

A guide for U-Pick producers / agritourism sites during the COVID-19 pandemic

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. — Spring's arrival brings many wonderful experiences — including the opportunity for local consumers to pick farm-fresh produce onsite, learn more about local outlets through agritourism and enjoy time outdoors.

The U-Pick season, as it's known, is just around the corner for strawberries, blueberries, cherries and more. Now is the time to implement best practices to maintain physical distancing, minimize community spread of COVID-19 and safely sell products.

These guidelines go hand in hand with Indiana Governor Eric J. Holcomb's executive order, as well as Purdue Extension COVID-19 resource articles for [direct marketing](#), [farmers' markets](#) and [more](#). U-Pick and agritourism activities are deemed essential due to their agricultural connection. Also, the [North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Association](#) has [summarized practices implemented by southern U.S. states](#) — where U-Pick season has already started.

Not all U-Pick and agritourism operations are the same. The suggestions below are intended as a starting point. Remember: You are responsible for complying with all federal, state and local guidelines. Recommendations and best practices are also subject to change in light of newly provided information about COVID-19.

This guide can help U-Pick producers and agritourism outlets navigate these uncertain times by offering ideas on:

- Adjustments to logistics
- Customer interactions that minimize potential exposure to COVID-19
- Alternative methods to U-Pick or agritourism activities

Changes to Logistics

It is important that any U-Pick or agritourism operation complies with current executive orders. This includes limiting the number of people attending an event. The most up-to-date information can be found at [Indiana's Back on Track website](#).

- Contact county health departments and county / local law enforcement.
 - Confirm in advance that intended guidelines are consistent with local requirements to avoid conflicts.
- Consult your liability insurance carrier for any restrictions or limitations.

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- Consider infrastructure / management practices to maintain 6-foot physical distancing and minimize crowds.
 - Determine certain rows from which customers can buy, segmenting people to a smaller space.
 - Establish time blocks, allow customers to register in advance and cap the number of groups per block.
 - Set limits on produce purchases if there are concerns about enough product to go around.
 - Increase the number of staff tasked to enforce physical distancing and enhanced sanitation.
 - For additional ideas on field spacing, [consult this Fruit Growers News article](#).
- Rent portable hand-washing stations and / or create hand-sanitizing stations to use onsite.
- Provide single-use containers or thoroughly disinfect reusable containers whenever they are returned.
- Discontinue, limit or properly and regularly disinfect field transportation (e.g., wagon rides).
 - The Office of Indiana State Chemist website offers [a searchable list of EPA-registered disinfectant products for COVID-19](#). Consult this site to determine if disinfectants are safe and recommended for use in this environment.
- Encourage online or credit-card payment where possible to avoid money handling.
 - Those handling money should regularly wash their hands and / or use hand sanitizer.

Customer Interactions

Maintaining regular, informative contact with customers is the best way to successfully implement any new procedures or policies. This way, customers will know about your efforts to minimize potential community spread of COVID-19 and keep all involved healthy.

- Use social media outlets, your business website and other normal means to communicate any and all changes in policy, including details about:
 - Time blocks
 - Caps on the number of people allowed onsite
 - Limitations on the amount of produce that can be picked
- Reiterate that no one should visit the farm if they feel ill, are showing signs of illness or have tested positive for COVID-19 (or had close contact with someone who has tested positive) within the past two weeks.
 - The same criteria applies to anyone in that visitor's household.
- Advise those attending in any capacity — customer, vendor, worker, volunteer — to wash their hands before arriving and upon returning home.
- In such a public setting, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention now recommend wearing cloth face coverings.
 - For a guide on how to create your own cloth face coverings, [visit the CDC website](#).
- Post signs onsite asking customers to practice physical distancing of at least 6 feet and **not** touch products they aren't purchasing.
- Recommend that all customers follow [CDC recommendations](#) on minimizing the community spread of COVID-19.
- Reiterate that there is no indication that COVID-19 is transmitted via food.
 - Standard guidelines for washing produce with clean water before eating still apply.

Alternative Methods

Remember: Just because U-Pick or agritourism activities are permitted, you don't *have* to continue them. If you feel you aren't able to safely handle this influx of customers to your farm — or simply prefer not to — consider converting to an [alternative delivery method](#).

- Alternative methods can include:
 - Farmers' market booths
 - Produce auctions
 - Retail sales
 - Online sales
- Remember that changes can mean increased labor for picking and packing produce, as well as additional expenses for packaging and delivery.

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