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Letter of Support of Farmers' Markets & Direct Sales of Farmers' Food across Canada

The National Farmers Union issues this letter of support for the continuance of farmers' markets and other direct sales during the COVID-19 crisis. In the face of disruptions in global trade and other threats to food imports, the maintenance of local Canadian food systems is critical. As long as grocery stores remain open, the direct sales provided by farmers markets must be enabled.

Direct food sales to the public can take different forms: through farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture (CSAs) and other delivery/pickup options. These direct sales are safe, with the shortest supply chain connecting producer and eater. These farmers are not part of the corporate food system and, hence, rely on direct sales: their disruption will mean the failure of local farms, especially as spring approaches and brings the start of the critical produce season.

Each locality will have its own approach to maintaining the link between farmer and consumer. Some producers are moving from a physical farmers' market to on-line sales with consolidated, safe pickup locations. Some farmers' markets are implementing safe market guidelines and are remaining open for take-away food sales (*see the example from the Vancouver Farmers Markets provided below*).

The markets and farmers themselves know what will work best in their specific context. We urge Public Health and municipal officials to work with the markets to develop a way to continue direct sales from farmer to consumer. Public decision-makers must work to support this continuation of sales that invests in the long-term benefit for community health and economic sustainability.

The designation of a farmers' market must be maintained throughout this crisis. The definition of a farmers' market varies somewhat based on jurisdiction; in many jurisdictions, a farmers' market is one in which over 50% of vendors are farmers selling the products they grow, raise and produce themselves. Retention of the designation, and the associated regulations, is critically important, whether farmers continue at a physical market or transition to different models of distribution (e.g., "virtual markets"). During this crisis, it needs to be recognized that a farmers' market may transition to a virtual market, but that the designation is still important for continuity of sales.

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Farmers' markets that are remaining open across the country have rapidly implemented proactive measures to ensure vendor and customer safety, such as selling outdoors, increasing the space between vendors, removing seating, limiting the number of customers at a given time, and prohibiting customers from touching vendors' items. Some markets are also offering on-line ordering to ensure vendor and customer safety. Many jurisdictions have revised their safe market operating guidelines to ensure the safety of the public and farmer-vendors during this COVID-19 crisis. Links to a few of the many farmers' market operating guidelines are provided at the end of this letter.

Public health and municipalities need to work with their local farmers' markets to ensure continued, safe operation, recognizing that that might look different than operating a physical market. Farmers and farmers' markets need to be provided with clear, consistent guidelines for health & safety best practices.

We are privileged to live in a country that has the capacity to move towards diverse self-reliance – a key tenet of food sovereignty. Now, more than ever, we urge all levels of government to maintain localized food systems.

Sincerely,



Glenn Norman, NFU VP Policy



Katie Ward, NFU President

Note 1: Provinces that have recognized the critical importance of maintaining food access and have approved the continuation of farmers' markets as of March 24, 2020:

- Alberta
- British Columbia
- New Brunswick
- Ontario

Note 2: Examples of Safe Market Operation Guidelines during the COVID-19 crisis

Farmers' Markets of Ontario:

<https://www.farmersmarketsontario.com/covid-19-modifying-market-operations/>

Vancouver Farmers Markets Guidelines:

<https://eatlocal.org/what-you-need-to-know/>

BC Association of Farmers' Markets COVID-19 Info

<https://bcfarmersmarket.org/bcafm-covid19/>