Covid-19 Strategies for Farmers Markets

Farmers markets in Wisconsin have been exempted from closing and from mass gathering restrictions instituted as the result of Covid-19. The following is from the FAQ document provided by the State of Wisconsin for mass gatherings:

Will grocery stores remain open? *Grocery stores, convenience stores, and farmer's markets are exempt from the order as long as: (1) they close all seating intended for consuming food; (2) self-service operations of salad bars and buffets is ceased; and (3) customers are prohibited from self-dispensing all unpackaged food. (3/17/20)*

Farmers markets, like grocery stores are considered an essential food resource. They may prove to be even more important if larger supply chains are disrupted leading to shortages of agricultural products we produce locally. To fulfill this role successfully, each market must decide if it can provide a shopping environment at least of equal safety to local grocery stores. The following are best management practices collected from across the country for you to consider. Not all of the options will be suitable for all markets. They will help you to minimize the spread of Covid-19 at your market while maintaining this essential food resource for your community and your vendors.

What can the market do? The goal of the following practices is to minimize shopper time at the market and the spread of Covid-19. Although farmers markets are important community events, these actions will help the market to focus on it's role as an essential food resource and protect public safety.

- No sampling
- No prepared foods or prepared foods to go ONLY. Everything must be pre-packaged to consume off site.
- No non-food vendors
- No music, tabling, activities, promotions or pets
- Handwashing stations/hand sanitizers for both vendors and customers
- Social distancing messaging and signage
- No customer contact with product (only vendors touch product until sold)
- Single use bags
- Increase the spacing between vendors to allow customers to maintain safe distance from each other and other vendors
- Market layouts usually have vendors facing each other across an aisle. This concentrates customers in the center. In order to provide more social distance, consider placing vendors on one side or having vendors face outward. Just be sure to give your vendors the space they need also.
- Consider alternative shopping methods like a one sided drive through market or online ordering with market pick up.
- Suspend fines for no shows to help prevent sick vendors from coming to the market out of obligation.

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What can vendors do?

- No sick vendors or employees at the market. Vendors should prioritize the health of customers.
- Have a different person handling money than handling produce. Although there is little evidence that money or tokens can transmit Covid-19, having a one person take money and talk with customers helps limit the contact of the farm staff to possible transmission.
- Use single use bags packed by the vendor.
- Clean/sanitize/disinfect surfaces including tables and table cloths before the market.
- Use barrier tables (an extra 3 foot wide table between the customer and the product) or put a check out table in front of the product. Only the staff at the booth should be handling the product. If customers can't see what is being sold use a chalk or dry erase board to list products.
- Wash hands regularly with soap and water. (Build your own handwashing station for under $20.)
- Use hand sanitizer only when necessary on clean hands. Hand sanitizer is not effective on dirty hands.
- Use single use gloves where needed.
- Avoid touching hands to face.

Messaging

Letting customers know if your market is open, the start date is delayed or if the market is closed is critical. If your market will remain open, be certain both customers and vendors know what you are doing to protect their safety and what they can do to protect themselves and others while at the market. If your markets will be closed, do your best to connect your customers with vendors. They will still have product to sell. Customers may be able to pick up products on farm or arrange a local drop off site for pre-packaged orders. Some markets are even considering drive through options. Some involve shopping from your car and others buying in advance and picking up the order at the market. There are a lot of ways to fulfill the farmers markets mission without compromising public health. Hopefully this guide will help you consider ways to maintain this essential food resource for your community.

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