



COVID-19 and Virginia's Farmers Markets Protocols

We believe that farmers markets provide vital food access services to our community, and we will continue to do so as safely as possible. The health, safety and overall wellbeing of our farmers market community is always our top priority.

With this in mind, we have been closely monitoring the rapidly-changing situation around COVID-19 (commonly referred to as coronavirus), responding to new information as it arises and preparing for all possible scenarios, with the goal of farmer's markets continuing to safely serve Virginia's communities.

As the spread of COVID-19 has become a reality in Virginia, market operators are developing communications, preparing contingency plans and, in some regions, beginning to modify operations. Some public health officials may require that markets close until the outbreak diminishes.

To help market operators adapt to this rapidly changing economic and public health situation, the Virginia Farmers Market Association has compiled information and recommendations from farmers markets, state associations, health departments and the Centers for Disease Control.

Farmers Markets Are Essential: Our open-air markets are important and necessary food outlets for community members from all economic backgrounds across Virginia to purchase healthy, fresh, nutritious food.

Farmers Markets Allow You to Shop Direct: Shopping at our markets means that you can purchase fresh, nutritious food from as close to the source as possible.

Farmers Markets Support Our Region: Farmers markets are essential to the livelihood of farmers and food producers. Shopping at farmers markets means you are supporting your local economy, which is especially critical in this time of uncertainty.

There is no evidence that food is a source or transmission route for the virus. To keep our farmers, producers, and shoppers safe, we are encouraging the following actions at Virginia's markets:

- Our farmers markets are vibrant community spaces where many shoppers gather to socialize in addition to purchasing groceries. However, for the time being, **we ask shoppers to prioritize essential food purchasing and eliminate social gatherings at the market.**
- Farmers markets vendors will **only be food /produce vendors and ready-made food will be carry out only.**
- If a vendor is sick or has been exposed to (or suspects they have been exposed to) COVID-19, **ask them not to attend the market.** We require vendors and customers to take note if they are experiencing symptoms such as **fever or dry cough**, to **stay home** to take care of themselves and protect others if they are sick.
- Market managers will **wipe down commonly used services**, such as the market information table, EBT redemption devices (phones, card swipers), and have hand sanitizer available.
- Market managers will **mandate that Vendors wear gloves** and change them frequently.
- All markets will **suspend sampling of products** at the market and to restrict access to condiments, silverware, cup lids, etc. unless requested.
- Markets will **send an email/post on social media** before the market **informing customers of the new guidelines** and asking folks who are sick to stay home.

- Customers will practice **“social distancing” – maintaining a space of about six feet from each other** – and markets will inform customers of this policy as they enter the market; have signage, and volunteers, if possible, spread throughout the market reminding customers of the practice.
- Market managers will temporarily **redesign market locations to limit contact** and still allow people to purchase from vendors. The **space between vendors will be increased** to reduce crowding to 10+ feet with no more than 2 customers at a booth at a time.
- Customers will not handle any items on the vendors’ tables but, instead, will just point at what they want and **let vendors bag their purchases**; market managers will provide vendors with signage informing customers of this policy.
- Market managers are asked to rescind/relax the policy about not allowing purchases until opening bell to **prevent the long lines** that form at vendors’ booths before the market opens; instead, allow early arrivals to make purchases.
- Vendors are asked **not to use cloth tablecloths** to make it easier to sanitize surfaces; or, if using a tablecloth, to lay a sheet of plastic over the top of vendor tables or cloth tablecloths which can be wiped down with sanitizer.
- We are encouraging vendors to have **one person to handle money** and **another to handle product**.
- **Contactless pay options** are easy and convenient and minimize the need to interact with credit cards or cash. Customers will be encouraged to use Apple Pay or similar. We encourage Vendors to **round their prices to the nearest dollar** so they can stop accepting coins (in the laboratory the virus has survived on coins). Vendors handling money should not touch food products until they have **washed their hands**.
- As possible, have volunteers stop by the vendor booths to relieve them so they can **leave and wash their hands**.
- **Hand sanitizer should be ubiquitous** throughout the market, at market manager tables, vendor tables and also in other locations throughout market.
- If possible, vendors should pre-package produce, offering it in closed containers or single-use containers.
- **All special events and programming**, including POP programming, food and cooking demos, music, etc. **are suspended**. Farmers Markets will be for **food sales only**.

The COVID-19 virus is thought to be spread through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes and can be killed using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe. If you are an at-risk population (particularly older adults or immunocompromised individuals) we encourage you to prioritize your own health and minimize your exposure to large groups of people. Consider asking a friend or family member to pick up your market items for you.

Stay Informed

Farmers market operators should consult their local health departments and the Virginia Department of Health <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/> for current public health information pertinent to their community. Regularly read the updates and recommendations available on their website and sign up for any alerts offered by local or county-level health officials. The CDC has issued interim guidance for large public gatherings with useful steps. Highlights include:

- Establish relationships with key community partners and stakeholders such as local health departments and collaborate with them on broader planning efforts.
- Virginia has declared a state of emergency in response to COVID-19. A state of emergency is a procedural step that allows state and local health officials to access additional resources for identifying, treating and preventing the spread of the disease.

Proper Cleaning Protocol

Vendors must clean and sanitize their supplies and equipment regularly:

- For surfaces that will be in contact with food or food products (such as produce bins, coolers, boxes, tools), use detergents and sanitizing solutions that are food safe:
 1. Clean the surface with a detergent (for example, Dawn dish detergent) and rinse thoroughly.
 2. Use a sanitizer product that is approved for use on food contact surfaces. (Consult this list: <https://producesafetyalliance.cornell.edu/sites/producesafetyalliance.cornell.edu/files/shared/documents/PSA-Labeled-Sanitizers-for-Produce.xlsx>).
 3. Follow the label instructions for the sanitizer you use when mixing, applying and storing it. Some sanitizers require contact time on the surface to be effective, and others require a rinse step.
 4. Allow the surface to air dry.
- To clean and sanitize surfaces that will not come into contact with food or food products (such as chairs, tables, truck beds):
 1. Clean the surface with a detergent (for example, Dawn dish detergent) and rinse thoroughly.
 2. Use a product that the EPA has approved for use against viruses and other emerging pathogens: https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-03/documents/sars-cov-2-list_03-03-2020.pdf.
 3. Follow the label instructions for the sanitizer you use when mixing, applying and storing it. Some sanitizers require contact time on the surface to be effective, and others require a rinse step.
 4. Allow the surface to air dry. Wear disposable gloves when cleaning and sanitizing surfaces.

Additional Resources

CDC Link

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/summary.html>

Virginia Department of Health

<http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/>

FEMA Guidance for COVID - 19 Preparedness

<https://www.ready.gov/>

Please take good care of yourselves, your family and friends, and your communities as we all navigate this immense challenge together.