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Farmers markets know how to keep customers safe. Overland Park's should open.

BY KATHERINE KELLY SPECIAL TO THE STAR

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Last week, [The Kansas City Star Editorial Board lauded the Overland Park Farmers Market](#) for delaying its seasonal opening during this COVID-19 shutdown. The editorial expressed concerns that lacked a broader assessment of the risks that all producers face in getting food to the people who need it. It also overlooked the benefits that are unique to locally-produced food and the farmers markets that sell it.

In a time when we are all focused on individual and community health and the greater threat posed by pre-existing medical conditions, the factors we weigh in determining what is safe are complicated and evolving. The stark disparities in the economic and geographic realities many residents of our urban communities face make access to good food that supports physical health particularly important to them. It is critical in these times to have a diversity of settings for people to obtain high quality, nutrient dense food — the type of food that local producers are experts at bringing them. Farmers markets are an important component of a healthy, affordable food supply chain, and encouraging any farmers market not to open its doors does the community a major disservice.

Grocery stores sell food. Farmers markets sell food. We need and benefit from a diversity of options in getting the food we need. This pandemic has taught us that redundancies are a strength, and that we need more dispersed and flexible supply chains and access points.

Farmers markets are also places where low-income families can and do use their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, formerly known as food stamps, to purchase fresh produce, free range eggs, cheeses and meats. Programs such as Cultivate KC's Double Up Food Bucks double the value of SNAP dollars, giving consumers extra purchasing power to buy fruits and vegetables. The growing number of people who need assistance in our suffering economy would benefit from the ability to stretch their money to include healthy local produce.