

NOFA-VT and the Vermont Farmers Market Association (VTFMA) take the health and safety of the public and Vermont farmers and food producers very seriously. We deeply appreciate the work of the administration to flatten the curve and limit the spread of COVID-19 to the greatest possible extent. At the same time, we believe it is critical that our farmers markets be allowed to continue providing direct access to locally produced, nutritious foods in a way that provides access for community members who rely on SNAP benefits, while also supporting the livelihoods of local farmers and food businesses. These objectives are especially important during the COVID-19 crisis to ensure a steady, reliable food supply to keep all Vermonters fed, thereby preventing an additional public health crisis.

Moving forward, we support a proposal that requires farmers markets to operate under drastically modified conditions that prevent mass gathering, enforce social distancing, and limit person to person contact. We are proposing that starting as soon as possible, farmers markets develop health and safety protocols on an individual basis, following the guidance below, and receive approval by VAAFM before continuing market operation.

The following practices around food safety and healthy behavior include some of the policies markets have already been working to put in place, along with recommended guidance from other statewide and national organizations and government partners.

Proposals that incorporate the following practices will be reviewed by VAAFM and VTFMA and considered for approval:

- **Modify general operations**
  - Offer online/phone ordering options for community members to pre-order for pick-up
  - Encourage customers to pre-order and pre-pay whenever possible
  - Suspend entertainment activities, children's activities, seating for consumption of prepared food, and associated components that encourage people to congregate
  - Pre-bag all loose produce and prohibit handling of product by anyone other than vendors
  - Open market pick-up times early to customers at higher risk: elderly, or those with weakened immune systems or respiratory conditions
  - Limit the number of surfaces in the market area
  - Only allow food vendors with raw or value-added products that are pre-packaged for off-site consumption and edible plant starts (i.e. no crafts)
  
- **Implement controlled social distancing**
  - Move indoor markets outside
  - Rope off market premises and limit access to a single entry and exit point
  - Prohibit on-premise consumption of food or drink, including all types of sampling and consumption of prepared food

- Monitor the entrance and exit to maintain a limited number of customers in the market area at a given time to ensure that customers are able to remain at least 6 feet apart. Refer to CDC guidelines for the recommended number of people allowed in a given space.
  - Ensure customers flow through the market in a single file line from entry to exit (e.g. redesign the market so that vendor booths are in a single row, L shape, or U shape) and create 6 feet distancing chalk lines/markers throughout the market area
  - Require vendor booths to be spaced at least 6 feet apart from each other
  - Create physical barriers (e.g. plexiglass, additional table, or rope) to ensure 6 feet spacing between vendor booths and customers
  - Encourage online/electronic/touchless payment whenever possible (e.g. Venmo or PayPal) and exact change for cash payments to eliminate the need for change to be made
  - Encourage shoppers to come to the market alone whenever possible to reduce the number of people in the market area and prohibit pets from the market area
  - Designate a market staff member to enforce customer compliance with social distancing
- **Utilize proper cleaning and sanitary protocols**
    - Ensure employees engage in good hygiene practices, including regular and thorough handwashing. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol
    - Make hand sanitizer or hand washing stations available at entry and exit points
    - Regularly clean AND disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces such as produce bins, tabletops, handles. Dirty surfaces can be cleaned with soap and water prior to disinfection. To disinfect, use products that meet EPA's criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, and are appropriate for the surface
    - Ensure all vendors wear masks and gloves while packaging orders and serving customers
- **Prepare and increase clear communication strategy**
    - Post signage instructing customers to frequently wash hands and provide hand washing instructions
    - Post signage prohibiting customers from congregating or lingering for social purposes, and reminding all to abide by 6 ft. social distancing guidelines
    - Post signage reminding customers to wash all produce before consumption
    - Prepare customers in advance to comply with new restrictions by posting them on social media, websites and in newsletters.
    - Caution sick or people who have been exposed to stay home.

We are proposing that the following process be put in place to ensure that farmers markets uphold public safety and health protocol:

- VAAFM and VTFMA should share the guidelines outlined above with the farmers market community and invite farmers markets to submit proposed modifications for approval, in advance of operation.
- VAAFM and VTFMA should review each market proposal and determine if it meets the necessary minimum safety standard. If it does not, VAAFM and VTFMA should work with markets to further modify their operations to meet expectations. If it does, the market will be notified that they can begin operating.
- Only markets that receive their notice of approval should be allowed to operate.
- Approval to operate can be amended at any time, and markets would be expected to comply with all changes.
- If VAAFM or VTFMA find that operating markets are not in compliance, there should be enforcement follow up with those individual markets.

If you have questions about this proposal, please contact Jennie Porter, Market Development Manager at [jennie@nofavt.org](mailto:jennie@nofavt.org) or Maddie Kempner, Policy Director at [maddie@nofavt.org](mailto:maddie@nofavt.org)