

Food Facts & Figures

Pondering Your Produce Picks Answers About Fruits and Vegetables

(NAPSA)—Here's food for thought: Local stores carry such a wide array of fresh produce, a smart consumer can get the highest quality at the best price. Knowing the answers to these commonly asked questions about choosing fruits and vegetables can help you when you shop.

Q: *What should I look for in fresh produce?*

A: We've all seen those shoppers who carefully examine, sniff, shake and tap produce before they buy it. The most important consideration for whole produce, however, is to avoid bruises and damaged spots, which can indicate rough or unsanitary transport. As for the best level of ripeness, it just depends on when you plan to use the purchase—tonight, tomorrow, or later in the week.

Q: *What about when buying fresh-cut produce?*

A: In addition to looking at the "best before" date, make sure fresh-cut produce is refrigerated or surrounded by ice where it's sold. Also, make sure the packaging is airtight and free of any dents or rips.

Q: *Should I look for domestic or imported produce, or doesn't it matter?*

A: This depends on the quality you see from day to day and the time of year. Domestic isn't necessarily better. For example, produce grown in Mexico for export meets



Savvy shoppers seek eye-catching produce without bruises or blemishes.

all U.S. standards for food safety, says Lee Frankel, president of the Fresh Produce Association of the Americas. "Mexican bulk produce is packaged and transported quickly, with cleanliness and atmospheric conditions controlled at every step of the way," he adds. "In fact, it often undergoes even stricter quality and safety assurances than U.S. produce does, because it gets inspected as it crosses the border."

Q: *Where does most of our produce come from?*

A: This depends on the time of year. Mexico is the number one exporter of produce to the U.S., and provides 60 percent of this country's fruits and vegetables during the winter. At other times, domestic produce may be more prevalent—it just depends on what produce buyers decide is the best quality and value from day to day.