

President's Message -

Every spring we wonder what the weather will be like over the season, will we find enough help, will the sales remain solid, and this year we can add, what will this coronavirus do and what will happen to the economy as a whole, and for farmer's markets, farm stands, pick-your-own, grocery stores, and restaurants. What I have heard so far is that while some vendors opted not to go to the winter markets in Portland and Brunswick, the markets were busy yesterday for the vendors who did go, with many new customers in addition to the regulars. Some vendors in southern Maine and the Blue Hill area have set up their own outdoor markets, and those have been well attended, too. One market in New Hampshire that typically has as many as 1800 customers per market decided to close.

Restaurant sales for ourselves and one of the other vegetable farms were typical on Friday for this time of year. One restaurant had a cancellation for a party of three on Tuesday because they didn't want to fly, and another restaurant had cancellations of a total of 20 people on Friday. Both of these restaurants are probably doing over 150 people on a weekend night at this time of year.

A year round farm stand in central Maine has been having double their usual sales because people want to avoid the crowds at the grocery store and many of the grocery stores are sold out of things like eggs. They are seeing new customers along with the regulars. What will happen tomorrow? Dunno.

For those of you who are interested, I've included some links so you can learn more about what you could do on you farm. For those of you who have had all the coronavirus news you can stand, don't miss the jokes at the end. And I think you can click on the links and get to that item now!

In this email, Info for Farms and Small Businesses about Coronavirus

A. Webinar Wednesday March 18; 1-2 pm

Webinar Link

B. Info from Chris Callahan, UVM

Background

What should Growers Do?

What Should Farm Stands and Farmers Markets Do?

C. Two links to CDC websites for Businesses

D. Info from the Federation of Farmers' Markets

E. Jokes

A. WEBINAR - Farm and Community Food Program response to COVID-19 – keeping our farmers, customers and communities healthy - Wednesday, March 18; 1-2 PM

Given the CoVid-19 outbreak and its potential impact on land-based and community farm and food systems projects, we invite you to share best practices and to collectively think through and apply the CDC and Health Department guidance to our farm and food settings to make sure that our organizations are taking the best measures possible to protect staff, farmers, participants, and the community. We'd like to provide opportunities to give examples of what programs are doing and engage in conversation to find solutions. The IRC and New Entry will share updates from our various organizations and encourage others to share their approach to supporting farmers and food security efforts during this pandemic.

Join the meeting here: <https://tufts.zoom.us/j/675393104>

B. From Chris Callahan @ UVM Extension: Considerations for Fruit and Vegetable Growers Related to Coronavirus & COVID-19

Background

COVID-19 is the disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus ("the novel coronavirus"). Symptoms include fever, cough, and shortness of breath, and may appear 2-14 days after exposure. While the majority of COVID-19 illnesses are mild, it can result in severe and fatal illness, particularly in the elderly and among those with severe underlying

health conditions. Federal and State agencies are working hard to better understand the virus, how to control its spread, and how to treat those infected. One of the key things we can all do is to limit and slow the spread of COVID-19 to provide time for this understanding to develop and to not overwhelm the medical system. Much more information is available at the <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/summary.html>.

What Should Growers Do?

1. **Stay Away from Produce if Sick** - If someone is sick, they should be nowhere near fruit and vegetables that others are going to eat. This is likely already part of your farm's food safety plan and policies, but this is a good reminder to emphasize and enforce the policy. Make sure employees stay home if they feel sick and send them home if they develop symptoms at work. Consider posting signs asking customers not to shop at your farm stand if they have symptoms.
2. **Practice Social Distancing** - By putting a bit more space between you and others you can reduce your chances of getting ill. This might mean limiting or prohibiting farm visitors or reducing the number of off-farm meetings you attend in person. Avoid shaking hands and other physical contact. This also reduces the risk of your produce coming into contact with someone who is ill before it heads to market.
3. **Wash Your Hands** - Reinforce the importance of washing hands well when arriving at work, when changing tasks (e.g. moving from office work to wash/pack), before and after eating, after using the bathroom, before putting on gloves when working with produce, and after contact with animals. Soap + water + 20 seconds or more are needed to scrub all surfaces of your hands and fingers thoroughly, then dispose of paper towels in a covered container.
4. **Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Drying** –Viruses can be relatively long-lasting in the environment, and have the potential to be transferred via food or food contact surfaces. In this early stage, there is no indication that this virus has spread via food of any type. However, there's no better time than the present to review, improve, and reinforce your standard operating procedures for cleaning, sanitizing, and drying any food contact surfaces, food handling equipment, bins, and tools. Remember, cleaning means using soap and water, sanitizing is using a product labeled for sanitizing, and drying means allowing the surfaces to dry completely before use.
5. **Plan for Change** - Many produce farms are lean operations run by one or two managers and a minimal crew. Do you have a plan for if you become severely ill? How do things change if half your workforce is out sick? More business and labor planning guidance is available at the <https://agworkforce.cals.cornell.edu/2020/03/12/novel-coronavirus-prevention-control-for-farms/>.

