

This farmer's market issue you speak of is definitely a problem. I am not in the business of bashing other farmers at the market, but I can walk around at any given market and I know who is buying their stuff in and who is growing it themselves. Markets have different rules, we do 3 and they vary greatly. In Appleton you can sell Michigan blueberries and peaches because they do not grow well in Wisconsin. But believe me there are plenty of Indiana melons and Illinois sweet corn to boot and are not labeled as such. When someone at the Appleton market has "field grown" tomatoes at the end of June, I have to wonder where the hell that field is!!! In a greenhouse maybe and hydroponically yes, but not in the field. I think the rule is that bought in produce can't be more than 25% of what you grow, but I do not know who is enforcing that strictly. Appleton is a very well managed market in many ways; I cannot say the same for the other markets we participate in.

There are a few vendors in the area who have road side stands or do like 5 farmers markets a week and it is always the "farmer" who is manning the stand. Well to me that does not add up, because if you are spending 40+ hours a week selling your produce, when are you planting, weeding and harvesting it? There is an "Amish auction" in Wausau once a week where produce and produce supplies are brought in and sold very cheap. I have never been but that could be a source for many.

When a vendor cannot answer your questions, that is a problem and a dead giveaway. (That being said, I have 5 staff people at the Sat market in Appleton who are college kids and while they are trained they won't have all the answers....so they give out our # or send them to the web site). Some vendors will blow you off, they do it to me. I really encourage customers to ask questions, but it's a lot of self-educating and it can take a lot of work to know exactly when things are in season especially if you are not a gardener. I certainly did not have a clue before I started farming. So this IS a problem.

Some people are very rural and many of the markets require you to list and draw a map of where your produce is grown and say they will do an inspection, but we have never been inspected and I have not heard of anyone else being inspected. In Green Bay there is some sort of grievance process and you have to find other vendors to join forces with (I think 3) before you file a complaint.

This is a topic of conversations on farming list serves and often leads to the creation of spinoff markets when farmers get pissed and just start a new market with strict guidelines, but I don't know where you could read about it. We have stopped going to some markets because of this problem.