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Maryland Farmers Markets Operations During COVID-19 State of Emergency **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

As a farmers market vendor...

If I am a vendor at a farmers market, what do I need to do to protect myself, my employees, and the public from COVID-19?

All Marylanders are advised to take precautions to slow the spread of COVID-19. Any place where people congregate is a possible opportunity for COVID-19 to spread. It is absolutely essential that farmers and farmers markets do what they can to reduce the risk of transmission. Vendors are advised to:

- Keep customers from grouping too close to one another and to staff.
- Provide signage that urges customers to keep a 6-foot distance away from others, and discouraging groups of 10 or more from assembling together in one area.
- Space the checkout stations 6 feet or more apart. If space is limited, limit checkout to one person at a time.
- Keep your staff 6 feet apart from one another.
- Do not let anyone work who is sick or is experiencing fever, body aches, nausea, cough, sore throat, or shortness of breath or may have been exposed to individuals with these symptoms.
- If a worker or manager becomes sick during the work day, have them isolate themselves from staff and customers immediately.
- If someone becomes sick while you are working, and you are physically near them (less than 6 feet) for more than 3 minutes without protective equipment like masks, gloves, and eye protection, you may have been exposed to the virus. You should immediately isolate yourself at home and call your healthcare provider.
- Require staff to follow CDC recommendations on the use of [cloth face coverings](#).

Review the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) [interim guidance](#) for businesses and employers.

Additional information for businesses on planning and responding to COVID-19 is available on Maryland's Business Express [website](#).

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) has provided specific guidance on food safety [here](#).

How do I prepare my stand at the farmers market?

- Pre-bag/package items in single use containers to minimize hand contact with produce. Use single-use bulk containers when possible. Clean reusable bulk containers thoroughly by first using detergent and water then a food contact surface approved sanitizer before reuse. Use disposable liners in reusable containers.
- Minimize produce's direct contact with the stand, surfaces, and customers.
- Clean and sanitize transport vehicles and minimize direct contact of produce with transport vehicles.
- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water if available, or use hand sanitizer before handling produce.
- Maintain a clean and sanitized food stand. This includes all food contact surfaces and frequently touched surfaces. Consider a more frequent cleaning schedule.

General cleaning and disinfection procedures and guidelines are provided on the CDC [website](#).

How do I prepare my staff?

- Have clear policies on illness and COVID-19. No employee or manager should work if ill or has been exposed to someone who is ill. Employees and managers should check themselves for symptoms of COVID-19 (*fever, cough, flu-like symptoms*). All employees should notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.
- If a member of the work crew becomes ill and other workers are 6 feet or closer to the worker for more than 3 minutes while the person is experiencing symptoms, those workers should immediately isolate themselves at home and call their healthcare provider.
- If workers develop COVID-19 — either suspected, diagnosed by a medical professional, or confirmed by laboratory diagnosis — they should be isolated at home and not allowed to return to work until:
 - There has been no fever for at least 72 hours (*that is three full days of no fever without the use of medicine that reduces fevers*); **AND**
 - Other symptoms have improved (*cough may persist for 1–2 weeks*); **AND**
 - At least 7 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.
- Require staff to follow CDC recommendations on the use of [cloth face coverings](#).

Review the CDC's [interim guidance](#) for businesses and employers. Additional information for businesses on planning and responding to COVID-19 is available on Maryland's Business Express [website](#).

Do I need to sanitize my stand?

- Routinely clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using standard cleaning practices.
- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has emphasized the need to maintain clean and sanitized facilities, including food contact surfaces. Consider a more frequent cleaning schedule.

Check out the CDC's [website](#) for general cleaning and disinfection guidelines. Review the CDC's [interim guidance](#) for businesses and employers.

What food safety practices should I implement on the farm to minimize the risk for COVID-19 transmission to my customers from produce?

- Although the CDC has indicated, "Currently there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food" they have also indicated, "It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads."
- Basic employee health and hygiene practices such as frequent hand washing, glove policies, restroom use, clean clothes, and other basic health and hygiene practices help reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Use of disposable gloves and more frequent changing of gloves when handling fruits and vegetables and currency is another additional safeguard that can be implemented.
- Sick workers should stay home and should **NOT** be reassigned to non-food contact duties.

All growers that need food safety information on farm worker health and hygiene training or other produce safety questions, please email produce.safety@maryland.gov. Additional information is available on the Maryland Department of Agriculture's (MDA) [website](#).

I have extra fruit and vegetables, can I still make jams and jellies and other value-added products to sell at the farmers market?

- **YES.** Extra fruit can be used to make jams and jellies for sale at farmers markets.
- Fruits must be high-acid with a natural pH of 4.6 or less (*i.e.*, *apples, apricots, blackberries, boysenberries, cherries, grapes, peaches, etc.*)
- Jams and jellies must be labeled with: the common name of the food; the list of ingredients (*and sub-ingredients*) in descending order by weight; a declaration of artificial color or flavor and chemical preservatives; a declaration of the quantity of the package

contents by weight in both metric and English units; the name and place of business of the manufacturer, packer, or distributor; nutrition labeling if not exempt; and the name of the food source for each major food allergen (*unless the food source is already part of the common or usual name*).