What Should Markets and Farmers Markets Do?

1. **Everything Above** - Growers, retail food market owners, and farmers market managers should do all the things above. Does your market have a hand washing station? More guidance for food and lodging businesses is available from the Vermont Department of Health.
2. **Communicate with your Customers** - Consider reaching out to your customers and recommend they stay home if they are ill. Have you informed your customers about any changes in your hours or policies?
3. **Consider Alternative Delivery** - Some markets are taking this opportunity to launch pre-ordering and electronic payment options to enable social distancing at market. Some markets are moving to a drive-through pickup option.
4. **Reinforce the Health Benefits of Fruits and Vegetables** - We're fortunate to have so many growers who do a great job with storage crops and winter production. This means our community has access to fresh fruits and vegetables that are important to their immune systems at this time of need. Be sure to promote the nutritional value of your products! But, keep in mind that promotion of your products should be within reason. Avoid making overly broad or unsupported health claims. Fresh produce contains many minerals and nutrients important for immune health which may reduce the severity and duration of an illness. **Fun Fact:** Pound for pound, that storage cabbage in your cooler has as nearly as much vitamin C as oranges.

C. Two links to government websites that you may find helpful -

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fspecific-groups%2Fguidance-business-response.html

https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=359a81e7_6

D. Info from the Federation of Farmers' Markets

https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/farmers-markets-covid19/?utm_source=Maine+Farmers%27+Market+Members&utm_campaign=d742da5436-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_03_13_01_27&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_c91c9687ff-d742da5436-22887037

E. Jokes -

With no intention of making light of it, I can't think of a time when jokes are needed more than in a situation like this.

1. Where does Arnold Schwarzenegger find his toilet paper?

Aisle B, back.

2. With all these people stuck at home, we can expect a baby boom in about nine months. This means that in the year 2033 we will see the rise of the "Quarenteens."

3. *Neil Diamond:* Hands

CDC: Yes, wash them for at least 20 seconds

Neil Diamond: Touching hands

CDC: No, please don't touch hands

Neil Diamond: Reaching out

CDC: Avoid that too

Neil Diamond: Touching me

CDC: Oh hell

Neil Diamond: TOUCHING YOU

CDC: We're doomed!

Email submitted by Lisa Turner.

Many thanks to ALL our business members including -

Brookdale Farm	http://www.brookdalefruitfarm.com/
Deerbusters Deer Fence	https://www.deerbusters.com/
Harris Seeds	https://www.harriseseeds.com/
Nourse Farms	https://www.noursefarms.com/
Nutrien Ag Solutions	brian.mccleary@nutrien.com
Hammond Tractor	https://www.hammondtractor.com/
Vermont Compost	https://www.vermontcompost.com/
Globe Bag Company	https://globebag.com/

Northeast Ag Sales	pumpkinpaul1@aol.com
Paris Farmers Union	timdonovan.pfu@gmail.com
Monosem, Inc.	aatpeter@aol.com
Arthur Carroll Insurance	ckisselburgh01@snet.net
Progressive Grower Agriculture	info@progressivegrower.com
Winslow Agriculture	alvinwinslow@gmail.com

If you're not a member -

Membership includes the newsletters, two twilight meetings every year, the New England Vegetable Guide or Fruit Guide in alternate years, and free attendance at the educational talks at the Ag Trade Show, and check out our new website, www.MVSFGA.org.

You can join by sending your contact information (name, farm name, address, email, and phone number) to our treasurer, Bill Jordan, at 21 Wells Road, Cape Elizabeth, Maine 04107. If you have any questions you can email him at whjir30@aol.com. Dues are \$50 for farmers.