

# Eating balanced meals, farm-fresh produce benefits families, communities, nutrition researchers say

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Leaders at the recent United Nations meeting emphasized nutrition as critical to producing thriving children, families, and communities. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said a key focus is helping farmers grow heartier crops to nourish families. University of Missouri nutrition experts say getting back to basics by eating balanced meals and farm-fresh produce can benefit families and communities in many ways.

As fall approaches, Robin Gammon, MU dietitian and Stay Strong, Stay Healthy Program Manager, says families can implement [healthy eating](#) ideas to mark the new season. Based on insights from MU nutrition and exercise research and MU Extension programs, she recommends:

- Take the entire [family](#) to the farmers market and buy a fruit or vegetable you haven't tried before. Ask the farmer for preparation or cooking tips.
- Eat seasonal produce. Produce is usually fresher and cheaper when it is in season.
- Make meal planning a family activity. Before going to the grocery store, plan meals for the week.
- Plan quicker meals for nights that you have evening activities.
- Try to make each meal balanced by including all or most of the food groups.

Lorin Fahrmeier with MU Extension coordinates the Missouri Farm to Institution/Farm to School project. The project is part of the national Farm to School network that connects schools (K-12) and local farms with the objectives of serving healthy meals in schools, improving student nutrition, providing agriculture and health education opportunities, and supporting local farmers. Findings and program data are available here: [Missouri Farm to School report](#)

"A goal of Farm to School programs is to promote healthy eating choices and encourage families to take advantage of those choices and have fun by trying seasonal [fruits and vegetables](#)," Fahrmeier said. "Next time you're at your local farmers market or grocery store, ask your child to pick out something new to try at home. You might be surprised at what they pick! Let them decide if they like new foods."

Family time, dinner commitments, agriculture education and healthy eating are doable even for today's busy families, Fahrmeier said. Some things to remember:

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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