

Farmers' markets during a state of emergency: Updated recommended measures for safely serving Nova Scotians

Nova Scotia is under a Provincial State of Emergency, effective Sunday, March 22nd. Social gatherings are limited to a maximum of 5 people. The situation can change at any time. Please go to <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/> to stay updated on the situation.

FMNS is providing updates and direction to farmers' markets so that they may continue to safely operate with restrictions and new temporary business models. The following directives will assist our markets to take innovative measures to ensure our farmers' markets continue to operate safely. We have provided recommendations specifically for indoor farmers' markets and for seasonal open-air farmers' markets.

FMNS wishes to stress that all efforts must be made to follow precautions and safety measures in order to continue ensuring that we flatten the COVID-19 curve in Nova Scotia. FMNS urges all farmers' markets in Nova Scotia to follow the recommended measures below. FMNS believes it is irresponsible to take premature action otherwise, as progress made to control the spread of COVID-19 could be lost or reversed in doing so.

Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia (FMNS) continues to closely monitor the Government of Nova Scotia's updates to contain the spread COVID-19. We've been tirelessly working with Public Health Officials and our partners across North America to ensure we recommend and follow the best practices to continue safely providing food and necessities to Nova Scotians through our farmers' markets. FMNS continues to work with farmers' markets across Nova Scotia to ensure *all* of the most up-to-date NSHA and Federal health and safety precautions are being followed at all times.

With a Provincial State of Emergency in effect, FMNS recommends that our markets adopts strict measures to minimize risks and ensure that our markets continue to operate as essential economic infrastructure in Nova Scotia. **FMNS has not called for the closure of farmers' markets.** However, FMNS believes that running market events as they used to be is no longer feasible during this time of mandatory social isolation.

Important Notice: As of 5:00pm on Tuesday, April 28th, 2020, FMNS recommends that *all* farmers' markets in Nova Scotia refrain from hosting market day events **wherever possible**. All markets should shift to a system of pre-ordering with designated population-controlled pick-up or drop-off areas. We will continue to work with *all* markets to assist with this shift, including seasonal markets. We have secured funding to **cover the cost of establishing online stores for markets.**

FMNS greatly respects and appreciates the economic importance of our province's farmers' markets to the thousands of independent businesses that call farmers' markets home. Farmers' markets are the foundation to thousands of jobs and the go-to point for healthy food and nutrition for tens of thousands of Nova Scotians. Now more than ever, our farmers' markets can play an integral role in supporting our local producers while feeding Nova Scotians.

With this in mind, FMNS believes the time is now to quickly adapt our farmers' markets to these fast-changing times. This unique challenge will give us an opportunity to temporarily shift our business models to continue supporting our local producers, while safely providing food and necessities for Nova Scotians.

Police throughout Nova Scotia have been authorized to enforce orders under Nova Scotia's *Health Protection Act*. This means that if an individual or business does not follow strict social distancing and self-isolation practices, they can be charged with a fine of \$1,000 for individuals, and \$7,500 for businesses.

In order to ensure that we continue to safely provide food and necessities for Nova Scotians, help to flatten the curve and prohibit the spread of COVID-19, and continue operating in compliance with the requirements of the Provincial State of Emergency, we encourage all farmers' market managers, staff, volunteers, and vendors to review and follow the measures below.

Directives for Indoor Farmers' Markets

The following measures should be observed at all indoor farmers' markets in Nova Scotia, effective immediately:

