

Guidance for Minnesota U-Pick Operations and On-Farm Markets

This document provides COVID-19 operational recommendations for On-Farm Markets to implement in order to conduct business under Governor Walz's Executive Order 20-04 that closed restaurants, bars and other businesses where people gather. On-Farm Markets are exempt from this order as long as they do not offer onsite food consumption (including food sampling) and implement social-distancing practices within the market and field operations. Standard requirements for [food licensing](#) apply.

U-Pick Operations and On-farm markets are encouraged to follow the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) recommendations below for slowing the spread of COVID-19. Additional guidance is available from University of Minnesota Extension in the form of a [COVID-19 Response Template for Fruit and Vegetable Farms](#).

General Guidelines for Business Operations

- Develop a COVID-19 response plan.
- Modify operations to ensure customers can stay at least 6 feet apart at all times.
- **Minimize or eliminate on-farm activities** that will encourage gathering on-site.
 - » Live music, sampling, food demonstrations, children's activities, animal venues, and on-farm meals are all examples of activities that encourage people to gather
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) state that during the COVID-19 pandemic, "[keeping hands clean is especially important to help prevent the virus from spreading](#)." We very strongly encourage the following three practices:
 - » Provide [handwashing stations](#) with soap and water on-site for customers.*
 - » Require customers to wash their hands prior to and after picking
 - » Instruct customers not to sample produce while picking, and to wash produce at home before consuming.

*Note that farms covered by the Produce Safety Rule are legally required to make toilet and hand-washing facilities with soap and water accessible to visitors.

- The CDC also states that during the COVID-19 pandemic it is recommended to wear [cloth face coverings](#) in public settings where other social distancing measures are hard to maintain. Determine a mask policy for your operation.

Prepare workforce

- Assign individual workers specific tasks they are responsible for during the Covid-19 pandemic. This prevents possible cross-contamination of certain areas, duplication of tasks and/or touching materials.
- Prepare signage that makes tasks easy to follow, at what times, and under what circumstances.
- Provide guidance for handwashing (e.g. how to, at what time intervals, and after which tasks).
- Communicate your mask policy to employees (when to wear, how to wear, guidelines for washing hands before and after donning).
- If you are using gloves, remind vendors and workers that gloves are not a substitute for handwashing. Hands must be washed before putting on gloves. Workers must wash hands and change gloves after touching their face, eating, using the bathroom, or any other time hands may have become contaminated.
- Consider establishing zones and assigning workers so they can maintain the required 6 feet of distance from each other.
- Stagger lunch times or provide additional space to increase distancing of workers.
- Inform workers where they can find and replenish cleaning and sanitizing materials on-site or find the individual responsible for materials.
- Make sure all workers are trained on policies for interacting with customers.

Customer Communications

- Establish policies for customers and communicate via social media, websites, and signage. The following list contains examples:
 - » stay home if you feel sick, have a fever, or are coughing
 - » maintain 6 feet of distance between you, other customers, and workers
 - » wash hands before entering and when leaving the farm
 - » handle only the food items you will purchase
 - » consider minimizing the number of family members participating in a visit (as feasible for area and farm operation)
 - » follow the mask policy for the farm
 - » leave pets at home, except for service animals
- Example signs include the following:
 - » Wash your hands >>> here is the handwashing station.
 - » Maintain 6' distance
 - » Please, no on-site consumption of food. Take home only.
- Update social media, websites and signage if your operation changes.
- Inform your customers that you are checking with state and CDC for health and safety protocols and ask for patience as you make operational changes. These changes protect customers and workers on the farm.
- Review operations regularly and ask for customer feedback to understand what is working and what may need to be modified.
- Consider implementing a reservation system for customers to schedule visits or times for picking, especially for very busy days or times. This could help limit the number of people on the farm at one time.

