

Guidelines for Apple Pick-Your-Own Operations

July 3, 2020

Version 1

Many Ontario apple growers rely on direct marketing, including pick-your-own (PYO) and on-farm sales, to market their crop. These guidelines provide recommendations for pick-your-own operations to operate safely in 2020. Your local Public Health Unit is a good resource of information as well. Each business should take the guidelines, make their own COVID-19 plan or policy, and work proactively with their health unit to avoid any issues.

These guidelines were created to help apple growers provide a safe and healthy product and experience for their customers, and a safe work environment for staff.

You can provide alternative options to customers instead of PYO, such as:

- ✓ Farm stands offering pre-picked / packaged fruit
- ✓ Online sales & curbside pick-up
- ✓ Join a multi-farm CSA (community supported agriculture)

Recommendations

Before Opening

- ✓ Take the opportunity to communicate your expectations and requirements of your customers through as many touchpoints as possible. Consider making your employee COVID-19 policy public on your website. The more preparation is done before a customer visits your farm, the more likely they are to follow the rules and know what to expect.
 - Communication, including your safety measures, can be through websites, social media, newsletters, phone messages, etc.
 - Include your container policy, in communications to customers
- ✓ Evaluate customer limits, i.e. what is the number of customers at a given time that your farm can accommodate safely? This will form the basis of the rest of your plan.
- ✓ What restrictions are necessary to maintain social distancing?
 - flow of car traffic
 - flow of customers to and from the check-in area
 - flow to and from the field

- make a map with this information available to customers online and/or printed for use when they arrive at the farm
- ✓ Given that many of your customers will be returning from previous years, establish in your signage and communications the new expectations of customers to keep the farm a safe place.

Operating Details

- ✓ Consider booking appointments for customers to maintain the safe limits established prior to opening. Assign time limits and ask that people respect their allotted time. Using an online scheduler or e-commerce solution will also allow for contact tracing.
- ✓ Consider employing a “greeter” who can clearly communicate with customers as they arrive and review expectations and rules.
- ✓ Consider offering specific hours for those most vulnerable to COVID-19 infection.
- ✓ Encourage customers to come on their own.
 - If a family arrives in one vehicle together, they pick together.
 - Emphasize the importance of the family staying close together.
 - Children must remain with the family unit. Failure to do so may result in a family being asked to leave the property.
- ✓ Postpone any large events, school tours or gatherings.
- ✓ Consider your social distancing requirements with your arrangement of seating areas, tables, or entertainment.
- ✓ Use directional arrows on alternating rows in the orchard to facilitate a one-way flow of foot traffic. Families should try not to pass each other in the row. You could possibly set up a passing lane along one side of the row, if row spacing allows, to allow customers to pass if they finish before a customer ahead of them.
- ✓ Consider how you will manage the flow of customers who want to pick multiple varieties.
- ✓ Make sure each row does not surpass the allowable occupancy.
- ✓ Have staff on hand to indicate where customers should be picking and to remind customers about physical distancing.
- ✓ Have new containers available with the staff in the field so customers do not have to leave and re-enter. Provide single use picking bags or allow customers to bring their own bags. Do not use bags or baskets that are shared between customers.
- ✓ Have clear signage for customers before they enter the field; make use of signage strategically. Too many signs or too lengthy a list of rules will not likely have the desired effect.
- ✓ Have signage asking that food not be consumed in the orchard and advise customers that apples should be washed before being consumed.
- ✓ For other activities on the farm (corn mazes, farm shops, attractions) follow the same principles: 1) if physical distancing can't be maintained don't offer the activity;

2) if certain areas or surfaces are high-touch, high traffic, ensure frequent cleaning is done; 3) facilitate good hand hygiene as much as possible by providing hand sanitizer or hand wash stations.

Transport

- ✓ If possible, avoid moving customers with vehicles (unless it is in their own).
- ✓ If customers must take a wagon to an apple orchard limit the number of customers per ride to maintain appropriate physical distancing.
- ✓ Have hand sanitizer available on wagons.
- ✓ Sanitize handrails and surfaces between each trip.

Payment

- ✓ Separate and redesign check-in and check-out if possible, to maintain physical distancing.
- ✓ Mark out 2m spacing for any customers waiting in line and have only one family member pay for picked apples.
- ✓ Provide hand sanitizer dispensers near check-in and check-out stations.
- ✓ Simplify your checkout procedure as much as possible to avoid unnecessary closeness and contact, for example set up a no-touch, e-transfer or tap option for payment.
- ✓ Wipe down credit/debit card machines and POS equipment often. Maintain a rigorous cleaning routine for frequently touched surfaces.
- ✓ Use tables and surfaces that can easily be disinfected at pay stations.
- ✓ Consider charging by volume versus by weight (reduces lines into farm and during payments) and provide new, standard containers to customers (avoid customers bringing their own containers).
- ✓ Consider a pre-payment system to limit the number of interactions. Customers can choose the volume they wish to pick, pick up containers in a self-serve area, and staff can confirm the amount the customers picked after they are done, either at a check out or in their trunk.

