



GROWN IN THE UAE - WHY GO TO A FARMERS' MARKET IN UAE

The UAE has some authentic Farmers' Markets where you can buy the freshest produce directly from the farmers. Read on to find out more about one such farmers' market where farmers from small farms located in Sharjah, Abu Dhabi, Al Ain and Dubai come together every weekend during the winter season.



Farmers selling locally grown organic produce in Bay Avenue. Photo courtesy: Sakshi Kapoor

Every time you go to the produce section in a supermarket, you can see labels with names of countries where the produce was grown. And if you have been paying attention, you may have been seeing UAE more often now. But we live in a desert climate, you would say. How is that possible?

As surprising as it may sound, the United Arab Emirates does grow a wide variety of produce in various farms located across the country. Eggplants, tomatoes, kale, cucumbers, carrots and cauliflower –all these vegetables and many more are grown in farms in the UAE. With innovative methods like vertical farming and hydroponics along with regular greenhouses, farms in the UAE have been producing a bounty of harvest.

In a country that uses desalinated water for everything and has no river sources, it seems far-fetched to imagine that it can sustain itself without food imports. But UAE is gradually working towards changing that. A visit to a local farmers' market in Dubai reveals that a variety of produce can be homegrown.

For the past nine years, a farmers' market by Baker and Spice, Dubai has been providing shoppers a direct access to farmers, without any middlemen or extra costs. The market started when Baker and Spice brought together a group of local farmers and food artisans to put together a farmers' market in Souq Al Bahar. The market has since found a home in Business Bay. Every weekend morning in the winter season, the garden in Business Bay's Bay Avenue comes alive with the freshest local produce. And if that was not enough, all the farms that participate in this farmers' market are certified organic! The prices are not bumped up because the participating farmers are not charged a fee at this market. There are several al fresco markets in the UAE that also sell products by small businesses and artisans. But as much as you would enjoy going to al fresco markets, it is important to know that not all these markets are real farmers' markets. A real farmers' market has farmers directly selling produce to customers and not through middlemen or a corporate entity.

WHY GO TO A FARMERS MARKET?

- Going to a real farmers' market means that you ensure support to a local small farm.
- Buying local produce means that you reduce your carbon footprint since the produce does not travel from far away.
- Produce that is imported uses packaging, uses energy while transportation and is obviously not the freshest. Going to a farmers' market would cut down on your use of single use plastic that is used for packaging your imported produce.
- Visiting a farmers' market is a great way to educate children about where their food comes from.
- The local farmers' market is a great place for the community to come together and for families to spend time together.
- One can learn about the process for growing certain kinds of produce at the farmers' market. A lot of times, you can find unique, heirloom varieties of produce at a local farmers' market. Farmers often share tips and recipes to use such unique produce.
- If you do decide to go to a farmers' market, don't forget to carry a reusable or jute bag to avoid using plastic bags.

MAKE THE MOST OF THE LIMITED GROWING SEASON!

Unfortunately, due to extreme weather conditions in the region, the growing season for farmers here is small. Most local produce is grown in the winter months (mostly from October to April). Many farms also allow you to visit the farm if you take a prior appointment. But until the good weather and UAE's growing season lasts, you must make the most of what these farmers' markets have to offer.