

Study finds urban farmers' markets may fall short compared to neighborhood stores

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Farmers' markets located in urban areas may not contribute positively to nutrition or health according to researchers at Albert Einstein College of Medicine of Yeshiva University and Montefiore Medical Center. Their study, published online in the journal *Appetite* in February, is the first to itemize farmers' market products in an entire urban county—in this case the Bronx—and compare them with what's available in nearby stores.

"Our study casts doubt on the presumed benefits of [farmers'](#) markets in urban environments," said Sean Lucan, M.D., M.P.H., M.S., assistant professor of family and social medicine at Einstein, attending physician in family and [social medicine](#) at Montefiore, and senior author of the paper. "And I suspect that most farmers' markets in most cities look a lot like what we found."

The researchers identified and visited all 26 farmers' markets in the 42 square miles of land in the Bronx. The Bronx is widely believed to have limited access to fresh produce. The research team measured the distance from each market to the nearest one or two stores selling fresh produce. The average store-to-market distance was 0.15 miles, or just a few city blocks, and no market was more than about 1/3 of a mile from a produce-selling store.

Each farmers' market was compared with the one or two stores closest to it with respect to accessibility (primarily hours of operation) as well as the variety, quality and price of their food. Farmers' markets had the edge in quality—their produce was more often grown organically and

was more likely to be fresher—but fell short in all other key areas.

Farmers' markets operated far fewer months, days, and hours than stores, which often were open year round, seven days a week, and at hours including those outside of the typical 9-5 workday. Plus, farmers' markets sold produce that was generally more expensive than comparable items in stores and offered much less variety: compared with nearby stores, farmers' markets offered less than half as many varieties of [fresh-produce](#) items.

The researchers also found that nearly one-third of farmers'-market fare consisted of refined or processed products (e.g., pies, cakes, cookies, donuts, jams and juice drinks) rather than fresh fruits and vegetables. "An apple-cider donut should not count as produce," observed Dr. Lucan, "neither should a blueberry scone."

"Farmers' markets might increase access to fresh, locally-sourced organic produce, but they may be of little net benefit to city dwellers because the food they offer costs more, is less varied, and available only at limited times as compared with stores," continued Dr. Lucan. "Also, a good deal of what farmers' markets offer is less than ideal for good nutrition and health."

More information: "Urban farmers' markets: Accessibility, offerings, and produce variety, quality, and price compared to nearby stores." *Appetite*. 2015 Feb 27;90:23-30. [DOI: 10.1016/j.appet.2015.02.034](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2015.02.034)

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