



COVID-19 GUIDANCE: Pick-Your-Own (PYO)/Agricultural Tourism

May 1, 2020

The RI Department of Environmental Management in conjunction with the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) issues this guidance to all Pick-Your-Own and Agricultural Tourism business in order that these operations may open once in compliance with the protocols in this guidance.

Farm Pick-Your-Own (PYO) and Agricultural Tourism Activities in Rhode Island

Farm Pick-Your-Own (PYO) and Agricultural Tourism Activities are important revenue streams for many Rhode Island fruit and vegetable farms. The Rhode Island Division of Agriculture, along with its State and Federal partners, are focused on enabling farms to continue to sell safe, healthy and local produce during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) response.

While the production of fresh fruits and vegetables are critical to the health and well-being of the citizens of Rhode Island, many farms must modify several components of their operations based on COVID-19 guidelines issued by the State.

PROTOCOLS AND GUIDANCE

The following protocols and guidance apply to all Pick-Your-Own and Agricultural Tourism operations beginning on the date of issuance until further notice. These policies must be in place in order to operate. The DEM Division of Agriculture staff will work closely with all Pick-Your-Own and Agricultural Tourism operations to inform, educate and enforce these protocols. DEM will collaborate with RIDOH and local law enforcement to make random inspections and adjust or shut down operations at any operation that does not comply. It is essential, in order for the following protocols to be effective, that all relevant businesses in Rhode Island adhere to the same standards regardless of membership affiliation, business structure or size.

The specific, required protocols are specified below.

Are farm events and tours allowed during the COVID-19 response in Rhode Island?

No, farms that conduct agricultural tourism events, such as corn-mazes, hay rides and other activities, including but not limited to educational sessions, farm tours, flower picking and other activities where groups of people congregate or are in close proximity are prohibited from conducting such activities while the COVID-19 response is ongoing and this guidance is in place in the State.

Are farms that support Pick-Your Own activities allowed during the COVID-19

Response in Rhode Island? Yes, with certain required modifications. Our aim continues to be the support of the many farms that will be entering the production season, so they are able to provide fresh farm products to the residents of Rhode Island.

Guidance for Farm Pick-Your-Own (PYO) activities to limit the spread of COVID-19

- 1) Social Distancing on PYO Farms:** Farms that offer PYO activities as part of their operations must maintain robust social distancing guidelines as issued in this Guidance document or any other State or local Guidance. Farm/PYO managers and staff must take measures to limit the number of PYO customers who can enter fields, farm areas and orchards at one time based on visitation rates and venues designated at the farm to accommodate visitation. Farms should consider PYO by appointment, or having customers make call-ahead reservations in order to limit the number of visitors and better monitor customer field activity.

As mentioned above, farms that conduct agricultural tourism events, such as corn-mazes, hayrides and other activities, including but not limited to educational sessions, farm tours, and flower picking are prohibited from such activities when the COVID-19 response is ongoing and this guidance is in place in the State.

PYO operations must remind customers of social distancing, including maintaining a space of at least six feet from one another while on farm. All staff must wear face coverings/masks while on the farm picking fruit and/or vegetables.

Signage at prominent locations, both at registration counters where payment is received, and at stations where harvest boxes, bags or other containers are made available to the public, as well as in fields, must clearly indicate social distancing guidelines, as well as the procedures and rules established by the farm for the conduct of PYO activities. Farm and PYO managers and staff must reinforce both State and proprietary guidance and rules verbally when necessary. As a reminder for farm staff and customers:

- 1) Everyone must maintain social distancing space of at least six feet from one another.

- 2) Anyone who is sick, whether customer or employee, is prohibited from any farm activity and instructed to isolate at home.
- 3) Farm employees who are customer facing must wear a cloth face covering.
- 4) Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- 5) Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
- 6) Cover your cough or sneeze with your elbow or a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- 7) Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces twice daily, at a minimum.

2) PYO Activity Plans: Farms that are conducting PYO activities are required to develop an activity plan that identifies the PYO operations rules, by crop, that supports State COVID-19 guidance in place, as well as rules that are established by the farm. The plan must be in place prior to the start of any PYO activity beginning. Plans must be kept at the farm or PYO location and made available in the case of a complaint, or site visit by local or state officials. The plan must include the following information:

- 1) Location of parking areas and number of spaces available.
- 2) Location of fields/crops available for PYO.
- 3) Date range of PYO activities by crop.
- 4) Primary access points for PYO areas.
- 5) Number of customers and staff allowed in field/areas/orchards and field rows at any one time.
- 6) Number and location(s) of hand washing/hand sanitizing stations.

3) Farm Communication to Customers: Ensure farm customers are aware of steps that are being taken to keep them safe while on the farm. Ensure that they know the rules associated with PYO activities, where hand washing and sanitizing stations are located, and who they should contact if a problem or questions arise. Have clear signs that display farm protocol to customers. In addition to on-farm signage, farm owners should communicate the farm PYO plan on social media outlets, farm websites and/or any other online listings, for example Farm Fresh RI listings.

4) Customers in the PYO Field/Area/Orchard: Customers and staff must be allowed in PYO areas in limited numbers, allowing for the maintenance of social distancing and safe harvest of crops. Farms must implement practices that apply guidelines by minimizing not only the number of customers allowed in a field, area or orchard, but

also by minimizing the number of customers in each field row during picking. Farms should also utilize one-way flow in field rows to minimize the potential for contact during picking. This can be accomplished through both verbal direction by farm staff and through signage placed at the entry point to PYO areas and rows. Children must stay within close proximity of an accompanying adult and supervised at all times.

- 5) PYO Staff and Customer use of Cloth Face Coverings:** Customer facing staff at any PYO must utilize cloth face coverings while harvesting crops at PYO locations in accordance with RI Executive Orders, as well as any other state and local guidance and requirements. All PYO owners must provide face coverings for their employees. Face coverings can include scarves, bandanas and other homemade and non-factory-made masks. This is particularly important for certain PYO crops that place customers in close proximity to produce on the plant. Additionally, PYO owners must take steps to remind customers to wear face coverings. That means you should be putting up signs at the door reminding customers to wear a face covering inside. Customers should utilize masks and face coverings that they bring with them to the farm.
- 6) Minimize the Number of Touches during PYO Activities:** Farm PYO managers and staff, as well as customers, must minimize the handling of produce during PYO activities. Farm/PYO managers and staff must facilitate reduced handling of produce by customers in the field. This can be accomplished through in-field monitoring, verbal reinforcement and signage of the PYO rules of the farm.
- 7) The Use of Reusable Harvest Bags/Containers and Boxes:** Farm staff, as well as PYO customers, shall not conduct the picking of produce if reusable harvest bags/containers and/or boxes are utilized until further notice. Farms must supply, to PYO customers, new single-use harvest bags/containers and boxes while COVID-19 response operations are ongoing in the State.
- 8) PYO Harvest Bag/Containers and Box Storage:** Harvest bags/containers and/or boxes used for PYO operations must be stored away from customer flow areas and should be covered by a plastic covering. Customers are not allowed to select or handle harvest containers utilized for PYO activities. Farms are encouraged to hand-out harvest containers upon registration or at primary access points in PYO areas.
- 9) Should farms be disinfecting PYO produce?** There is no indication that COVID-19 is transmitted via produce. The virus is thought to be spread mainly from person to person, [according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#). For most farms the level of operational change and amount of disinfectant needed to

disinfect produce is unrealistic. If you are using a chemical specifically designed for use on food, please follow the instructions located on the label of the product to find directions on the proper use of the product.

10) PYO Registration/Check-in Tables: PYO Farms must limit the use of tablecloths in order to make it easier to clean, sanitize and disinfect tables and contact surfaces, or utilize a sheet of clear plastic over the top of the tablecloth to facilitate maintenance. PYO farms must clean and sanitize displays and contact surfaces at increased intervals during PYO operations. Farms are recommended to discontinue the use of PYO display items and contact surfaces that cannot be cleaned, sanitized and disinfected. The virus that causes COVID-19 can be stable for several hours to days on surfaces, up to 24 hours on cardboard, and up to two to three days on plastic and stainless steel <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/new-coronavirus-stable-hours-surfaces>.

