

Leeds Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit - Health Unit and Farmers' Markets are Working Together to Safely Bring Local Food to the Community

MEDIA RELEASE:

Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit

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Health Unit and Farmers' Markets are working together to safely bring local food to the community

The Leeds, Grenville and Lanark strongly supports local Farmers' Markets. They encourage people to buy healthy local food, and are a way for farmers to sell their produce. They have also been a social gathering place which supports individual and community well-being. Unfortunately at this time, with COVID-19, where social gatherings used to be a strength, they now pose a risk to both the vendors and the people who come to the market.

The provincial government has allowed Farmers' Markets to open under the agricultural exemption to the provincial emergency directives. The provincial directive about avoiding gatherings of more than 5 people still applies.

The Farmers' Markets of Ontario has identified public safety protocols for two acceptable models: Option 1: Multi-Vendor/Multi-Stand market; and Option 2: an **E-Commerce model with a drive/walk-through pickup of pre-ordered and prepaid food. Both options** require the market organizers to work with local public health and present a plan for opening.

"This is not business as usual for markets as only food can be offered for sale and social interaction must be limited to maintain social distancing." – [Farmers' Markets Ontario](#)

The Leeds Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit has been working with all Farmers' Markets in the region that are interested in opening under these restricted requirements. Originally, the Health Unit proposed Option 2 as this was the lower risk of the two options. The situation has changed now with a gradual relaxation of restrictions. In addition, in Lanark, Leeds, Grenville, most people are following the public health measures, including physical distancing, with the result that the number of new people infected with COVID-19 in the community is low. Therefore, Option 1: Multi-vendor /Multi-stand market has become less risky, as long as careful protective measures are put in place. The Health Unit will work with the markets who are interested in this approach. This will hopefully make local produce available to people who cannot use the e-commerce approach.

The Health Unit is required by law to ensure there is no additional risk to either the community or the vendors from the Farmers' Markets being open. Their plans are reviewed and suggestions made to further decrease the risk of COVID-19 spread.

The critical factors are:

- Control of people coming in, getting the produce, and leaving;
- Ensure 6 foot distance between buyers;
- Ensure the vendors are 6 feet away from people buying food;
- Adequate hand washing stations;
- No sampling of food;
- No reusable customer supplied containers; and
- No communal table or seating.

The Health Unit recognizes the economic importance of farmers being able to sell their produce to the public. A safe market set up can allow this to happen and not put anyone at increased risk.

The Health Unit staff are answering COVID-19 related questions and concerns from 8:30am to 4:30pm every day at 1-800-660-5853 extension 2499. Public Health Inspectors are also available to discuss environmental health concerns. You can also get more information about COVID-19 by visiting www.healthunit.org/coronavirus or by connecting with LGLHealthUnit on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).