

Katie Johnson: Good morning and welcome to Apple a Day, Lake Region Healthcare's Health and Wellness program where we feature news and information you can use to live a healthier life. I'm Katie Johnson and my guest today is Madison Mashek. She's a registered dietician in our nutrition services department, rather new there. Currently working on her licensure, and our guest today to talk about safe shopping at farmer's markets. Good morning, Madison.

Madison Mashek: Good morning.

Katie Johnson: I think the last time you were on, you were actually an intern here. Tell us about your journey. You're actually a full-time employee now.

Madison Mashek: Yeah. I interned here for about eight weeks, March through May, and then I graduated from NDSU and accepted a part-time job as a dietician here. Just waiting on getting my license now.

Katie Johnson: Awesome. That's exciting. Well, we're glad to have you on the team and thanks for making some time to share your knowledge with us today on a topic that I think is becoming more and more popular. Farmer's markets are becoming more common in communities, small and large. We have several in our region and we'll talk more about that, too, but I think that it was an article that was written by another of our dieticians that brought the topic to the forefront that it might be a good idea to stop and think about what you're buying, what to look for, how to do smart shopping when you're shopping at the farmer's market.

We've done the Shop with the Doc series about smart shopping at the grocery store, but there aren't labels on the food at the farmer's market. Let's start with the concept of cottage foods, which is used in reference to farmer's markets. What does that term mean?

Madison Mashek: Right. The Cottage Food Law actually allows for individuals to make and sell certain non-potentially hazardous food and canned goods in Minnesota without a license. You can only sell non-potentially hazardous foods and home processed and home canned pickles, vegetables or fruit with a pH of 4.6 and below. This can also include baked goods, candy and confections, dry and dehydrated and roasted items like beans, herbs, and spices.

Katie Johnson: To sell at a farmer's market, do you need to be ... I don't know, what is the word ... licensed, registered as a cottage foods distributor or how does that work?

Madison Mashek: Yeah, to be able to sell cottage foods, there are requirements for it. You do have to become a licensed seller, I guess. You also must take a food safety training course every three years. You must display a sign that says these products are homemade and not subject to state inspection. Certain guidelines for it.

Katie Johnson: Okay. I think there might be a little bit of a misconception about homegrown or fresh produce also being perceived as being organic. That's not true, is that right?

Madison Mashek: Right, yeah. There is a difference. The two terms have become interchangeable in recent years, but they're actually not the same. To be organic, there's a long list of specifications to be considered, but in short, they're prohibited from using most synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, as well as antibiotics. They must also take measures to protect water and soil quality, whereas homegrown or fresh is not the same. They don't have to have those same requirements as organic. Farmer's markets can sell both. They can be organic, but they also might not be, so just be cautious with that.

Katie Johnson: Exactly. In order to display a sign or to claim that your food that you're selling is organic, like you said, requires a lot of extra work.

Madison Mashek: Right, yeah. There's a lot of paperwork and a lot of guidelines and inspections and safety hazards.

Katie Johnson: I know I've found that a lot of times when someone will ask is your food organic, I hear the growers saying, "Well, technically it is. I just haven't gone through all of the paperwork to certify it."

Madison Mashek: Right, yeah. It's just a lot of extra work, but [crosstalk 00:03:52]

Katie Johnson: At that point, I guess you're taking the grower's word for it.

Madison Mashek: Right, yeah.

Katie Johnson: I think that's one of the advantages of kind of knowing the grower, too, and that's one of the things that farmer's markets bring to it. But because of that, it is really important that we're still really cautious about the questions we ask and then the washing and prep that we do on our own at home after we buy these foods.

Madison Mashek: Yeah, for sure. Safe handling measures should also be taken, regardless of where you purchase your produce, whether it's at the grocery store or the farmer's market or the countryside stand, you should always be washing your produce when you take it home.

Katie Johnson: How about foods we should stay away from at the farmer's market? Is there anything you might see there that you just have a big red flag when you see it?

Madison Mashek: I really just like the same guidelines as approaching food from a farmer's market is the same cautions you would at a grocery store. If it's bruised or beat up or doesn't look as nice, I maybe wouldn't take it. Same kind of concept.

Katie Johnson: Sure. How about things to look for if it's ... a fresh vegetable is one thing, but say it's something that's baked or that requires a little bit more preparation on the part of the seller, types of foods like that, that we see at the farmer's market. What should we look for to be safe and cautious?

Madison Mashek: Yeah, a good rule of thumb is to ask if the product requires refrigeration or not. If the answer is no, then you're good to go. Like canned goods, avoid meat, non-baked dairy and egg products and cream-based or custard-filled products. That means banana cream pie is off the list.

Katie Johnson: Oh, shoot.

Madison Mashek: But toppings, such as frosting and icing, are okay as long as they don't contain eggs, cream, or cream cheese, anything that needs refrigeration.

Katie Johnson: Sure.

Madison Mashek: And then a favorite of many farmer's market are the jellies and jams and salsas. They usually don't require refrigeration, so they're usually on the safe side.

Katie Johnson: Right. And as long as they've prepared them according to the proper guidelines, should be good. How about locally, where can we find farmer's markets around here? Is there a good resource for knowing where the farmer's markets are in our area?

Madison Mashek: I guess the one farmer's market in Fergus Falls that I found runs June through October on Wednesdays from 2:00 to 5:30 and Saturdays from 9:00 to 1:00. It's located on the lawn of Otter Tail County Historical Society, and there's also more info at fergusfallsfarmersmarket.org.

Katie Johnson: I know I've checked minnesotagrown.com, all one word, minnesotagrown.com, is where I found the Battle Lake farmer's market, and they let you search by your zip code or by city, whatever is nearby, and finds more than just farmer's markets, too. Finds lots of other sources for locally grown food. That's a good resource, too.

CSAs are another great option, as well, and I think those are becoming more and more popular.

Madison Mashek: Yeah, for sure. I know Virginia, the other dietician here, her and the chaplain upstairs, they go in on one together and they split the cost and then she goes and picks up her box of produce weekly for three or four months, and you just have fresh produce every week. You don't have to worry about going and figuring out what you're going to make. Super fun.

Katie Johnson: Right, exactly. More and more resources for that nutrient dense, locally grown fresh food. Thanks for your tips on being a wise consumer at farmer's markets

this summer. Madison Mashek, a registered dietician in nutrition services at Lake Region Healthcare, my guest today on Apple a Day. Thanks, Madison.

Madison Mashek: Thank you.

Katie Johnson: Madison and Katie remind you there's so much to do here. Stay healthy for it. Have a great day.