

Small Farms, Local Food, and COVID-19

What do you need to know?

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Introduction

Access to credible information is important during any public health crisis. Faculty in the OSU Center for Small Farms and Community Food systems are working with community partners to provide current information that is relevant for small farms and local food systems. As the pandemic progresses, we may update or add to these Frequently Asked Questions.

How is COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly through person to person contact. The virus spreads in droplets or aerosols (fine spray) and can infect a new person through the eyes, nose and mouth. In addition to hygiene and sanitation, social distancing can reduce the likelihood that the virus is transmitted. Recent research shows that infected people with little to no symptoms can spread the virus, and this accelerated the spread of the disease in China. Current guidelines are to maintain 3-6' between people and avoid large groups. Public policy is changing as the pandemic progresses. Stay up to date on Federal, State and local regulations that may affect you.

- CDC: How COVID-19 spreads: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/transmission.html>
- National Public Radio: It's time to get serious about social distancing. Here's how: <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/03/17/817251610/its-time-to-get-serious-about-social-distancing-here-s-how>

- ‘Stealth transmission’ fuels fast spread of coronavirus outbreak:
https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2020-03/cums-tf031520.php
- World Health Organization: COVID-19 advice for the public:
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

Am I likely to spread COVID-19 with the food I am selling?

“FDA is not aware of any reports at this time of human illnesses that suggest COVID-19 can be transmitted by food or food packaging. However, it is always important to follow good hygiene practices (i.e., wash hands and surfaces often, separate raw meat from other foods, cook to the right temperature, and refrigerate foods promptly) when handling or preparing foods.”
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/COVID-19/Coronavirus%20Disease%202019%20and%20Food%20Industry.pdf>

Coronavirus is a respiratory virus – it is *not* considered to be a foodborne illness by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) – but similar actions to prevent foodborne illness can be taken to mitigate coronavirus: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncezid/dfwed/index.html>

What hygiene and food safety practices will help me prevent COVID-19 infection?

Farms should provide handwashing stations and/or hand sanitizer to all employees and customers, and request that they wash their hands before entering the field and upon exiting. Employees should wash their hands anytime they may have become contaminated, such as after touching contaminated surfaces or touching their face. Change gloves when they become contaminated (after touching any part of the body, another person, eating or drinking, handling equipment, using the restroom) and wash hands between glove changes. If gloves are not used properly they can lead to contamination, please reference Info Sheet: How to Remove Gloves under next question about communication to employees. Hand sanitizer does not work on dirty surfaces and should not replace cleaning with disinfectant. Disinfect hand or food contact surfaces on a regular basis, including: reusable bins and buckets, railings, doorknobs, tables, etc. Identify share equipment and other contact points, make a list and add to the cleaning regime.

Masks are not necessary, as they are not protective to healthy people, but prevent the spread of the virus from sick people. Print the CDC factsheets and posters, post in your workplace and employee housing facilities. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/factsheets.html>

At markets sampling should be suspended to minimize touch points. Add a hand washing station. Vendors should practice good hand hygiene; use disposable gloves when handling money, when possible designate separate people for handling money/cards and handling products, and handle and package items for customers. If money is handled, hands should be washed or hand sanitizer should be used afterward. Consider pre-packaging food before going to the market to limit customer contact with the food. Limit market volume by promoting pre-ordering, alternate pickup locations, or delivery.

Current evidence suggests that novel coronavirus may remain viable for hours to days on surfaces made from a variety of materials. Use non-porous plastic tables that can be easily disinfected whenever possible. CDC advises using compounds on the list of EPA recommended disinfectants (see below), this list is based on current data, but compounds have not been validated for COVID-19. The Oregon Department of Agriculture also has a fact sheet of approved disinfectants for emerging pathogens. Bleach may be used to disinfect surfaces, but the concentration is higher for COVID-19 than for everyday sanitation, see the link from Michigan State University for detailed information. The Oregon Department of Agriculture has a fact sheet of approved disinfectants for emerging pathogens.

