



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF  
FOOD & AGRICULTURE

Karen Ross, Secretary

## Guidance for Operating Certified Farmers' Markets During COVID-19 Pandemic

*This guidance is based on what is currently known about the transmission and severity of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) will update this guidance as needed and as additional information becomes available. Local environmental health and public health agencies may have additional guidance and/or requirements regarding these operations in their jurisdiction.*

### BACKGROUND

Certified Farmers' Markets (CFMs) have been operating in California since the late 1970s. They began because packaging and labeling regulations added costs that often made it difficult for small growers to compete in the marketplace. CDFA recognized those hardships and provided regulatory exemptions at CFMs for growers wanting to sell directly to consumers. Participation rules then and now require that growers only sell products they have produced; no buying and reselling is allowed.

Certified Farmers' Markets then started appearing in all counties and most cities, allowing consumers access to fresh produce, dairy, meat and eggs directly from the producer. As the markets became successful, many added additional opportunities for community participation. Soon, coffee vendors, food trucks, crafts tables, musicians, and other non-agricultural entities became a mainstay, selling in what is commonly referred to as the "non-certified" section of the market. In some cases those sellers outnumbered the producers by a significant amount, turning farmers' markets into community events.

### FOOD SUPPLY

As defined by the federal government, the food supply makes up [critical infrastructure](#) from farm to table and includes assets, systems, networks and functions that provide vital services to the nation. It is essential that federal government-defined critical infrastructure and supply chains are protected, and that all elements pertaining to the food supply remain operational, including a workforce that is vital to production of the food supply. More information is provided in the [National Infrastructure Protection Plan](#) to help further clarify these critical infrastructure systems.

Certified Farmers' Markets are recognized as important sources of fresh food in many communities and CDFA is working to ensure communities can maintain access to healthy food during this COVID-19 pandemic. Local health officials are questioning the need for the "non-certified" section of the market to remain open. CDFA understands their concerns and is asking each market to first focus on the needs of producers and patrons during these times.





CFM Market Managers will need to work with their local environmental health agencies to ensure that all local laws, regulations and ordinances are being met. The following are guidelines for markets during this COVID-19 outbreak.

## CERTIFIED FARMERS' MARKETS

### Market Layout and Signage

- Space booths accordingly to meet physical distancing guidelines of 6 feet among patrons in line and walking about the market.
- Create entry/exit points that serve as crowd control.
- Provide signage/cues indicating which way to walk inside of the market and placemarks to stand in line ensuring physical distancing is adhered to.
- Ensure that physical distancing of 6 feet per person for non-family members is maintained. Family members can participate together (stand in line together, etc), but best practices encouraged families to limit the number of members who conduct essential activities, like shopping for groceries, away from the home.
- Encourage expedited purchasing to avoid lingering to help minimize crowds within the market.
- Limit the number of patrons in the market at any given time as necessary to reduce outdoor/indoor crowding and long lines that do not meet physical distancing guidance.

### Enhanced Sanitation and Hygiene

- Post signs with COVID-19 safety and hygiene [guidelines](#).
- Offer additional hand washing or sanitizing stations throughout the venue, especially at entry and points of payment.
- Install check stand protective shields and/or adhere to [state](#) and [federal](#) guidance on the use of face coverings.
- Increase frequency of cleaning of tables, payment devices and other surfaces.
- Increase cleaning and sanitizing frequency of restrooms and other high contact areas.
- Ensure each vendor has hand sanitizer or a hand-washing option.
- Train employees on best hygiene practices including washing their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Separate employees should be accepting payment and handling produce/restock at tables. If this cannot be accomplished, then handwashing or use of a sanitizer should happen between each transaction.
- Encourage activities such as pre-bagging to minimize contact and expedite shopping and transactions.
- Producers should avoid touching reusable bags belonging to customers.
- Suspend any sampling activities.





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### **Suspend Non-Essential Activities**

- Eliminate non-essential/non-related services, such as bands, crafts, seating/dining areas or other entertainment.

### **Enhanced Services**

- Create opportunities (curb-side pickup and pre-order or alternate hours) in order to accommodate individuals that the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has identified as [higher risk of serious illness for COVID-19](#).
- At the end of the market, continue to utilize local food recovery systems to contribute/donate extra products to populations in need.
- If applicable, continue accepting government nutrition funds and EBT payment.

Additional information can be found in the CDPH document [“Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) and Retail Food, Beverage, and Other Related Service Venues, March 16, 2020.”](#) and at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration [Best Practices on Safe Food Handling and Employee Health in Retail Food Settings During COVID-19 Pandemic.](#)

