

CORONAVIRUS DISEASE



Maryland Pick-Your-Own Operations During COVID-19 State of Emergency

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

As a pick-your-own farm operator...

What do I need to do to protect myself, my employees, my customers, and the public from COVID-19?

All Marylanders are advised to take precautions to slow the spread of COVID-19. Any place where people congregate is a possible opportunity for COVID-19 to spread. It is absolutely essential that pick-your-own farm operators do what they can to reduce the risk of transmission.

In general, operators are advised to:

- Require customers and staff to follow Governor Hogan's 20-04-15 Executive Order requiring the use of a face covering including face masks or [cloth face coverings](#).
- Keep customers and workers from grouping too close to one another, in no case closer than 6 feet.
- Provide signage that urges customers to keep a 6-foot distance away from others, and discouraging groups of 10 or more from assembling together in one area.
- Allow for customers to be spaced 6 feet or more apart when they are picking and paying for the produce. Use flags, cones, and tape, or otherwise demark areas available for picking in the fields. Allow for sufficient space when customers are waiting to pay for the produce.
- Do not let anyone work or pick who is sick or is experiencing fever, body aches, nausea, cough, sore throat, or shortness of breath or may have been exposed to individuals with these symptoms. You can use signage like, "Do not pick if you are sick!"
- If a worker becomes sick during the work day, have them go home and isolate themselves from other staff and customers immediately.

How do I prepare my pick-your-own operation?

- Put up signage and provide information on websites and social media to explain any changes to the operation or extra precautions taken to limit exposure to COVID-19.

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- Have fully stocked handwashing and sanitizing stations in place at multiple locations and post signs that inform customers the correct way to wash hands. Workers and customers should wash their hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water if available, or use hand sanitizer, before and after handling produce.
- Consider on-line ordering, alternate pick-up, drive-through, or delivery options to keep crowd levels low.
- Schedule harvest times to limit the number of people picking including, but not limited to, scheduling a harvest time reserved for those who are most vulnerable to COVID-19.
- Limit and control access to the farm to ensure proper social distancing by establishing clearly marked entrance and exit points for customers.
- Postpone or cancel any scheduled events at the farm.
- Offer picked and packaged for sale items in single use containers to minimize crowds and contact with produce.
- Instead of customers bringing their own containers, provide them in one weight or size (ex. pulp quarts and cardboard flats). Consider modifying your pricing structure to accommodate the containers and allow you to cover your costs. This will allow a quick count of containers when charging at checkout, and not only increases efficiency but also minimizes the handling of containers by multiple people.
- Use credit card readers that allow customers to swipe their own credit cards or use touchless payment systems. Disable the signature function on your point of sale (POS) system to limit contact from multiple customers. Discourage payments by cash.
- Clean reusable bulk containers thoroughly by first using detergent and water then a food contact surface-approved sanitizer before reuse. Use disposable liners in reusable containers.
- Maintain clean and sanitized food contact surfaces and frequently touched objects and consider a more frequent cleaning schedule. Provide wipes or clean carts for customers prior to use.

Can I still offer samples of my produce at the farm?

Generally, the more food is handled, the more likely it is to be a source of exposure to viruses like COVID-19. MDH strongly advises against food sampling during the state of emergency.

Can my customers pre-order and pick-up at the farm?

Customers can pre-order and pick-up products regulated by MDA or MDH. Follow all recommendations for social distancing and other public health precautions when handling orders.

How do I prepare my staff?

- Have clear policies on illness and COVID-19. No employee should work if ill or has been exposed to someone who is ill. Employees and managers should check themselves for symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, flu-like symptoms). All employees should notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.



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- Stagger employee lunch and break times to encourage social distancing.
- If workers develop COVID-19 — either suspected, diagnosed by a medical professional, or confirmed by laboratory diagnosis — they should be isolated at home and not allowed to return to work until:
 - There has been no fever for at least 72 hours (i.e. three full days of no fever without the use of medicine that reduces fevers); AND
 - Other symptoms have improved (cough may persist for 1–2 weeks) ; AND
 - At least 7 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.
- Require customers and staff to follow Governor Hogan’s 20-04-15 Executive Order requiring the use of a face covering including face masks or [cloth face coverings](#)..

What food safety practices should I implement on the farm to minimize the risk for COVID-19 transmission to my customers from produce?

- Basic employee health and hygiene practices such as frequent hand washing, glove policies, restroom use, clean clothes, and other basic health and hygiene practices help reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Use of disposable gloves and more frequent changing of gloves when handling fruits, vegetables and currency is an additional safeguard that can be implemented.
- Sick workers should stay home and should NOT be reassigned to non-food contact duties.

I have extra fruit and vegetables, can I still make jams and jellies and other value-added products to sell at the farm?

- Yes, extra fruit can be used to make jams and jellies.
- Fruits must be high-acid with a natural pH of 4.6 or less (e.g., apples, apricots, blackberries, boysenberries, cherries, grapes, peaches, etc.).
- Jams and jellies must be labeled with: the common name of the food; the list of ingredients (and sub-ingredients) in descending order by weight; a declaration of artificial color or flavor and chemical preservatives; a declaration of the quantity of the package contents by weight in both metric and English units; the name and place of business of the manufacturer, packer, or distributor; nutrition labeling if not exempt; and the name of the food source for each major food allergen (unless the food source is already part of the common or usual name).
- If you are currently licensed by MDH as an on-farm home processor or food processor, extra fruits and vegetables can be used to make those value-added products that have been approved by MDH. More information is available here: [Processing and Selling Value-Added Food Products in Maryland](#)



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- Fresh produce can be shipped to consumers in Maryland without a license. Shipments to other states may be restricted in some cases.
- Cottage food businesses can ship properly labeled, allowable foods (high-acid jams and jellies and non-potentially hazardous baked goods) to customers in Maryland. Please visit the Maryland Department of Health's Cottage Food Businesses [website](#) for additional information.

If a worker or customer becomes sick while working or picking, and you are physically near them (less than 6 feet) for more than 3 minutes without protective equipment like masks, gloves, and eye protection, you may have been exposed to the virus. You should immediately isolate yourself at home and call your healthcare provider.

Additional COVID-19 Resources:

Guidance for Businesses and Employers: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has provided [interim guidance](#) for businesses and employers, and additional business-specific guidance can be found on Maryland's Business Express [website](#).

Food Safety Guidance: The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) has provided specific guidance on food safety [here](#). For more information on farm worker health, hygiene training, or other produce safety questions, please email produce.safety@maryland.gov. Additional information is available on the Maryland Department of Agriculture's (MDA) [website](#).

University of Maryland Extension: The University of Maryland Extension and other state extension programs have worked to create a factsheets regarding COVID-19 for home consumers, retail-food service, grocery shopping, farms and PYOs, and foodbanks. Materials are also available in Spanish and Chinese, and updated weekly. Visit: <https://extension.umd.edu/foodsafety>

Cleaning and Disinfection Guidelines: The CDC's [website](#) has general cleaning and disinfection guidelines.



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