- Organic producers can refer to the USDA page on Allowed Detergents and Sanitizers for Food Contact Surfaces and Equipment in Organic Operations here: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/8%20Cleaners%20and%20Sanitizers%20FINAL%20RGK%20V2.pdf>. Please cross reference materials using the OMRI Brand Name Materials list by entering 'sanitizer' in the search box: <https://www.omri.org/ubersearch>.
- Clean and Disinfect Information from CDC: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/cleaning-disinfection.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fcommunity%2Fhome%2Fcleaning-disinfection.html
- EPA recommended disinfectants: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>
- Info Sheet: Homemade Hand Sanitizer – Small scale recipe from World Health Organization formulation https://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/Guide_to_Local_Production.pdf
- Oregon Department of Agriculture – approved disinfectants for emerging pathogens: <https://www.oregon.gov/ODA/shared/Documents/Publications/PesticidesPARC/DisinfectantsforEmergingPathogensCOVID-19.pdf>.
- Fact Sheet Disinfecting with Bleach from Michigan State University: <https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/covid-19-disinfecting-with-bleach>
- Center for Disease Control posters: Keeping workplaces, schools, homes and commercial establishments safe: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/workplace-school-and-home-guidance.pdf>
- World Health Organization COVID-19 advice for the public: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

- Food and Drug Administration Food Safety and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/food-safety-and-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19?utm_campaign=FSMA_COVIDcall_03172020&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Eloqua

What should I be communicating to employees?

Talk with your employees about Coronavirus, how it spreads, and how to prevent getting infected. You should review your sick leave policy with all employees. The first advice for people who are sick is to stay home. Anyone that has a fever, cough, and shortness of breath should call a medical provider before visiting a care facility. Do you provide paid sick leave for your employees? If you do not, will employees feel financially obligated to come to work even if they are sick? Employees sometimes come to work believing they will face punishment or firing if they miss work. Be sure your employees understand that their health and that of their co-workers' comes first. Communicate and make a plan to cover for sick employees. See Fact Sheets in link below, provided in both English and Spanish.

Provide guidance to help employees clean and disinfect employer-provided housing. Follow up with employees and manage the process to be sure that this happens. Set up a regular weekly and daily schedule for cleaning.

- CDC guidance for cleaning homes: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/home/cleaning-disinfection.html>
- Info Sheet - Worker Health and Hygiene: <https://extension.psu.edu/worker-health-and-hygiene>
- Info Sheet - How to Remove Gloves: <https://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/pdf/poster-how-to-remove-gloves.pdf>
- Info – Disinfecting with Bleach <https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/covid-19-disinfecting-with-bleach>
- Info Sheet: Homemade Hand Sanitizer – Small scale recipe from World Health Organization formulation
https://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/Guide_to_Local_Production.pdf
- Link to a handwashing video from Produce Safety Alliance:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8EpfWAmq3o&feature=emb_title



- World Health Organization: Getting your workplace ready for COVID-19:
https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=359a81e7_6
- Multilingual resources related to COVID-19 <https://switchboardta.org/a-round-up-of-multilingual-resources-on-covid-19/>
- For Organic operations check with your certifier if you are in doubt about the NOP compliance of any inputs. Allowed detergents and sanitizers for food contact surfaces and equipment in Organic operations can be found here:
<https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/8%20Cleaners%20and%20Sanitizers%20FINAL%20RGK%20V2.pdf>
- For Organic operations: Cl₂ concentration in sanitizer effluent must be less than 4ppm. NOP Guidance: The Use of Chlorine Materials in Organic Production and Handling
<https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/5026.pdf>

What should I be communicating to customers to inform as well as retain them?

“FDA is not aware of any reports at this time of human illnesses that suggest COVID-19 can be transmitted by food or food packaging. However, it is always important to follow good hygiene practices (i.e., wash hands and surfaces often, separate raw meat from other foods, cook to the right temperature, and refrigerate foods promptly) when handling or preparing foods.”
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Emphasize that protecting public health is paramount to your business and share your food safety protocols to prevent the spread of infection. Currently there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food. You can communicate to employees and customers that before preparing or eating food it is important to always wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds for general food safety.

Now is the time to benefit from our vibrant local food system! CSA, farmers markets, online ordering, etc. are all ways to reduce the number of hands touching your food. Fresh vegetables and unprocessed food help to promote good immune system function. For customers who feel the need to stock up on food products, encourage them to do so through their local farms. Emphasize items that store well and prepare meals with fresh produce that can be frozen. Reinforce the health benefits of fruits and vegetables.

Share the positives through your list serves and on social media! During this stressful time, our local food system is already set up to offer increased food safety to eaters. CSA models allow eaters to avoid crowds and grocery stores, and online and delivery systems are quickly ramping up to get local food to local eaters in the safest possible way.

What resources are available for the changes I might need to make to my business?

Your customers need access to food in order to stay healthy, and well managed local farms and food systems can be consistent with social distancing efforts that are critical during this pandemic.

- Wholesale markets: stay in touch with your buyer so that you know how they are responding to the outbreak.
- Direct to retail: Explore online sale platforms, see question below regarding options.
- Community Supported Agriculture: if pick up locations are sanitized and customers practice social distancing, CSA's may reduce the risk of spreading the virus.
- Farmers markets: Stay in regular communication with your farmers market manager as well as the Oregon Farmer's Market Association as they develop strategies and communicate with vendors and customers. As things are rapidly changing, you may want to connect with their email list to receive regular updates.

