

NEWS RELEASE

March 19, 2020

Helping consumers buy from local farmers during the COVID-19 outbreak

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. — Spring is a time when we prepare gardens for new seedlings, clear pots for new flowers, visit farmers' markets, and enjoy fresh, locally produced fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy, eggs, grains and much more.

COVID-19's arrival in Indiana has created an unprecedented disruption to these seasonal plans. Although the regular farmers' market season is still several weeks away, there's a significant chance they will be postponed or potentially canceled—an economic catastrophe for the farmers you have long supported. When you connect with farmers and buy their goods, you help protect those who rely on sales for their livelihoods and who have already invested in supplies, seed and seasonal operating costs.

Just as there are [ways for local farmers to reach consumers](#), there are also outlets for you to engage with farmers, establish direct contact, and make your purchases.

This guide helps you navigate these uncertain times by offering:

- Ideas on how to initiate and maintain contact with local farmers.
- Questions to ask local farmers about how you can buy their products.
- Resources to prepare for any changes that might occur in your local market.

Communication

Thanks to social media and other digital methods of communication, you can reach out directly to your local farmer and offer positive reinforcement along with your business.

Many Indiana farms maintain a regular presence on Facebook, Twitter and/or Instagram — sharing news about their operation and information about product availability.

However, *now* is the time to begin a direct dialogue with local farmers. Don't wait until they are inundated with requests.

Consider reaching out to them in the following ways:

- Search social media for farms from whom you've purchased before and follow them.
- Search online to see if those farms have a website with contact information.
- Call, text, email or message farmers and ask them the following questions:
 - Are their products available through local grocery stores?
 - Do they sell to any local restaurants from which you could order takeout or delivery?

... more ...

- If you want to buy direct, what products will they have available and when?
- If the local farmers' markets don't open, how would they deliver their products?

Some farmers may pivot to a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model — in which they assemble a packaged box of goods that you can pick up or potentially have delivered to your home. Ask farmers if they're considering a CSA model and learn more about their CSA plan.

To find farmers in your area, use the following resources:

- Visit the Indiana State Department of Agriculture's [Indiana Grown website](#) for a county-by-county list of Indiana producers, as well as their [farmers' market resource page](#).
- Consult online regional markets such as [Market Wagon](#), [Hoosier Harvest Market](#) (central Indiana) or [Green Bean Delivery](#).
- [Contact your county's Purdue Extension office](#) and ask them about local farms in your area.

Alternative Marketplaces

If farmers' markets are canceled, local producers will do their best to set up alternative marketplaces where they can sell directly to you. When you reach out to local farmers, ask them how they intend to deliver their goods to you if traditional outlets are not an option.

In that scenario, local farmers may:

- Create opportunities for you to order online, by phone or via text.
- Establish a pop-up stand for you to pick up products on their farm or elsewhere.
- Designate coordinated drop-off points where you can purchase their products.
- Deliver products directly to your residence.

Purdue Extension has advised local farmers to take precautions that protect their products from weather damage and that minimize the potential to spread COVID-19.

Purdue Extension advises that you ask local farmers:

- Are they packing boxes in a way that prevents customers from touching others' products?
- Are they staggering pickup times to reduce crowds?
- If they have a pick-up site, will they have hand-washing or hand-sanitizing stations available?

Please be patient and flexible with local farmers as they adapt to rapidly changing conditions. Developments concerning COVID-19 are fluid, and plans may need to change on a moment's notice.

Know What's Healthy and in Season

Fresh fruits, vegetables, herbs and flowers are mainstays of local farmers' markets. But what is most readily available right now — or in summer or fall seasons? Visit Purdue Extension's [FoodLink](#) for a guide to seasonal produce availability.

Food Safety

Local farmers take pride in delivering food that is fresh, locally sourced *and* safe to consume. Nevertheless, please take precautions that assist them *and* minimize the potential spread of COVID-19.

- If you exhibit any symptoms of illness, do **not** go to a market or farm.

- Wash your hands [according to CDC guidelines](#) before picking up / taking delivery of any order.
- Do not ask local farmers to let you handle products beyond those you are purchasing.
- [Wash your hands](#) and any produce you buy once you return home to reduce contamination.

Once you're ready to use what you've purchased, be sure to [follow expert guidelines for safe food handling](#) — as recommended by the United States Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

To correctly store your fresh fruits and vegetables, consult [Purdue Extension's free storage-and-cleaning guide](#).

Authors:

Tamara Benjamin, Assistant Program Leader and Diversified Agriculture Specialist – Purdue Extension Agriculture & Natural Resources

Elizabeth Maynard, Clinical Engagement Associate Professor of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture at Purdue University and Purdue Extension Commercial Vegetable Production Specialist

Michael O'Donnell, Purdue Extension Educator in Organic and Diversified Agriculture

Nathan Shoaf, Purdue Extension Urban Agriculture State Coordinator

Heather Tallman, Indiana Grown Program Director, Indiana State Department of Agriculture

Amy Thompson, Agriculture & Natural Resources Educator, Purdue Extension – Monroe County

Writer: Tamara Benjamin, tamara17@purdue.edu

Media Source: Maureen Manier, mmanier@purdue.edu