

# fresh

paths to the freshest food.

**By Gail Reynolds**  
FOR THE NEWS-LEADER

**A**round dinnertime Marilyn Smith will follow her usual Wednesday routine. Along with a few hundred other folks, she'll head straight for Wommack Mill.

Smith may sit down to a meal of barbecued brats or burgers, visit some and enjoy a few live bluegrass tunes, but her main focus will be food shopping at the Fair Grove Farmers Market.

**• Recipes** "For the past several years, we have not use markets' fresh ingredients. **2C** planted a garden, and I especially missed home-grown corn, tomatoes, lettuce and spinach," Smith says. "I am so pleased Fair Grove now has a farmers market."

**• What fruit** and vegetables are in season. **2C**

Stuffed squash. Blackberry cobbler. Fried zucchini. Wilted spinach salad. Farmers' markets sprouting up throughout the region allow people, such as Smith, to buy fresh produce to fix any way they like.

Smith prefers fresh produce and fruit, farm eggs and baked goods offered by the 25 regular vendors who show up with each week. She also enjoys the late-afternoon and evening timing of the Fair Grove market.

"The food is good, and I don't have to cook when I get home," she says.

While the open days and hours differ from market to market, the purpose is a unified one, says Peggy Schletty, manager of Fair Grove's farmers market and past president of the Missouri Farmers' Market Association.

"Local farmers markets are a venue for consumers to meet and talk to the farmer who has grown the fresh vegetables or fruit they are buying to eat," Schletty says, "and provides a means for the local small farmer to market their products directly to you, the consumer."

You can buy fresh produce and fruit that was likely picked within the last 12 hours, she explains.

In turn, Schletty says, the farmers are able to keep doing what they love, which sustains the local economy and agriculture.

Henry Beersman, administrative assistant of the Greater Springfield Farmers Market, says many of the 99 vendors who sell at the Battlefield Mall parking lot location every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday morning pick their garden truck either late the night before or often begin picking around 3 a.m. on market day — hours before the market's official 8:30 a.m. opening time.