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# A Guide for Direct Sales to Consumers During COVID-19 and Beyond

During these unprecedented times, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) recognizes that it is not 'business as usual'. We hope to provide some support and guidance to help you continue to market and sell your agricultural products.

## Alternative Market Channels for Selling Your Products

Regardless of whether your business is considered an essential workplace, **all businesses** can continue to sell goods and services, so long as they do so through teleworking, online, telephone, contactless-pickup and delivery. Some potential options are:

1. Direct farm gate sales, using the above preventative measures.
2. Online sales for contactless farm-gate pick-up or delivery.
3. Partner with other local businesses to offer a local box delivery.
4. Partner with local restaurants who still offer food delivery services and takeout.
5. If you have surplus food, consider donating to a local food bank or community food program and you may be able to claim an [income tax credit](#).

## General Health and Safety Protocols for Selling Direct

Be sure to read the [Ontario government's guidance: Agriculture health and safety during COVID-19](#). Continue to monitor the [Public Health website](#) for updates regarding current health and safety protocols and promote the use of the online [Self-Assessment Tool](#).

Remember, COVID-19 can be spread by people who are asymptomatic. Someone who is infected may not yet, **or ever**, show symptoms or signs. Screening will only identify the symptomatic population, so it can easily spread undetected.

Coronaviruses are spread through close contact with others. To help prevent the spread of germs in the workplace, encourage your staff to:

- [Wash hands often with soap and water](#) or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Wash or sanitize hands after making or receiving deliveries.
- Sneeze and cough into sleeve, and avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth.

- Avoid contact with people who are sick and stay home if sick.
- Avoid high-touch areas where possible, or wear gloves. Do not touch face with gloved hands and wash hands after removing them.
- Wash clothes as soon as you get home.
- If ill, notify the supervisor immediately, complete the [self-assessment](#) and follow the instructions.

## Implementing Physical Distancing

- The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person contact. Ensure there are 2 metres of physical distancing between employees at all times. Limit employee interactions by avoiding non-essential travel and carpooling.
- Consider adjusting schedules to avoid the likelihood of infection of all employees at the same time, by splitting employees into shifts, alternating days, etc.
- Stagger arrivals and break times for employees so they do not congregate in common spaces.
- Keep employees separated in designated areas and functions to limit interactions.
- Try to limit the number of employees using farm equipment. If possible, assign each employee to their own piece of equipment (e.g. tractor, truck, etc.).

When physical distancing is not possible and close contact is necessary, consider installing barriers or partitions. For example, putting up barriers like ‘sneeze guards’ around desks or workstations close together.

In addition to the above, when physical distancing and physical barriers are not possible, you may need to consider Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). PPE is only effective if people wear it correctly. Ensure PPE training includes the fit, use, care, putting on and taking off, maintenance, cleaning and limitations of the PPE.

Some examples of PPE considerations for agriculture workers include:

- Single-use gloves can help limit contact with certain surfaces, products, etc. Set up practices for suitable disposal or change when soiled. Be sure you consider other hazards that may be present in the workplace before introducing gloves – in some cases, gloves can be an ‘entanglement’ hazard and should not be worn.
- Goggles or face shields can help with barriers and separation too. They should be assigned to people and not shared but can be used regularly if kept clean. Be sure to determine how they will be assigned and cleaned if you determine you will use them.

## Setting Up Your Space

- Set-up your operation so that people can maneuver the space using physical distancing.
- Offer your products pre-packaged to reduce contact.
- Consider offering a space for handwashing or hand-sanitization.
- Provide self-serve freezers or other methods to reduce your need to be present and sanitize all areas between customers.

- Do not allow customers to sample food or use reusable containers.
- Do not provide communal areas or seating to stay on site.
- Offer contactless payment through Apple Pay or other tap/touchless payment methods, e- Transfer, pre-purchasing online. If you do accept cash, ensure it is properly sanitized.

## Marketing Your Operation

- When promoting your farm gate, encourage people to stay home if they are not feeling well.
- Encourage customers to pre-order so that their visit is as brief as possible.
- Post a list of the health and safety measures you have in place, so that customers are more at ease visiting your farm.
- Tell your story! Many consumers want to support farmers during these difficult times.
- Promote the health benefits of your products. You are providing fresh, local food or agricultural products that are good for your customers health and well-being.
- Pivot your business model to focus on essential products instead of luxury items. Your product may also double as a health product, or there may be a related value-added product that could be useful during this time. For example, many distillers are using their resources to develop hand sanitizer, which is in short supply.
- Get creative! Use social media for giveaways, encourage your followers to ‘take the [insert product here] challenge’, promote a fun activity related to your product, or consider a charitable/social good promotional initiative. Many people are on social media and are looking for ways to help and support others and lift their spirits!

## Local Line: An Online Sales Platform

Local Line is an online platform that helps farmers sell directly to consumers. Local Line’s e-commerce, Customer Relationship Management (CRM), inventory and logistics platform helps enable producers to control their own brand and grow their business on their terms.

OFA members receive the following benefits:

- A 30-day free trial and 20% off the first-year subscription
- A free website builder, free account set-up, and free Quickbooks integration

To sign-up, visit <https://www.localline.ca/signup> and enter your OFA number in the referral code box. To learn more about Local Line, [watch the OFA webinar](#) or [visit Local Line’s website](#).

## Making Risk Management Plans

- Ensure risk management and operational plans include pandemic plans. These plans should include identification of decision makers, roles and responsibilities, access to medical care, plans for quarantine and/or transportation to medical facilities. They should also include communications planning, such as: who is the point of contact, medical contacts, internal and external communication plans, staff contact information, suppliers, and community services.
- The risk management plan should also identify what to do if staff are not available to conduct time-sensitive work (e.g. milking, strawberry picking) when not enough employees are available to do the work

because of illness. This may include having agreements with surrounding farmers for back-up support.

- Review Public Health of Canada's [Risk-informed decision-making guidelines for workplaces and businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

## Workplaces with Employees

- If you are looking for HR support, download the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC) [AgriHR Toolkit](#). To receive a free access, use the code: OFA-Toolkit.
- CAHRC also has a regularly updated [COVID-19 web page](#) with information about managing your farm when employees are sick, calling in sick to work, or not showing up for work.
- If your business uses essential international seasonal employees, review the [Ontario Ministry of Health's Guidance for employers using the Temporary Foreign Worker Program](#).

## Resources

Many other organizations and government websites have additional resources and support available to help farmers to maintain the health and safety of your family, your workplace, and your customers. Here are some additional resources to help:

- [Ontario's Agriculture health and safety during COVID-19](#)
- [WSPS COVID-19 Sector-Specific Health and Safety Guidance Documents](#)
- [OFA's Guide to Operating Your Essential Farm Business During COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19 Guidance for Food Premises](#)
- [Farmers' Markets Ontario COVID-19 Updates](#)
- [Ontario Federation of Agriculture COVID-19 Updates](#)
- [Ontario Farm Fresh Marketing Association's Best Practices for On-Farm Marketers During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [Local Line Direct Market Farmers' Guide to COVID-19](#)
- [Ontario Ministry of Health](#)
- [Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance: Online Marketing and the Basics of Direct-to-Consumer Sales](#)

The health and well-being of your family should be top priority during these difficult times.