

Considerations for Mississippi Farmers Markets Related to COVID-19

As concerns about the spread of COVID-19 grow, farmers market operators around the country and in Mississippi are wondering how best to respond. Farmers markets are vital to consumers and farmers alike; therefore, markets around the country are developing contingency plans and implementing modified hours of operation and/or shopper policies to keep farmers and market customers safe.

To offer a point of reference for our markets just as other states have done, the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce is sharing this compiled information and advice from farmers markets and other state associations, health departments and the [Centers for Disease Control](#).

Considerations for Farmers Market Managers:

1. Stay informed with updates from the [Mississippi State Department of Health](#), the Governor's Office and the [Mississippi Emergency Management Agency](#). Adhere to any directive from these agencies as well as **local authorities (city and county)** and plan accordingly.
2. Communicate with your Farmers and Customers – If you do not have one, consider developing a system or process to communicate with your farmers and your customers. While social gatherings and business operations are limited, put a plan in place now to quickly and easily communicate with them. After you have a plan in place, keep your farmers informed, and customers informed of changes in your opening dates, operating hours or policies. Consider reaching out to your customers and farmers and recommend they stay home if they are ill.
3. Review your market operation plan and procedures and consider developing hand washing or sanitation stations and ways to keep customers safe with regards to **social distancing** and vendor-customer interactions.
4. Consider Alternative Modes of Operation (i.e. delivery, pre-packaging, modified CSA/food boxes, or farmer co-op) – Some markets are taking this opportunity to launch pre-ordering and electronic payment options to enable or enhance social distancing at the market. Some markets are moving to a drive-through pickup option.
5. Also consider the following recommendations as it relates to market operations:
 - a. Encourage customers and vendors to practice “**social distancing**” – maintaining a space of six feet from each other – inform through social media, signage upon entering the market, and volunteers and vendors to spread the message to remind customers of this practice.

- b. Increase the space between vendors to reduce crowding. Round prices to the nearest dollar so they could stop accepting coins.
- c. Ask customers not to handle any items on the vendors' tables but rather point at what they want and let vendors bag their purchases. Provide vendors with signage by the market informing customers of this policy. Vendors can also pre-bag/pre-package produce to reduce customers touching product.
- d. Vendors DO NOT offer samples of their products to reduce opportunities for contamination.
- e. Encourage vendors not to use tablecloths to make it easier to sanitize surfaces. Encourage them to use plastic tablecloths that can be sanitized or discarded.
- f. Encourage vendors to wear disposable gloves, mainly as a reminder to not touch their face.
- g. Vendors may designate one person to handle money and another to handle product. Or have market volunteers on site to relieve vendors that need to wash their hands.

(Adapted from Fruit Grower News.)

*****Agriculture, farms and farmers markets are considered an “essential business or operation” under Mississippi Executive Order 1463 signed on March 24, 2020, by Governor Tate Reeves.*****

Helpful Links and Resources:

- Center for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>
- MS State Department of Health: <https://msdh.ms.gov/>
- Fruit Growers News: <https://fruitgrowersnews.com/news/farmers-markets-respond-to-covid-19-with-a-number-of-approaches/>
- Farmers Market Coalition: <https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/farmers-markets-covid19/>
- NC State Extension: https://growingsmallfarms.ces.ncsu.edu/2020/03/local-farmers-markets-do-their-part-to-flatten-the-curve-on-coronavirus/?fbclid=IwAR2bKyUaxcYCuT2USXQxFAQAw5Ucvz_xJNuX9uLKD9UCB5gl92hF8fcVzLgM

