

Many gardening enthusiasts start a new gardening season with plans for growing a vegetable garden. Unfortunately, sometimes it doesn't happen due to unforeseen reasons. Now that we are well into July, the opportunity to plant a spring garden is gone. Those fortunate individuals who planted a spring garden are now enjoying fresh produce.

From the home garden, one is able to harvest mature vegetables that produce ideal flavor and proper nourishment. Let's face it; there is nothing like the fresh taste of homegrown garden produce. Take a moment and imagine the sweet taste of a freshly husked ear of sweet corn or savor the smell of freshly picked strawberries. Just thinking about such delights makes me hungry.

Fortunately, Rita and I were able to plant our spring vegetable garden. No pun intended, but we are now enjoying the fruits of our labors. If you missed such an opportunity, don't fret. I have good news. I know a great way for consumers to obtain fresh produce — it is through one's local farmers' market.

For those living in the Kearney area, I suggest taking advantage of the Kearney Area Farmers' Market. This non-profit organization has been around since the 1970s. Its membership consists of thirty-three vendors marketing an assortment of high-quality, locally-grown fresh produce and other food-based products. This year's market remains open until October. The market is located at 4915 Second Avenue in the parking lot of the Hilltop Mall. Hours of operation are Monday and Wednesday from 3:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. and on Saturday from 8:00 a.m. until noon.

For those not living in the Kearny area, knowing elsewhere to shop is conveniently located at your fingertips. The Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA) created the Nebraska Farmers' Market Online Database. This online, interactive database is designed to make it easier for consumers to find local produce and to create more market opportunities for Nebraska produce vendors.

The database consists of 100 farmers' markets and over 600 produce growers. The markets are searchable by market name, city, or county. Each market lists the market manager's name, contact information, and who sells at the market. Individual produce grower search fields include market name, address, city, state,

zip code, county, phone, and (if available) fax, email, web site, outlets through which produce is sold (including the names and locations of farmers' markets and/or roadside stands), and products sold.

As mentioned earlier, the database is designed to make it easier for consumers, as well as retailers, to find local produce growers and farmers' markets across Nebraska.

The database can be accessed at <http://ne.gov/go/neproduce> Individuals without online access can receive information about the location of farmers' markets in their area by contacting the Nebraska Department of Agriculture at 800-422-6692. Farmers' market managers and fresh produce growers who have not already submitted information for the database are encouraged to contact Casey Foster with NDA's Ag Promotion and Development Focus Area at 800-422-6692.

Oh, and by the way, even if you did not plant a spring vegetable garden, opportunity is just around the corner. In the not too distant future, it soon will be time to plant a late summer/fall garden- more about that in a week or two. In the meantime, visit a local farmers' market and reap the benefits of savoring fresh, homegrown produce.