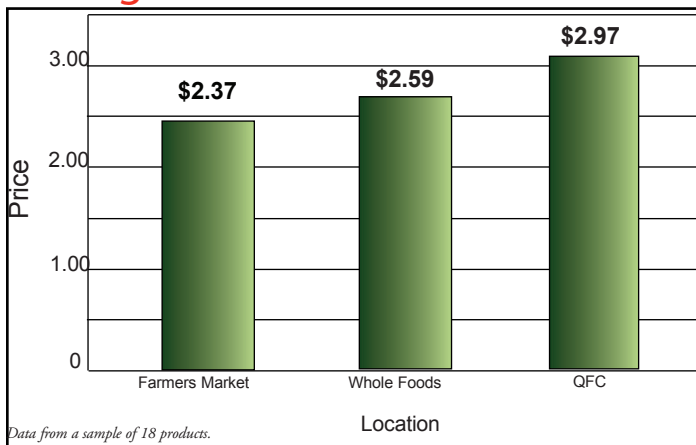
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Photos by Dan Kowk



Results of the study

Average Price Per Pound



Bang Per Buck



Comparing Prices

- On average, prices at the Farmers Market were **99%** of Whole Foods prices.
- On average, Farmers Market prices were **86%** of QFC prices.

Whole Foods data from a sample of 25 products, QFC data from a sample of 18 products.

Some Items Available

Item	Price Per Pound		
	University Farmers Market	Whole Foods	University Village QFC
Gala Apples	\$2.49	\$2.99	\$2.99
Red Beets	1.50	1.99	2.17
Red Cabbage	1.50	1.49	1.49
Red Potatoes	1.00	1.99	1.99
Yukon Gold Potatoes	1.50	1.99	1.99
Winter Squash	1.50	1.99	2.49
Turnips	1.50	1.99	1.49
Carrots	1.40	0.99	1.25