U-Pick Field Operations

- Maintain a minimum 6-foot distance between customers from distinct household groups. This can be done in many ways, depending on the layout and type of farm and operation. The following list contains a variety of options that would help create distance between customers:
 - » Provide customers specific instructions as to where to begin to pick and a designated direction in which they should move down a row
 - » Schedule harvest times for customers to pick using a reservation system, or other ways to limit the number of customers on the premises at one time and allow for social distancing.
 - » Stagger where customers pick. For example:
 - In a strawberry field, if the rows are 4 feet apart, make sure picking groups are in every other row to ensure separation.
 - » Establish a designated entrance and a distinct exit to the field, and a flow of traffic within your field.
- Evaluate the way customers queue before entering your fields and develop ways to limit congregating through identified spacing, partitioning, or other social distancing practices.
 - » Create a border around your pick your own space, limiting entrances and exits (flags, cones, fencing, tape, and rope are all options for physical borders).
 - » Add signs to the border, for example: “Please enter through gates with handwashing stations and wash hands upon entering.”
- Evaluate transportation you provide to the fields. The following examples are ways to address transportation:
 - » Designate spots on a wagon or truck that are 6 feet apart from each other
 - » Run more trips to and from picking areas to decrease the number of people being transported at one time
 - » Move the parking location closer, eliminating the need for transport and allowing customers to walk to and from the field
 - » Have employees pick up harvested produce and deliver to customer vehicles
- Identify “high touch” surfaces (e.g. fence latches or wagon railings) that will need to be regularly cleaned and sanitized.
- Establish designated harvest times daily for individuals at greater risk for COVID-19.
- Consider requiring every child to have an adult nearby to ensure they are always following safety guidelines or implement an age cut-off for picking.
- Provide picking containers for customers to reduce the possibility of bringing contaminated containers into the field.
 - » Containers should be single use, or made of smooth, cleanable material that can be sanitized before reuse.

Retail Market / Point-of-Sale Set-up

- Limit the number of customers within your market at one time and provide 6 foot spacing for customers waiting to enter.
- If you have multiple cash registers / points of sale at your establishment, create additional spacing between each register in order to maintain six feet of separation between workers, as well as spacing out any customers who may be queuing.

- Use physical markings or signage to indicate the distance customers should maintain when they may be queuing, such as when waiting to enter your market, to pay, etc.
- At your register, create additional distance or establish physical barriers between the worker and the customer.
 - » This could include creating or expanding counter or table space between the worker and the customer and using that space to place purchases and exchange money, putting in plexiglass or other physical barriers, or reconfiguring your space or process to limit point of sale contact
- Establish a designated register for customers who may have pre-ordered or are buying pre-picked items, in order to limit time on-site.
- Consider delivery or pick-up options (e.g., drive-through), and options for customers to pre-order and pre-pay. The National Young Farmers Coalition created a guide to sales platform comparisons: <https://www.youngfarmers.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Farmers-Guide-to-Direct-Sales-Software-Platforms.pdf>
- Have handwashing stations available for customers and workers within your market.
 - » Hand antiseptics (sanitizers) are not a replacement for proper handwashing but are better than providing nothing. If you have hand sanitizer in customer areas, provide an alcohol-based hand product with at least 60% alcohol as an active ingredient.
- Pre pick and pre-bag farm products and other items to limit shoppers' handling of food, and consider selling by the container, box, or pail rather than by pound to keep customers moving quickly along.
- Work to minimize or eliminate self-packaging of bulk items by customers (e.g., produce, dry goods). Provide containers where possible versus customers touching a bulk set of containers.
- Where possible, have a designated worker handle product and a different person handle money. Or, wash hands in between these tasks.

Clean and sanitize

- While transmission of COVID-19 is not primarily via surfaces, the virus can persist on a variety of [materials](#) including cardboard, metal and plastic. Use materials that can be cleaned and sanitized or are single use.
- Make sure to clean surfaces thoroughly before sanitizing. Dirty surfaces cannot be properly sanitized.
- Frequently clean and sanitize all high touch surfaces including door handles and knobs, credit card machines, counters, shopping baskets, etc. at regular pre-established time intervals.
- Identify all customer contact points and gathering locations, such as points-of-sale and restrooms, and set up a sanitizing schedule to frequently clean them.
- Choose a sanitizer from the EPA's List N, the approved list of products that are effective against the SARS-CoV-2 virus:
 - » EPA's Registered [Antimicrobial Products](#) for Use Against Novel Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, the Cause of COVID-19
 - » American Chemistry Council Center for Biocide Chemistries - [Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Fighting Products](#)
- Follow label instructions for sanitizers, especially when sanitizing food contact surfaces.

Additional References

- Minnesota Department of Agriculture: <https://www.mda.state.mn.us/covid-19-agriculture>
- Minnesota Department of Agriculture Produce Safety Resources: <https://www.mda.state.mn.us/food-feed/produce-safety-resources>
- University of Minnesota Extension: <https://extension.umn.edu/covid-19>
- University of Minnesota Extension Response Plan Template and FAQ: <https://blog-fruit-vegetable-ipm.extension.umn.edu/2020/04/covid-19-response-plan-template-and-faq.html>
- Minnesota Department of Health Materials and Resources for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Response <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/materials/index.html#sm3>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>