- Do not hold a farmers' market event.
- Instead, all indoor farmers' markets should be operating through pre-purchasing and pick-up or drop off only.
- Update your websites and/or social media channels to clearly reflect your new temporary system for your customers.
- **Strictly follow and enforce social distancing practices for vendor, staff, and volunteers at all times:**
 - Ensure that all vendors, staff, and volunteers engaging in order packing and distribution remain a minimum of 2 metres apart from each other.
 - Note: Food vendors are considered essential service workers and do not count towards the 5 person population limit.
- Strictly control the population of customers arriving for pick-ups:
 - Create clearly marked dedicated pick-up or drop-off spaces with strict, well-defined boundaries.
 - **No more than 5 customers or clients must be present in a dedicated space at any given time.**
 - Monitor and enforce at least 2 metres of social distancing for all customers.
 - Stagger the times for your pick-ups if possible.
 - Do not allow members of the public or family members of those picking up products to enter your space. Only those who have purchased product ahead of time may be permitted entry.
 - For touchless pick-ups, you may wish to post your market's phone number on your social media or the window or door where pick-ups occur, giving your customers the option of parking in a numbered parking spot, phoning when they arrive, and having staff deposit the order into the trunk.
- If appropriate, your market may wish to create a designated storefront space:

- All of the abovementioned social distancing and population control practices must also be enforced, in addition to:
 - Provide handwashing stations for customers, and do not allow a customer to enter your storefront without first washing their hands.
 - Please note that additional permits or licences may be required.
- All vendors, staff, and volunteers must continue to follow safe food handling and hygiene practices at all times at all areas of your market:
 - Ensure that all staff and volunteers have ready access to hand washing stations and hand sanitizer.
 - **All staff, volunteers, and vendors should wear a facemask.**
- Managers must ensure that all vendors do not charge higher than fair market prices for goods and services. Failure to adhere to this directive could result in an enforceable offense by police under the *Emergency Management Act*.
- All Nova Scotians returning from out-of-province travel must self-quarantine for a period of at least 14 days.
- **Any person exhibiting any symptoms must refrain from being involved in any aspect of a farmers' market at all times.**
- Post this statement (or your own) to your website, social media, and newsletter.

Directives for Open-air Farmers' Markets

FMNS recognizes that seasonal open-air markets may face additional challenges, but maintains that they can continue safely operating if they follow the following precautions. The following measures should be observed at all open-air farmers' markets in Nova Scotia, effective immediately:

- Wherever possible, do not hold a farmers' market event.
- Instead, all farmers' markets should be operating through pre-purchasing and pick-up only.
- Update your websites and/or social media channels to clearly reflect your new temporary system for your customers.
- **Strictly follow and enforce social distancing practices for vendor, staff, and volunteers at all times:**
 - Ensure that all vendors, staff, and volunteers engaging in order packing and distribution remain a minimum of 2 metres apart from each other.
 - Note: Food vendors are considered essential service workers and do not count towards the 5 person population limit.
- Strictly control the population of customers arriving for pick-ups:
 - Create clearly marked dedicated pick-up or drop-off spaces with strict, well-defined boundaries.
 - **No more than 5 customers or clients must be present in a dedicated space at any given time.**
 - Monitor and enforce at least 2 metres of social distancing for all customers.
 - Clearly mark out 2 metre spacing in the queue or line-up area leading to your dedicated space(s), and have staff or volunteer personnel on hand to let customers know when they can enter a space.
 - Stagger the times for your pick-ups if possible.
 - Do not allow members of the public or family members of those picking up products to enter your space. Only those who have purchased product ahead of time may be permitted entry.

