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**About Farmers' Market in Sweden**

**Imagine a traditional local market...**

The air is full of exciting smells of new-baked bread and fresh vegetables. A crowd of customers between the market stalls are doing their shopping and discussing crop growing and animal rearing with the farmers who produced the goods on sale. The customers walk around in a sea of colours and can taste local specialities no longer to be found in the shops. The produce on the market is guaranteed to be the freshest available, often harvested the same day and transported only a short distance.

There is now a growing demand among consumers for healthy, environmentally sound products that help to promote sustainable development. People are looking for an alternative to food that is transported all over the globe, sprayed in order to withstand transport, and stored for months. Farmers' markets offer an answer!

A farmers' market is characterized by locally grown and reared produce, all of it from farms near the place where it is held. In the United Kingdom, farmers' markets began with support from local Agenda 21 offices. By the time the pilot project had come to an end, they had become self-supporting. Today more than 200 farmers' markets exist in the UK – developed from the first one set up in September 1997. In the United States, 100 markets were established during the first year, and the latest known figure is 3,500. In that country, farmers' markets have nearly one and a half million customers every year – which bodes well for their future in Sweden!

**Two rules which make farmers' markets unique:**

**Producers only**

Farmers must grow or rear all the products they offer for sale on the market. The main ingredients in processed foods, such as marmalade, fruit juice or sausage, also have to come from the stallholder's own farm. Some farmers may share a stall, but they must always display a sign clearly declaring that they are doing so.

**Locally grown produce**

All the farms involved are located within a 250 km radius of the market place and are therefore seen as "local producers".

**For the benefit of consumers, producers and the environment**

Farmers' markets significantly reduce "food miles", i.e. the number of miles food has to travel to end up on the consumer's plate. The classic example is a portion of spaghetti Bolognese: when you add together the travelling all the products in this dish have done, it amounts to a trip from Stockholm to Göteborg (500 km) and back!

Ecologically sustainable production is encouraged and rewarded by customers. Because of their many environmental advantages, farmers' markets are also supported by local authorities, and local communities can use them as a platform for ongoing efforts in the context of Agenda 21.

### **The local community**

One of the greatest advantages of a farmers' market is the way it can spread information and encourage a change of attitude. In both the UK and the US, the meeting between consumer and farmer is serving as a door opener and a catalyst for the message of a sustainable society. Local authorities in these countries have themselves initiated farmers' markets, on account of the real benefits which they have been shown to bring for local communities.

### **The consumer**

One of the main reasons for the success of farmers' markets is that they give consumers the chance to speak to food producers direct about crop growing and animal rearing. The wide variety of organic produce available, the friendly atmosphere and the fact that products follow the seasons are also highly valued. The products on sale are guaranteed to be the freshest ones available, often harvested the same day.

### **Grocery stores**

Although farmers' markets were initially seen as a threat in both the UK and the US, grocery stores and supermarkets have begun to see the benefits they can bring, both as a complement and as a stimulus to their own trade. Farmers' markets offer a wide variety of locally produced specialities which are not available to regular stores, and the two sides have therefore begun to cooperate. In the UK, 50 farmers' markets are now held outside stores between March and November.

### **The farmer**

Farmers' markets allow products to be sold directly, without middlemen, which means that the price paid for them goes straight to the farmers. These markets are a good thing for small business, for organic agriculture, and in terms of providing space for a wider variety of products. In other countries, farmers' markets have in particular been successful in protecting and marketing regional specialities.

### **Cultural heritage**

In the middle of the last century a large number of local specialities could still be obtained in Sweden. Today's efficient, large-scale distribution channels do not allow them to reach consumers, and they are therefore rapidly disappearing. This is happening despite the considerable demand for produce of this kind. Crop rotation has been shown to be better for the environment, and many farmers want to produce in this way.

Translated information from Swedish Farmers' Market.

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