

How safe is food you buy at farmers' markets?

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(HealthDay)—You might love getting fresh produce at your local

farmers' market, but you should wash everything thoroughly when you get home.

Why? Many farmers' market vendors don't follow [food](#) safety practices meant to prevent the spread of foodborne illnesses, a new study found.

Researchers used [direct observation](#), state health inspector reports and vendor input to assess [food safety practices](#) at farmers' markets in Pennsylvania.

"We found that our direct field observations and inspector findings were very similar, yet very different from what most vendors said they were doing," said Cathy Cutter, a professor of food science at Penn State University.

"There was a chasm, if you will, between what we and the inspectors saw, and what vendors reported they were doing. The vendors think they are doing a good job, when in reality they are not," she said in a university news release.

"We are not sure why there were such discrepancies. Nevertheless, they need to do better," said Cutter, who's also assistant director of food safety and quality programs for Penn State Extension.

With more than 8,500 farmers' markets in the United States, food safety risks have risen, the researchers explained.

Areas where vendors in the study fell short included hand-washing, personal hygiene and cross-contamination. There was low use of disposable gloves, even among vendors who sell unpackaged, ready-to-eat foods. Only 24 percent of vendors had disposable gloves at their stands, the study revealed.

The researchers also analyzed samples of leafy green produce and meats sold at farmers' markets and found *E. coli* bacteria in 40 percent of beef samples, 18 percent of pork samples, 28 percent of kale samples, 29 percent of lettuce samples, and 17 percent of spinach samples.

Listeria was found in 8 percent of beef samples, 2 percent of kale samples, 4 percent of lettuce samples and 7 percent of spinach samples, according to the researchers.

The findings show the need for food safety training programs for farmers' markets vendors, the researchers concluded.

The study was published recently in the journal *Food Protection Trends*.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [food safety](#).

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