

Marketing Food Safely

Farm Direct Advantage



Marketing Food Safely: Farm Direct Advantage

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Food Safety Division
6909 116 Street
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Canada T6H 4P2
Telephone: (780) 427-4054

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Alberta Farmers' Market Association (AFMA)
Room 106, 7000 113 Street
Edmonton, AB T6H 5T6
Telephone: (780) 644-5377
Email: director@albertamarkets.com

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How To Use This Manual

Who Should Use This Resource

All farm direct operators, including Alberta Approved Farmers' Markets managers and vendors, need a solid understanding of food safety principles and practices. *Marketing Food Safely: Farm Direct Advantage* is a comprehensive resource to help you market your food safely. It is intended for use by all farm direct marketers including market gardeners, producers, small processors and Alberta Approved Farmers' Market managers and vendors.

The Manual

Effective food safety plans are built on a solid foundation of prerequisite programs. Prerequisite programs are defined as universal steps or procedures that control the operational conditions within a food establishment allowing for environmental conditions that are favorable to the production of safe food.

The elements of prerequisite programs include:

- Premises
- Sanitation
- Storage
- Transportation
- Equipment
- Personal hygiene
- Pest control
- Recall

A quick look at the table of contents shows that these are some of the chapter titles. In addition there is information on causes of foodborne illness, general food handling requirements and federal and provincial legislation.

A comprehensive appendix provides additional information. It includes such things as record templates, websites, list of contacts and publications and food safety tips. There is a glossary of definitions for the terms used throughout the manual.

To help you understand some of the food safety concerns, there are three fictional farm direct businesses. These case examples used throughout the manual illustrate certain concepts and potential issues.

As a direct marketer, you will likely face some of the same food safety issues that the fictional marketers face. Although your products or markets may be different, the food safety requirements are the same.

Chapter Layout

Most of the chapters have some common sections. They help you link the material in each chapter and create your own food safety plan. The chapters discussing prerequisite programs explain some of the hazards inherent to those aspects of your operation. They address the practices that should be included in your food safety plan along with the records and staff training required. There is also a section for farmers' market managers to help you identify your roles in each of these areas.

Exercises within each chapter help you review the material and focus on some of the activities you need to undertake to produce your food safely.

Four icons are used to draw your attention to specific sections within each chapter.



This icon introduces the case examples. Each chapter provides you with more information about the fictional marketers.



This icon refers you to other sections of the manual or websites that will provide you with more information about the subject.



This icon is used when there is an exercise or review.



This icon identifies the food safety plan, one of the most important sections of this manual. This section helps you build a food safety plan geared for your operation.

Food Safety Plan

A food safety plan consists of the practices and procedures you undertake to protect food products from becoming contaminated and control microbial growth. These practices and procedures should be explained in a written document and are referred to as standard operating procedures (SOPs). They are specific to your operation. SOPs need to be readable and to the point so that staff can understand and easily implement them.

Food Safety Plan → Written SOPs → Implementation → Records

The objective of any food safety program is to reduce the risks created by all potential hazards. Each of the prerequisite chapters describes the process to follow as you develop the written document outlining your standard operating procedures that keep your food products safe.

An effective food safety plan gives you the ‘how to’ to reduce food safety risks in your operation.

Your Food Safety Plan

You’ll reap the most benefit if you work through each chapter in sequence. Follow the process outlined in the Food Safety Plan section of each chapter to build a food safety plan for the marketing activities of your farmers’ market or farm direct venture.

If you produce or process the food products you sell, you will need additional food safety plans for the production and processing components of your business. They are not addressed in this resource.

Implementing Food Safety Strategies

Once you have written your food safety plan, you need to prioritize your actions to implement food safety strategies in your operation. Break your actions into simple steps and start small; for example, use thermometers in refrigerated storage and during transport to monitor product temperatures.

Don’t forget to include record keeping and staff training in your plan. If necessary, get assistance to implement the changes you have planned. Make sure you know who to contact to ask questions regarding food safety.

The *Marketing Food Safely* chapters are arranged in logical order. Use their order as a guide to plan your food safety implementation strategies.

Step 1 Know why food safety is important to your business or farmers' market.

Step 2 Understand the three categories of food hazards.

Step 3 Determine if your food product is potentially hazardous and understand the implications.

Step 4 Ensure that you are complying with all legislation that pertains to your operation.

Step 5 Determine if your establishment is an appropriate place to sell safe food. Identify the improvements required.

Step 6 Begin implementing your plan.

Step 7 Continuously improve.

A Food Safety Committee Success Story

The Old Strathcona Farmers' Market in Edmonton originally started a food safety committee to help the market develop a rapport with the regional health authority and other market committees. Today the committee sets food safety policy for the market, advises vendors on proper procedures for sampling, producing and marketing products safely and works with the committee that approves new vendor applications.

When vendors have issues requiring additional food safety expertise, committee members refer them to other resources such as Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, private food labs, etc. The food safety committee routinely checks food handling procedures at the market.

The original membership was made up of the market manager, several vendors and one board member. Today it is a group of vendors that works closely with the regional health authority on safe food handling procedures and practices for the market. The committee evaluates a prospective vendor's food safety knowledge and experience. They assess food handling, sampling and production procedures and product shelf life. If the prospective vendor lacks required knowledge, the prospect is directed to other organizations to find out the information and asked to reapply.

The committee takes a proactive approach to food safety. Members conduct surprise inspections of vendor farms and businesses to assess their operations and production processes.

In conjunction with the regional health authority, the committee sponsors a compulsory food safety seminar for food vendors. They provide food safety information to vendors throughout the year in newsletters, workshops and individual consultations. The committee does everything it can to ensure that their market is doing things safely.

“We’ve made lots of changes at the market. We established a food safety committee that works closely with other market committees to achieve a common goal of food safety. We’ve added better sinks, encouraged our vendors to use commercial refrigeration units, purchased food safety testing equipment and developed an emergency safety protocol. Having a food safety focus at the market is simply the right thing to do.” Jim O’Neill, Old Strathcona Farmers’ Market

What’s Next?

What advantage does an Alberta Approved Farmers’ Market provide over all other public markets? What assurances do food safety systems offer consumers? Do farm direct marketers benefit by minimizing food safety risks? Chapter 1: Securing Your Future answers these questions and describes how addressing food safety issues ensures the sustainability of your business.

