



April 16th, 2020

From: Heather O'Hara – Executive Director
BC Association of Farmers' Markets (BCAFM)

To: Mayors, Councilors & Regional District Officials

RE: Farmers' Markets are Essential Services under BC State of Emergency

Dear Mayors, Councilors and Officials,

The BC Association of Farmers' Markets is sending this letter on behalf of our 145+ member farmers' markets which operate in each of your communities across BC. Please share this information with relevant municipal and district staff and stakeholders.

As recognized by the BC Centre for Disease Control and Provincial Health Officer, on March 26th, 2020 the Ministry of Health designated farmers' markets as essential food and agriculture service providers. Farmers' markets are exempt from the mass gathering order: however, they must comply with physical distancing requirements.

BCAFM and BCCDC continue to work together as our farmers' markets modify their operations to ensure the health and safety of consumers, market organizers and vendors across BC. The most current guidelines and restrictions on the safe operations of farmers' markets can be found on the BCCDC website and this farmers' markets landing page:

<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/community-settings/farmers-markets>

Since the outset of the COVID-19 crisis, BCAFM and each one of our member markets have been proactive and demonstrated great leadership in your communities. Please visit the BCAFM website for our response to COVID-19 and see how all the ways farmers' markets are responding:

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

Like always, your market organizers and vendors are resilient and taking concrete steps to ensure your local community has access to local food. Furthermore, the livelihoods of your local farmers and food vendors rely on farmers market as a critical and vital direct sales channel to local customers to sustain their livelihoods and directly support your local economy. Right now, we are seeing the demand for local food in your community is increasing daily at our markets.

BC Farmers' Market Online Initiative

BC Farmers' Markets Online is a new e-commerce initiative launched by BCAFM and member markets in response to COVID-19 to support member farmers' markets of the BC Association of Farmers' Markets. This online e-commerce platform enables farmers' market vendors to sell their products through their new farmers' market online store, *in addition* to their modified



physical market locations on the ground. Each market is unique in its operations, and BC Farmers' Markets Online will reflect this diversity. For example, each market may vary in how products are delivered or picked up and how they manage their online store in addition to and as a complement to their physical markets. Participation in BC Farmers' Markets Online is voluntary and does not necessarily replace a physical market. Additionally, for various reasons individual markets may determine not to develop an online market for the moment.

Visit the **BC Farmers' Market Trail website** to find and promote your local farmers' market and to determine which markets have now launched their online stores. Check back often as we expect **80+** markets to offer an additional online store feature for their local customers across the province this season in addition to their physical market locations which continue to be a food retail channel and critical pick up and distribution point supporting this e-commerce initiative.

BC Farmers' Market Trail <https://bcfarmersmarkettrail.com>

BC Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon Program

As you may know, each year BCAFm together with participating farmers' markets deliver the BC Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon Program in participating communities with funding support from the Ministry of Health and Provincial Health Services Authority. In 2019, this program delivered **\$1.4M** in farm, fresh food to over **15,000** pregnant women, seniors and low income families in your community and across BC directly from your local farmers' market. BCAFm is adapting this program to work with modified participating farmers' markets on the ground and online for the 2020 season. In order for this program to operate in your community, your farmers' market must continue to operate in 2020.

Municipal & Regional District Support

Farmers' Markets are doing their part. Municipalities and regional districts can do your part to ensure local food is available and accessible. Together we can do this now and for the future.

- First and foremost, allow your farmers' markets to operate.
- As markets modify their operations, be flexible, administratively efficient and supportive of changing space and location requirements for the sake of local customers and market organizers. This includes providing new, additional or different spaces for your market to operate.
- Provide access to handwashing and washroom facilities.
- Provide access to underused equipment, infrastructure eg; barricades, pylons, ropes and other equipment and infrastructure markets can use on the ground to manage market spaces.
- Provide financial support. You should know that as all markets are required to modify their physical operations and are limited to food only vendors, their operating revenues are greatly reduced. Conversely, the work and time required of market organizers to modify markets and build their online store has been dramatically increased.
- Provide municipal in kind staff and volunteer support on the ground to market organizers.



- Market and promote your local farmers' market as an essential place for residents to purchase food locally and sustain your farmers and food entrepreneurs.

Reach Out

As always, we encourage our member farmers' markets to reach out to their municipal and regional districts. We invite you to do the same and reach out to your local farmers' market organizers and see how you can lend a hand.

Your farmers' markets need your support today more than ever. Working together we will ensure access to local food in your community today and tomorrow.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Heather O'Hara', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Heather O'Hara
Executive Director
BC Association of Farmers' Markets