11) What should PYO Farms use for disinfection and sanitizing? The EPA has provided [a list of disinfectants for use against SARS-CoV-2](#), the virus that causes COVID-19. RIDOH requires regular cleaning with soap or other detergents and recommends the use of disinfectants that have been approved by the EPA for use against SARS-CoV-2. Employers should maintain records that include documentation of date, time, location, and procedures for all cleaning activities.

12) Can PYO Farms use bleach as a sanitizing agent on contact surfaces? Yes, you can also follow the CDC guidance and use a [mixture of bleach](#) and water (5 tbsf per gallon or 4 tsp per quart).

13) Hand Washing/Hygiene Stations: PYO farms must make available hand washing stations and supplies for farm staff and customers to promote personal hygiene and issued guidance during the COVID-19 response. Portable sinks equipped with soap, hand sanitizers and paper towels must be made available in amounts relative to the total number of anticipated visitors. Hand washing stations can be brought in by the farm to augment current facilities for customer use. Hand sanitizer stations can be useful, though should not be used as a replacement for handwashing stations.

14) Gloves: Farm staff must utilize disposable gloves or utensils for handling all ready-to-eat foods during PYO operations. Gloves can provide a barrier between hands and produce, preventing transmission of pathogens. They can also be a good reminder not to touch your face. Remember however, that gloves can be a source of contamination if not used properly. Follow [CDC glove removal guidelines](#) and please

remember to [follow hand washing guidelines](#) recommended by the CDC before putting on gloves and between glove change-outs.

15) PYO Farm Money Handling: Farms are strongly encouraged to minimize cash transactions. If more than one person is working the table, vendors should designate one person to handle money and another to handle produce/product. Vendors can round their prices to the nearest dollar so they can reduce the acceptance of coins and minimize the handling of change. Clean and sanitize credit card readers and POS equipment periodically and between transactions. Online payment application platforms used on smartphones, such as Venmo or PayPal, are a viable option to facilitate transactions at markets and farm stands.

16) Establish Relationships: Communicate with key community partners, such as local town officials, and collaborate with them on broader planning efforts during the COVID-19 response.

17) Plan for Cancellations: Identify actions to take if you need to cancel your PYO activity, such as communications with customers and staff. Share planned closure communication strategy and channels with community partners in advance.

18) PYO Customer/Consumer Education and Outreach: Keep farm staff and customers updated on PYO information and guidelines and ensure people who are sick stay home. Emphasize that protecting public health is paramount to your farm, and describe any changes to PYO operations to prevent the spread of infection. Use health messages and materials developed by credible public health sources such as the RI Division of Agriculture, RIDOH, or the CDC to encourage your farm staff and customers to practice good personal hygiene habits.

Background on COVID-19

COVID-19 is the disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (“the novel coronavirus”). For additional information about COVID-19, including the latest guidance, visit www.health.ri.gov/covid or <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

Foodborne Exposure to COVID-19 (As of 3/24/2020)

Unlike foodborne gastrointestinal (GI) viruses like norovirus and hepatitis A that often make people ill through contaminated food, SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19, is a virus that

causes respiratory illness. Foodborne exposure to this virus is not known to be a route of transmission.

The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person. This includes between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet), and through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. 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 mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes. This is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads, but we are still learning more about this virus.

Please visit <https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/food-safety-and-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19> for further information on COVID-19 and food.

Future Updates

Our aim continues to be the support of the many farms that will be entering the production season and of the supply of fresh fruits and vegetables in Rhode Island. Further guidance will be issued as the growing season commences and issued guidance will be extended or rescinded based on COVID-19 response operations in the State.

Please contact Ananda Fraser, Produce Safety Program Coordinator, at (401) 222-2781 or via email at Ananda.Fraser@dem.ri.gov with any questions.

You may also sign up for the Produce Safety Program [newsletter](#) to receive regular updates on COVID-19 and other important events, resources, and other updates from the RI Division of Agriculture.