

Farmers Markets Need Your Support

Farmers markets have long served as a symbol of community spirit; they provide a vital link between field and plate, increase sustainable access to healthy food, and serve to bolster the local economy. COVID-19 has pushed us into a world-wide public health and economic crisis; the global food supply chain is at risk and local communities are devastated by business closures.

The announcement by Leo Varadkar on 24/03/2020 to close all markets left many of us reeling. It has put our local farmers and food producers in an alarmingly precarious position in a time of economic turmoil, and has denied their customers access to the fresh, healthy and affordable food that they steadfastly provide. I am proposing that we come back to our farmers markets, that we enable them to aid in filling this critical gap. We need national, regional and local commitment to allow them to re-open as the essential services that they are.

It is vital that farmers markets are set up in such a way that they are safe for both traders and the public amid this pandemic. If we work together, we can establish secure parameters and protocols to keep our markets safe and open now, and in the event of another international crisis. From this point forth, farmers markets should be classified as an essential service.

Adapting to public health realities

- The physical aspects of farmers markets may actually make them safer than shops. Open-air farmers markets allow for greater social distancing, whilst the nature of temporary stalls offers the ability to be flexible in an ever-changing social landscape.
- Systems can be implemented to allow customers to arrange pre-orders and pick-ups directly from stallholders.
- The produce itself is part of a short supply chain, meaning that food passes through far fewer hands than in retail outlets, minimising the risk of cross-contamination.
- Unlike being inside a building with recycled air, the fresh air outside may help reduce contact with pathogens.
- Farmers markets may also take the pressure off supermarkets who are having to cope with queues and empty shelves, whilst also reducing the demand for imported goods.

Farmers markets and local authorities

It has been wholly unacceptable and unnecessary to suddenly close farmers markets without exploring other options. While shops were provided with a series of guidelines to follow in order to continue trading, no such opportunity nor support was granted to farmers markets. It is of the utmost importance to reduce any risk to public health: therefore we implore local authorities to meet their responsibility in providing acceptable measures to create safe and functional market places for the common good.

Suggested protocol for farmers markets

We can gain from the information shared by farmers markets around the world that are evolving with the current climate, but we must recognise and respect the individuality of each market in Ireland and support them accordingly.

The following measures can be easily implemented to aid in the permanent reopening of our farmers markets:

- All stalls **will** be appropriately spaced
- Shoppers **must** respect rules of social distancing by staying 2m apart
- **No** seating
- **No** food sampling
- **No** activities that promote gatherings such as demonstrations, live musicians, etc
- General pedestrians and customers **must** be separated by markings or temporary fencing
- Each stallholder **will** take responsibility for encouraging the physical distancing of their customers. This may be done with the use of chalk or tape markings on the ground, ropes, barriers or other markers as required.
- Only **one** customer should be allowed at a stall at any time
- Traders **must** provide hand sanitisers and/or hand washing facilities
- Traders selling ready-to-go foods **must** package food in take-away containers or bags and advise customers **not** to eat in the marketplace

Protocols for stallholders:

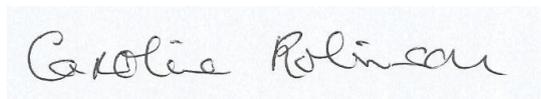
- Symptoms? Stay at home!
- Wash hands and/or use hand sanitiser regularly
- Do not allow customers to handle products
- Be vigilant with payments by washing and/or sanitising hands after touching money or card reader. If possible, have one person handling cash whilst another deals with the product
- Encourage customers to pre-order for pick up, in order to reduce time spent at the farmers market

Protocols for customers

- Symptoms? Stay at home!
- Wash hands and/or use sanitiser regularly
- Shop, don't stop!
- Maintain social distancing

In times of crisis, it is crucial that we unite as a community in support of one another. Over the past months, COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on individuals, businesses and families across Ireland. Farmers markets are critical venues for providing healthy, affordable food to those who need it, and creating a direct connection between producer and consumer. Now more than ever, it is important that we unite around our farmers markets and support those who work to make our communities happier and healthier. Join us in the fight to support our local producers, empower our consumers, and bring back our farmers markets once and for all.

Signed,



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