<https://www.oregonfarmersmarkets.org/>. The Farmers Market Coalition has started a dedicated page of resources: <https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/farmers-markets-covid19/>

- This guide from Purdue can help you navigate these uncertain times by offering ideas on:
 - Changing your business model
 - Meeting the needs of the market
 - Reaching your customer base without increasing potential exposure to COVID-19
 - Continuing to generate income during this difficult period

<https://www.purdue.edu/newsroom/releases/2020/Q1/a-guide-for-local-producers-to-navigate-the-covid-19-outbreak.html>

What online sales systems can I use if farmers markets are closed or I close my farm stand?

Here are a few online sales platforms to check out, this is not a comprehensive list, nor are we endorsing any of these. We recommend reaching out to your farmer networks to get recommendations on platforms currently used:

- Barn2Door <https://www.barn2door.com/>
- Farmigo <https://www.farmigo.com/>
- Harvie <https://www.harvie.farm/>
- Local Food Marketplace <https://home.localfoodmarketplace.com/>
- Local Line <https://site.localline.ca/>
- Shopify <https://www.shopify.com/>
- Food 4 All <https://www.food4all.com/sell-food-online-csa-software/>
- Cropolis <https://cropolis.co/>

Here are a few pointers on marketing during the COVID-19 pandemic from businesses that offer online sales platform:

- Tactics for Your Farm to Succeed in The Light of Coronavirus Impact
<https://www.barn2door.com/blog/3-tactics-for-your-farm-to-succeed-in-light-of-coronavirus-impact>
- The Direct Farmers Market Guide to COVID-19 <https://go.localline.ca/covid-19>

Here are some questions to ask when you're choosing which service to work with:

- How long has your online sales platform been in use?
- How many farmers are you currently working with?
- What will it cost my farm to use your platform? What is your fee structure?
- I'm ready to start selling products right now. What does it take to get started? Is there a wait because of the current increase in demand for online sales platform services?
- How will your online sales platform integrate with my current website?
- What is the process for entering the products that I have to sell?
- How do I update my product list and pricing?
- Will I be able to set inventory limits so that I don't oversell products?
- How does the customer interface work? Is your platform easy to use on a Smartphone?
- How do customers pay for products?
 - Are credit and debit card fees charged to customers?
 - Can customers pay by check or cash on delivery?
 - Can customers pay with EBT?
 - Is there a way for me offer customers discounts, coupons, and promotions?
- How long does it take for customer payments to deposit into my farm's bank account?
- How is sales tax handled on your platform?
- Is it possible to integrate your platform with my accounting software?
- Is it possible to create pack lists directly from your sales platform? How about labels?
- Does your platform offer any suggestions for delivery routes based on orders?
- What kind of IT support does your company provide?
- How is my farm's sales data used and/or shared?
- What happens to my farm's sales data if I stop using your platform?
- What other features does your platform offer that I should know about?

Where can I go for financial assistance due to COVID-19 business hardship?

It is likely that financial assistance will evolve in response to COVID-19. Here are some sites to check out regularly: The Small Business Administration and Business Oregon.

The Small Business Administration issued this statement on March 12th, 2020 regarding emergency loans for small businesses and private non-profits: <https://www.sba.gov/about-sba/sba-newsroom/press-releases-media-advisories/sba-provide-disaster-assistance-loans-small-businesses-impacted-coronavirus-covid-19>

Business Oregon listed available resources for small businesses providing financial assistance in the event of local, regional, or statewide economic impacts due to identified disasters. <http://www.oregon4biz.com/Coronavirus-Information/COVID19-Resources.php>

Where can I find reliable information about the spread of COVID-19?

The Oregon Health Authority, national Center for Disease Control, and World Health Organization are all providing information to help manage the pandemic as it becomes available. Restrictions to reduce the spread of the virus can come from Federal, State and local government, so stay up to date on policies in your area.

OSU Extension is following the public health guidance of our local county health departments, the Oregon Health Authority, and the national Center for Disease Control (CDC).

- Oregon Health Authority's COVID-19 page: <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/DISEASESCONDITIONS/DISEASESAZ/Pages/emerging-respiratory-infections.aspx>
- CDC FAQ COVID 19 <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#protect>
- Oregon State government announcements about COVID -19 responses are available in the Oregon.gov newsroom: <https://www.oregon.gov/newsroom/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?newsid=36192>
- USDA Coronavirus information: <https://www.usda.gov/coronavirus>
- WHO: COVID-19 advice for the public: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>