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Photo: credit: Edwin Remsberg

COVID-19 and Agritourism in Maryland

(The information in this article applies to pick-your-own and other food marketing operations. These are deemed as essential businesses and can be open. Maryland does not recognize agri-tainment enterprises such as mazes, farm stays and petting farms as essential businesses at this time. These types of businesses should not be open.)

By its very nature, agritourism activities bring groups of people together. Since Covid-19 protocols call for social distancing and avoidance of "crowd" situations, how are farms that feature agritourism as their core business model fairing? This is the start of the pick or cut your own season and on-farm markets premiering early season produce. What strategies, adjustments, and even innovative ways are these farms keeping their doors open to the public?

Good communications with customers and your employees is a primary recommendation.

COMMUNICATING WITH CUSTOMERS

- ▶ Communicate that customers should not come to the farm if they are displaying symptoms of COVID-19, or have come in contact with someone who has, and if they are displaying symptoms at the farm they will be asked to leave.
- ▶ Communicate to customers through signs, social media or newsletters, etc.
- ▶ Communicate that employees will not work if they have symptoms or were exposed.

Here are two examples of communication and outreach messages distributed by two of Maryland's agritourism operations:

- 1) **First Class Farm, Fred Coulbourn, Preston, MD**, recently sent this announcement to his email list: "As we near the strawberry season, COVID-19 is on all our minds. I've been researching the safety for u-pick, as well as plant sales at the greenhouse. The following, although a little wordy, says it best. I plan

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on adopting these practices, and placing more safeguards in place, including drive-thru pickup when appropriate. Stay tuned for continuing updates.”

2) Larriland Farm Facebook Homepage (April 10)

The blueberries are blooming. Blueberry season is late June through July. See you then for pick your own blueberries



Photo Credit: Larriland Farm, Woodbine, MD

HERE ARE SOME ADDITIONAL RESOURCES YOU MAY FIND HELPFUL:

▶ **COVID-19 Protective Measures for U-Pick Farms, Posted on March 16, 2020, From Clemson Food Safety Agent, Chad Carter.**

As COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) is being monitored across the State of South Carolina, growers have questions as to whether to continue operations, especially at U-Pick farms. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN reports that “While COVID-19 is not known to be a foodborne illness, usual good practice as regards handling of animals and good food hygiene throughout the food chain are essential for public health and will aid in the prevention and control of infectious diseases.” It is important that growers enforce good personal hygiene policies on farm which include frequent and proper handwashing, not working on or visiting farms when ill, and covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.”

▶ The University of Florida Extension has published a PDF brochure with excellent recommendations for Pick-Your-Own operations titled, **COVID-19 FAQ for U-Pick Farms: Steps for Farm Managers** <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fs338>

▶ The National American Farmers Direct Marketing Association (NAFDMA) is conducting weekly roundtables with producers and features excellent suggestions for handling:

- 1) Pick-Your-Own Operations
- 2) Market Operations:
 - a. Drive thru/ Curbside
 - b. Delivery
 - c. Managing guests/ crowds/ vehicle traffic
- 3) Safety:
 - a. Cleaning protocols
 - b. Money handling
 - c. Staff Safety

▶ There are also several Face Book Agritourism Groups. These are discussion spaces for farmers who offer agritourism activities including direct sales to share strengths, challenges, resources and ideas.

- NAFDMA- International Agritourism Association
- Agritourism Networking Association
- Agritourism Forum: Farmers Helping Farmers
- Grow & Fortify- Agritourism
- Vermont Agritourism
- Maryland Office of Tourism

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