



Fridays at the farmer's market



At least once in your life, you must have been to a grocery store or a modern convenience store to check off household shopping from your chores list. But shopping regularly from the store next-door can get monotonous easily, as well as expensive.

During winter, you can bring a change to your regular shopping routine and drop by the local farmer's market – a niche market with a handful of vendors selling fresh produce that is picked out on a daily basis.

On a pleasant morning, take a walk down the Agargaon Colony Road, and at random intervals, you will find a couple of vendors with big baskets full of green leafy veggies negotiating with interested customers. Similarly, if you live close to the Kamalapur Railway Station, you might have noticed the sellers who sit with their harvests spread across both sides of the rail lines (when there is no train movement, of course). On hearing the whistle of an oncoming train, they quickly gather their beloved belongings and scurry away, only to settle down again once the coast is clear.

Most often, these vendors are the farmers themselves. Some of them live in shacks and tend to use the limited space surrounding their habitats to grow whatever they can. For instance, some farmers selling their produce at the Mohammadpur Town Hall market actually come

all the way from Bosila (across Nobodoy Housing Society), where they originally farm and live. Another commendable place to go hunting for the freshest produce would be across the Balu Bridge at Purbachol. Numerous farmers from nearby gather there to sell a flavourful collection of brightly coloured veggies – pumpkins, tomatoes, gourds, celeries and many more!

Vegetables and greens sold at the farmer's market tend to be quite budget-friendly as well. On crossing the Diabari Bridge (Uttara), you will see a great variety of fresh produce being sold in an open marketplace. It is quite easy to have an amiable bargaining session with the sellers and you will be surprised to discover that they are often actually more understanding towards your budget than other big market vendors. Such farmer's markets can be spotted in some parts in Abdullahpur and Beribadh as well.

Besides being a fun trip outdoors, a day at the farmer's market lets you get to know the local produce and the locals who harvest it. Moreover, your purchases are helping to support a small business (and family) that not only uses lands for farming but also provides you with fresh food to make your meals healthier and tastier!

By Nafisa Faruque
Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed

A Chef's Grocery Bag

Have you ever wondered how a chef shops for his/her grocery? Chefs are known to be food experts, not only because they know how to cook it well but also because they intricately understand food quality and taste. The results of their culinary delights largely depend on the ingredients they purchase. So what goes into their grocery bag can ultimately make or break a dish.

Here is a sneak peek at Reema Islam's and Salina Parvin's grocery bags. Based on the way they shop, they have given us some priceless pointers to keep in mind when we go grocery shopping.

Reema Islam always prefers buying her grocery from her trusted vendors. A few staple items one will find in her grocery bag would be deshi ghee, tomatoes and garlic.

For Salina Parvin, organisation is the key word for a smooth-running kitchen. She does her grocery shopping in batches, buying all the 'shukna bazar' monthly whereas her kaacha bazar is a weekly affair. Her grocery staples are rice, lentils and wheat flour.

SEASONAL FRESH PRODUCE

Both Reema and Salina are propagators of cooking with ingredients that are in season and locally produced. They believe in making the most of seasonal food items because it ensures you get the best tasting and healthiest food available.

NO TO CANNED PRODUCTS

Canned products are a total no-no. Reema categorically states that anything canned should not enter our gut. Preservatives are the main reason she never buys anything in a can, because she believes that food items with a dated shelf life are definitely not good to consume. Salina is of a similar opinion and prefers to make even sauces at home rather than buying ready made ones. You can be sure to not find any canned items in their grocery bags.

LOCAL ALL THE WAY

Locally produced food items are definitely a healthier food choice according to Reema. The price of the item she says is a good indicator for people to understand whether that particular item is locally produced or imported or even seasonal for that matter. Imported fruits and vegetables will always be costlier than locally produced items just as out of season produce will be costlier than the ones in season.

Matching Reema's opinion on vegetables, Salina says she is very particular when buying meat and fish. To make sure the fish is fresh she always checks its eyes, which are a good indicator of freshness as a fresh fish will have clear eyes and its body will not go limp when held in the hand. As for meat and chicken, its flesh being slightly warm and moist is a good indicator of its freshness.

LESS IS MORE

Reema warns against over consumerism. She likes to keep her grocery list simple just like she does, her cooking. Her grocery items are very measured as she is very stringent about what and how much she buys. For her, a recipe with a few key ingredients can be way more flavourful than one with a truckload of them. So, keep it simple — is her advice.

UNREFINED FOR A REFINED LIFE

Salina's grocery bag always contains brown rice, whole wheat flour (lal atta) and deshi sugar which falls somewhere between refined sugar and brown sugar. Even though she does use white rice, she prefers its unrefined counterpart. When lentils are concerned, she buys a variety of them and cooks a different one everyday as it is a staple in her house.

Armed with this little insight on what goes into a chef's grocery bag, we can hopefully make our grocery bags healthier.

By Samina Hossain