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COVID-19 and Farmers Markets

April 21, 2020 | Food Safety

On Sunday, March 22, 2020, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine, Lt. Governor Jon Husted, and Ohio Department of Health Director Amy Acton, M.D. MPH, announced that Ohio was under a "Stay at Home" order unless engaged in essential work or activity. To the relief of farmers, food producers and farmers market operators, farmers markets have been designated as essential under section 12.b.

With that said, and as long as COVID-19 poses the level of risk we are currently experiencing, farmers markets must operate under modified conditions. The rigorous regulations that normally govern farmers markets exist to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, meaning that you, farmers market managers and vendors, are well versed and prepared to enact additional precautions.

Farmers market operators, farmers and food producers care deeply about the communities they serve, and one another. With added precautions, new procedures and proactive steps to protect market customers, vendors, and staff, a farmers market is permitted to operate under the essential category identified by Governor DeWine.

The content in this document has been collected from farmers markets across the state and the country who are adapting operations to comply with public health official's guidance and requirements. The content has not been approved by any single public health authority, but instead lists methods and tools being used by those actively managing and selling at farmers markets. As the landscape and recommendations change, this document will be updated and informed by public health guidance for grocery and farmers markets, as well as by those market managers implementing the guidance through operational changes.

Together with state partners, the Ohio Farmers Market Network recommends modifying operational conditions including, but not limited to:

- Limit the sale of food to whole, uncut produce and packaged food items. No on-site food preparation will be allowed.
- All ready-to-eat foods must be pre-packaged before arriving at market.
- No sampling of any food is permitted.
- Limit crowds by staggering entry to provide for social distancing of customers.
- Require space between vendor stands of at least 6 feet.
- Provide handwashing stations for customers and vendors where possible. At a minimum, provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol for customers to use prior to entering market space and throughout.
- Cancel all extracurricular activities including music, children's activities, cooking demos, etc.
- Group like items together (ie. all produce, all bread and baked goods, etc.) to reduce the amount of time searching the market for particular products.
- Ensure that isles are at least 12 feet wide to provide for ample distancing around vendor spaces.
- Promote alternative sales outlets and methods such as online ordering and delivery, pre-order for pick up, etc.
- Consider using tape or chalk to indicate 6 foot distances in and throughout the market space.
- When possible, offer separate operating hours for vulnerable shopping populations.
- Require vendors, employees and volunteers to wear a cloth face covering as recommended by CDC guidelines.

Employee, volunteer and vendor policies:

- Sick employees, volunteers and vendors must stay home and not return until they are free of fever for at least 72 hours without fever-reducing medication and improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath) and, at least 7 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.
- Those who appear to be ill upon arrival to market or become sick during the day should be sent home immediately.
- Recommend all vendors wear gloves, regardless of whether or not they handle food.
- Designate one person to handle food and another person to handle payment transactions when possible.
- Take the temperature of all employees, volunteers and vendors upon arrival, confirming that no person has a temperature of more than 100.4°F [38° C]. If an employee, volunteer or vendor should register a temperature of 100.4°F [38° C], he/she/they will be sent home immediately.
- Wear a cloth face covering as recommended by CDC guidelines.

Vendor policies:

- All vendors must sanitize their stands regularly, primarily wiping down tables, terminals, cash boxes, etc. Familiarize yourself with the [CDC Guidelines](#) to clean and disinfect surfaces.
- Discontinue use of tablecloths and other porous materials such as baskets.
- Recommend using only materials that can be immediately washed and sanitized after use.
- Clean your hands frequently, ideally between each customer transaction. Follow [CDC recommendations for cleaning your hands](#).
- Use only new plastic bags for the packaging and sale of goods.
- Promote alternative sales outlets and methods such as online ordering and delivery, pre-order for pick up, etc.
- Consider purchasing a contactless chip reader to process customer sales.
- Wear a [cloth face covering as recommended by CDC guidelines](#).

Customer engagement:

- Customers must stay home and not return until they are free of fever for at least 72 hours without fever-reducing medication and improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath) and, at least 7 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.
- Encourage shoppers to prioritize only essential food purchasing and discontinue social gatherings.
- Encourage shoppers to send only one member from each household to the market in order to curtail crowds.
- Encourage shoppers to practice the recommended 6' social distancing from one another while at the market.
- Discourage shoppers from touching any products, rather allowing the vendor to select and bag products customers wish to purchase.
- Clean your hands frequently. Follow CDC recommendations for cleaning your hands.
- Discontinue use of reusable bags and materials at this time. Accept only new plastic bags from your farmers and food producers.
- When possible, order directly from farmers and food producers for delivery or pick-up.
- Wear a [cloth face covering as recommended by CDC guidelines](#).