- If you are currently licensed by MDH as an on-farm home processor or food processor, extra fruits and vegetables can be used to make those value-added products that have been approved by the department. More information here:
 - [Processing and Selling Value-Added Food Products in Maryland](#) [PDF]

I want to direct ship to consumers. Are there any regulations that I need to follow?

- Fresh produce can be direct shipped to consumers in Maryland without a license. Shipments to other states may be restricted in some cases.
- Meat and poultry inspected by USDA can be direct shipped to consumers. Those currently licensed by MDH as an on-farm storage processor are required to:
 - Notify MDH by emailing mdh.envhealth@maryland.gov that you intend to direct ship and provide your on-farm storage processor license number in the email;
AND
 - Provide the process that will be used to maintain temperature during shipment.
- Poultry and rabbit producers regulated by MDA can directly ship meat to consumers in Maryland **ONLY** and are required to notify the department by emailing Deanna Baldwin at deanna.baldwin@maryland.gov when they intend to ship and provide the process they will use to maintain temperature during shipment.
- Cottage food businesses can ship properly-labeled, allowable foods (*high-acid jams and jellies and non-potentially hazardous baked goods*) to customers in Maryland. Please visit the Maryland's Cottage Food Businesses [website](#) for additional information.

Can I still sample my product at the farmers market?

Generally, the more food is handled, the more likely it is to be a route of transmission for viruses like COVID-19. **MDH strongly advises against food sampling during the state of emergency.**

Can my customers pre-order and pick-up at the farmers market?

Customers can pre-order and pick-up products regulated by MDA or MDH, including table eggs, poultry and rabbit meat (*from MDA-certified Food Safety Inspection Service exempt producers*), produce, meats processed at a U.S. Department of Agriculture facility, and cheeses. Follow all recommendations for social distancing and other public health precautions when handling orders.

I am a producer and I have partnered with a local restaurant. Can they sell their meals at the farmers market?

- Refer to the [Governor's Executive Orders](#) and Maryland's Business Express website to determine what businesses can remain open during the emergency: [Maryland Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Information for Business](#).
- Local restaurants must contact their local health department to obtain a Temporary Food Service Facility License in order to participate in a farmers market.
 - For contact information for local health departments, please visit: coronavirus.maryland.gov/pages/lhd-resources.
 - To contact your local health department's food program, please visit: phpa.health.maryland.gov/OEHFP/OFPCHS/Pages/LHD-Food-Contact.aspx.
Please note that some local health departments have reduced their services during the state of emergency.

Can other vendors besides agricultural producers sell at farmers markets (i.e., crafts, soaps, woodworking, etc.)? Can I sell bedding plants, cut flowers, or potted flowers at farmers markets?

Refer to the [Governor's Executive Orders](#) and Maryland's Business Express [website](#) to determine what businesses can remain open during the state of emergency.

Is there an approved list of food products that can or cannot be sold at the farmers market?

- Raw agricultural products, products that are not potentially hazardous and do not require refrigeration that are processed in a licensed food processing plant, and MDA-regulated eggs can be sold at farmers markets.
- Additionally, farmers and individuals offering cottage foods have restrictions on what types of foods can be offered. More information here:
 - **MDH** – [Maryland's Cottage Foods Businesses](#)
 - **MDH** – [Processing and Selling Value-Added Food Products in Maryland](#) [PDF]
 - Restaurants and food vendors that are not farmers or individuals selling cottage foods, should contact their local health department for food licensing requirements in order to participate in the market.
 - For contact information for local health departments, please visit: coronavirus.maryland.gov/pages/lhd-resources.
 - To contact your local health department's food program, please visit: phpa.health.maryland.gov/OEHFP/OFPCHS/Pages/LHD-Food-Contact.aspx. **Please note that some local health departments have reduced their services during the state of emergency.**

As a farmers market manager...

Do I have to monitor the number of customers in the market at the same time?

- Businesses are encouraged to monitor crowd size and encourage social distancing. Posting signs reminding the public to social distance is advisable. Signage related to COVID-19, and social distancing are available on the MDH Coronavirus 2019 resource [webpage](#).
- For current social distancing guidelines refer to the CDC's [interim guidance](#) for business and employees.
- Markets should require staff, vendors and customers to follow CDC recommendations on the use of [cloth face coverings](#).

How much space should I have between vendors' stalls/tables to ensure social distancing?

Keep customers from grouping too close to one another, around staff and produce. Provide signage that urges customers to keep a 6-foot distance away from others, and discouraging groups of 10 or more from assembling together in one area. Space the checkout stations 6 feet or more apart. If space is limited, limit checkout to one person at a time.

Read the CDC's [interim guidance](#) for business and employees to stay up-to-date with current social distancing guidelines.

Will farmers accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) at the market?

MDA is working with the Maryland Department of Human Services to keep them informed of all individual farmers accepting SNAP as well as farmers markets accepting SNAP. Farmers markets and farmers accepting SNAP are identified on MDA's website and in the [Maryland Farmers Market Directory](#).

Will farmers accept FMNP checks at the market?

At this time, Women Infants and Children (WIC) Farmers Market Nutrition Program checks and Senior FMNP checks will be issued as scheduled. Farmers will be accepting them. Markets with farmers accepting checks are identified in the [Maryland Farmers Market Directory](#) and on MDA's website.