COVID-19 GUIDANCE*: Farmers’ Markets & On-Farm Markets

The Rhode Island Division of Agriculture recommends Farmers’ Markets and On-Farm Markets to adhere to the following guidance to limit exposure and risk related to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Farmers' markets and on-farm markets are additionally encouraged to follow the COVID-19 guidance for farm and distribution preparedness, in addition to the following recommendations developed for farmers' markets. As such, until COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, farmers’ markets and farm stands should focus on their essential roles as food distribution points and eliminate other activities such as entertainment, eat-in options, or other roles that might cause the congregation of customers.

1. Prepare market and individual stands
   - Consider delivery or pick-up options to limit person-to-person contact.
   - Consider pre-packaging bags of fruits, vegetables, and other items to limit shoppers’ handling of food and to keep customers moving along.
   - Consider alternate locations that could allow drive-through or pick-up.
   - Handwashing stations & sanitizer: It is vital to the health and safety of everyone at the market that handwashing stations and hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol be readily available. This includes having enough quantity of both to facilitate and encourage regular hand sanitizing of vendors and customers alike.
   - Consider putting up signs and information on websites and social media to explain any changes, delivery options, or extra precautions taken to limit exposure to COVID-19. Examples: Instruct customers not to handle food. Package cheese and eggs for customers, even if the cheese and eggs are individually packaged. Open egg cartons for customers to see the eggs they are getting instead of having them handle multiple cartons.
   - To limit crowds, separate stands at least six feet apart. Consider limiting the number of customers in your market at one time in the case of “panic shopping.”
   - If possible, have a different person handling products and handling money and instruct staff to wash or sanitize hands in between these tasks.
   - Remove tablecloths and sanitize tables regularly.

2. This Guidance has been approved by the Rhode Island Department of Health
• Eliminate samples. To minimize shared food contact surfaces, sampling should be prohibited throughout the entire market. This is to limit hand-to-mouth contact occurring at the markets.
• Eliminate eating areas and gently direct customers to take prepared foods home to avoid crowds.

2. Prepare Workforce

• Provide guidance for handwashing (such as time intervals) and handling materials. The Rhode Island Department of Health and U.S. Centers for Disease Control recommend washing hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds when available. If water and soap are not available, use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
• Stagger lunch times or provide additional space to increase distancing of employees.
• All sick employees need to stay at home.
• Inform employees where they can find sanitizing materials throughout on-farm contact points.
• Encourage employees to practice social distancing and avoid large gatherings to avoid risks for potential exposure during off hours.
• Encourage employees not to handle customers’ reusable bags and let customers pack their own bags.

3. Sanitize contact surfaces

• Frequently disinfect all door handles and knobs, credit card machines, shopping baskets, etc., at regular, pre-established time intervals.
• Frequently sanitize common gathering places such as restrooms, break areas, etc.
• Money handling: Procedures at the market should change to facilitate the minimal exchange of currency. Alternative methods include allowing pre-order and pre-payment of products, starting a tab for customers, or rounding up product prices to the nearest dollar. Also, before and after handling currency, gloves should be changed out and hands should be properly washed.

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