- You may wish to post your market's phone number on your social media or the window or door where pick-ups occur, giving your customers the option of phoning when they arrive, so they may stay in their vehicle, open their trunk, and have staff deposit the order into the trunk.
- To encourage customers to come in and out as quickly as possible, observe the following:
 - Encourage all customers to secure their order and leave the premises as quickly as possible.
 - Do not allow any live music or entertainment of any kind on the premises.
 - Remove all customer seating areas.
- All vendors, staff, and volunteers must continue to follow safe food handling and hygiene practices at all times:
 - Ensure that all staff and volunteers have ready access to hand washing stations and hand sanitizer.
 - **All staff, volunteers, and vendors should wear a facemask.**
 - Do not allow dogs at your open-air market.
- **SPECIAL NOTICE:** In the event that pre-purchasing is not possible, a seasonal open-air farmers' market may operate an in-person market event. In this case, **all of the abovementioned social distancing and population control practices must also be strictly enforced, in addition to:**
 - Open-air farmers' markets that cannot operate with a system of pre-purchasing and pick-ups only **should operate as food-focused markets only.**
 - Vendor tables or booths must be widely spaced out on the premises.
 - Vendors may not issue product samples to customers at any time.
 - Brewed coffee or tea should not be served on the premises. Roasted beans may be sold.
 - All customers should be encouraged by staff and volunteers to enter and exit the designated space as quickly as possible.
 - Customers should be encouraged by staff and volunteers to refrain from stopping and chatting with vendors. Vendors should also be encouraged to refrain from engaging in lengthy conversation.
 - Vendors must not allow customers to touch their products unless they intend to purchase that product.
 - Vendors should pre-wrap or pre-package all products in units with set prices, and not sell by volume or weight.
 - Prepared food and drink should not be served in any designated market space. All food and drink must be served "to-go".
 - Vendors should encourage the use of credit card or debit card, and refrain from accepting cash. If this is not possible, vendors should have a designated person handling cash while another person handles product. Vendors who must handle cash should consider rounding to the nearest dollar to avoid excessive use of coins.
- Managers must ensure that all vendors do not charge higher than fair market prices for goods and services. Failure to adhere to this directive could result in an enforceable offense by police under the *Emergency Management Act*.
- All Nova Scotians returning from out-of-province travel must self-quarantine for a period of at least 14 days.
- **Any person exhibiting any symptoms must refrain from being involved in any aspect of a farmers' market at all times.**
- Post this statement (or your own) to your website, social media, and newsletter.

More information about FMNS support for your market

During these times, we wish to stress that we must continue monitoring updates and taking all necessary health and safety precautions. The situation can change at any time, and we owe it to all Nova Scotians to stay informed. FMNS wishes to stress that it's important to stay informed while taking all necessary precautions during these times. We encourage all farmers' market managers, staff, and vendors to constantly monitor Nova Scotia's updates on COVID-19 by going to www.novascotia.ca/coronavirus.

FMNS wishes to stress that our farmers' markets can use innovative approaches to continue operating, without the need for market days for the time being. With support from FMNS, farmers' markets can pivot and adapt to new conditions: shifting their business model to continue supporting as many local producers as possible while finding new and innovative ways to safely provide food and necessities to Nova Scotians.

Farmers' markets will be able to serve more customers and generate more sales for vendors if they work collectively and adopt a province-wide model of pre-ordering. Strictly controlled market day events are possible, but will likely yield lower volumes of sales for vendors, with an added element of risk to the public.

FMNS is working to implement necessary changes rapidly to help our markets adapt to the new market conditions and emerging needs of Nova Scotians. People need safe spaces to pick up food, and until this subsides, people may need food delivered to their door.

Please note the following:

- FMNS has secured funding from the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture to help *all* farmers' markets in Nova Scotia create online marketplaces to help make pre-ordering, pick-ups, and even door-to-door deliveries easier.
- We will launch a public volunteer drive to recruit groups and individuals that can safely provide technical assistance remotely from their homes. If your market or your vendors require assistance with website building, social media, or launching an online store, please reach out to us immediately.
- Any farmers' market that hasn't yet been contacted by FMNS is encouraged to reach out to us immediately to join our program.
- **We will provide this service free of charge to all of our markets.** Seasonal markets and open-air markets may join as well.
- All markets even if not currently operational are urged to contact us immediately for support.

FMNS will continue to work tirelessly with farmers' markets across Nova Scotia to rally our community and get our food and our message out to people over the internet and through news outlets at a time when more people are using social media and checking the news than ever.

By embracing innovative practices and by working cooperatively, we can continue to serve Nova Scotians in a safe manner, while continuing to support our local producers.

Sincerely,



Justin Cantafio
Executive Director
Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia