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EXTENSION

COVID-19 GUIDANCE for PICK-YOUR-OWN FARMS

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The practices and protocols below are to address how farms who offer Pick-Your-Own (PYO) can minimize the spread of COVID-19. These recommendations are in addition to guidance provided by the [CDC](#), [USDA](#), and other federal agencies.

In order to provide a safe, reliable and nutritious food source for those growing and picking at a PYO, all farm owners and employees must be committed to adhering to health and safety standards identified by the [CDC](#) and this guidance:

- Washing hands regularly, at least 20 second each time, multiple times throughout the day.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover mouth with a bent elbow when sneezing or coughing. If a tissue is used, dispose of it immediately and follow with proper handwashing.
- Maintain the recommended social distancing protocols of at least six (6) feet of separation between individuals.
- Limit access to and disinfect common areas regularly.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Consider conducting health checks for staff
- Wear a cloth face covering or higher level protection when in public per [Executive Order 7BB](#)

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture wants to reinforce that PYO farms can continue to operate during this time and is issuing this document to provide guidance on how to safely operate a PYO farm. However, managing a PYO farm during this time has meant changing, rethinking, and being innovative. This is how farmers regularly persevere and the Connecticut Department of Agriculture is committed to supporting farmers throughout this pandemic.

This document cannot and does not cover every scenario that could arise. The recommendations provided herein represent best practices *at the moment* surrounding and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and will be updated as we progress through the growing season. The recommendations below should be in addition to continuing your traditional food safety protocols.

Employees

- Per [Executive Order 7S](#), all farm owners and employees must wear gloves and face masks at all times when they're interacting with customers and/or handling products.
- Grouping workers together into teams may reduce the spread of COVID-19 transmission in the workplace by minimizing the number of different individuals who come into close contact with each other over the course of a week, and may also reduce the number of workers quarantined because of exposure to the virus.
- Owners/operators should maximize opportunities to place farmworkers residing together in the same vehicles for transportation and in the same cohorts to limit exposure.
- If a farm owner and/or employee has a sick person at home or has been in contact with someone who has either tested positive for COVID-19 or has symptoms of COVID-19, they should follow the CDC's guidance on [Implementing Safety Practices for Critical Infrastructure Workers Who May Have Had Exposure to a Person with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19](#).
- Have employees to handle product and separate/additional employees to handle money; reminding them to wash their hands per the CDC recommendations or use hand sanitizer after every transaction.
- Use enhanced sanitation practices to regularly clean and sanitize high touch points/surfaces including: wagons/carts, scales, reusable bins and buckets, railings, doorknobs, tables, credit card processing terminals, etc.
- Use non-porous plastic tables that can be easily disinfected whenever possible.
- Provide a staff/patron hand washing or hand sanitizer stations with proper signage and request that they wash or sanitize their hands before entering the field and upon exiting. Restock hand washing supplies, including soap, paper towels, and/or hand sanitizer and empty garages frequently.
- Use non-porous tables for the check-in and check-out area.
- Install Plexiglas shields to separate employees from customers at checkout lines where practical.
- Hay/wagon rides to picking fields must enable social distancing. Consider allowing people to drive to the field and locate check-in there. For guests with transportation needs:
 - Utilize open-air farm vehicles
 - Limit rides to those with physical challenges
 - Limit the number of people on the vehicle
 - Provide hand sanitizer on the vehicle
 - Sanitize handrails and surfaces between trips
- **Update 8/14/2020: Hay/Wagon rides are permitted. Groups shall be limited to 10 people and all participants must wear a face mask.**
- Additional information can be found in the [COVID-19 Food Safety Guidance](#).

The CDC has released the [Agricultural Employer Checklist for Creating a COVID-19 Assessment and Control Plan](#). Agricultural employers can use this checklist to create a COVID-19 assessment and control plan for applying specific preparation, prevention, and management measures to prevent and slow the spread of COVID-19. The checklist is divided into five sections: assessment, control plan, shared housing, transportation, and children.

Pick-Your-Own Process

- Be mindful of how many people your field can accommodate

- Signage should be posted regarding social distancing, frequent handwashing, not touching your face, etc. Here's a [poster, in English and Spanish](#), from the CDC for posting around the market and take a look at [DECD's signage options](#) as well.
- Assign patrons to areas/rows with a buffer row in between them to maintain social distancing. Have signage reminding patrons of the importance of staying in their own area.
- Consider having at least one employee who specifically monitors and reinforces social distancing of patrons.
- Per [Executive Order 7S](#), patrons must wear face masks if they cannot socially distance.
- **Update 8/14/2020: Picnic areas are permitted and must be spaced at least six feet apart. Do not allow moving of tables.**
- No pets should be allowed.
- Signage should be posted to remind patrons that food picked cannot be consumed in the field and should be washed and eaten at home.
- If necessary, have patrons make reservations online or via phone to pick to limit the number of people in the picking area at one time. Have patrons pre-pay online or purchase in advance a picking container with a predetermined price to eliminate weighing and cash transactions.
- Have patrons leave a flag where they have stopped picking to limit patrons from overlapping in a given area. Remove these flags each day and sanitize for reuse.
- Encourage patrons to visit during off-peak hours.
- Encourage patrons to come with their nuclear family only.
- Post signs at check-out to emphasize physical distancing while waiting (e.g. flags at 6 foot intervals.) Encourage one family member to check out while others proceed to their vehicle.
- Offer special picking times for seniors and immunocompromised patrons.
- Request patrons sanitize their hands prior to picking and purchasing.
- Do not allow patrons to bring their own picking container from home. Reusable bags to take their purchases home after purchase are permitted.

Outreach

- Farm owners should communicate to their patrons that they should not come to the farm if they are displaying symptoms of COVID-19, or have come in contact with someone who has. If they are displaying symptoms at the farm they will be asked to leave.
- Update your website and social media with detailed instructions so patrons are aware.
- Share that you will be requiring all patrons to maintain a 6-foot social distancing amongst themselves.
- Explain your container and payment policy.
- Emphasize that families, including children, need to stay close together while on the farm to ensure physical distance from other customers.
- Share that there will be no entertainment or picnicking as in previous years to reduce congregating on the farm
- Emphasize that you do not allow any pets on the farm.

Considering other sales outlets:

- Pre-pick product and allow for pick up, drive through, and/ or delivery options such as online ordering or phone orders.
- A pre-picked CSA model with scheduled, physically distanced pick up.

For additional guidance for the agricultural industry, please visit the Connecticut Department of Agriculture's page, [Resources for Farmers During COVID-19](#).

If you have a farm open for the purchase of farm products and you'd like to be listed on [CTGrownMap.com](#), please complete this [online form](#).

For ideas and additional outreach on social media platforms that encourage Connecticut residents to [#StayHomeBuyCTGrown](#), take a look at the [Social Media Toolkit](#) on the agency website.

Please reach out to AGR.Covid19@ct.gov with any COVID-19 related questions or concerns you may have. The Connecticut Department of Agriculture is actively working to support our industry and will continue to provide the most up to date information as it becomes available

This guidance was compiled through the review of the following resources:

VA Dept of Ag and Consumer Services | TN Department of Agriculture | Jones Family Farms |
Lyman Orchards | UConn Extension | NY Department of Agriculture U-Pick Guidance