Employees

- ✓ All employees must be trained and held to a very high standard in terms of COVID-19 policy compliance. They are what customers will notice and if they do not have confidence in the staff, they may complain, report, or not return.
- ✓ All employees should be required to complete a symptom check before their shift, wash their hands thoroughly and frequently and wear masks throughout the day and will be sent home if they have symptoms. You may want to consider taking temperatures at the start of the employees shift.
- ✓ Employees should use gloves when handling money.
- ✓ Employees should wash their hands or use hand sanitizer between customers.

- ✓ Set up the payment stations so employees do not have to handle produce. Avoid paying by weight and provide standard-sized containers to allow this.
- ✓ Employees should wear masks if physical distancing is hard to maintain. Alternatively, set up plexiglass at pay stations between employees and customers.
- ✓ It is almost certain that more employees will be needed than in a typical year to manage the same number of customers.
- ✓ Every effort should be made to reduce the number of interactions between customers and employees. Employees are at a higher risk of exposure due to prolonged and frequent interactions with the public. Great care should be taken to ensure that they feel safe and that customers see them and management taking COVID-19 seriously.

Washrooms

- ✓ If there are washrooms or hand-washing facilities available for your customers create a schedule for staff and post it in the washroom to assure customers that cleaning has been done regularly.
 - Provide staff with instructions on appropriate procedures to follow when cleaning and sanitizing the facilities.
- ✓ Provide soap, water and single use paper towel for hand washing, and provide hand sanitizer.
- ✓ Dispose of the garbage bags in the washrooms daily. This may need to be done more often throughout the day with increased handwashing there is increased garbage.
- ✓ Include signs for customers emphasizing the importance of thorough hand washing after using the washroom facilities.

Customers

- ✓ Customers should not come to the farm if they are displaying symptoms or have come in contact with someone who has symptoms.
- ✓ Do not use re-useable containers. Farms will provide clean, new containers.
- ✓ If a customer is displaying symptoms while at the farm they will be asked to leave.

Resources

Federal and Provincial Resources

Resources to prevent COVID-19 in the workplace (Ontario)

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/resources-prevent-COVID-19-workplace>

Guidance on Worker Health and Safety (Ontario Apple Growers)

<http://onapples.com/growers/COVID-19-resources>

Guidance on Health and Safety for Food Retail Sector during COVID-19(WSPS)

<https://www.wspss.ca/WSPS/media/Site/Resources/Downloads/COVID-19-food-retail-health-and-safety-guidance.pdf?ext=.pdf>

Advice for essential retailers during COVID-19 pandemic

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/advice-essential-retailers.html>

Agri-Food Workplace Protection Program: Agriculture Producers

http://lp.wspss.ca/COVID-19_and_farm_workers.html

Guidance for Taxi and Ride Share Vehicles

City of Toronto

<https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/8d19-COVID-19-Guidance-for-Taxi-Ride-Share-Employers-Drivers-Vehicle-Owners.pdf>

Disinfectant Info

Information about disinfectants and COVID-19 can be found at:

Hard-surface disinfectants and hand sanitizers (COVID-19)

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/COVID-19.html>

Suppliers for personal protective equipment and disinfectants

Fastenal: <https://www.fastenal.com/product/janitorial-and-cleaning/cleaning-chemicals-detergents-and-deodorizers/disinfectants-and-surface->

[sanitizers/601509?categoryId=601509&level=3&query=disin&isExpanded=true&page=4&pageSize=12&exactSkuMatchLevel=useData](https://www.amazon.ca/s?k=hand+sanitizers&ref=ast_sitemap)

Dental Market: <https://thedentalmarket.ca/>

Amazon: <https://www.amazon.ca/>

Hazmasters: www.hazmasters.com

Suggested apps & online booking tools for pre-booking

EatApp: <https://restaurant.eatapp.co/>

Sagenda: <https://www.sagenda.com/>

BookThatApp: <https://apps.shopify.com/bookthatapp>

Links to specific companies do not constitute an endorsement from the OAG.

Guidelines from other jurisdictions (Berry PYO focused)

Cornell (New York): <https://smallfarms.cornell.edu/resources/farm-resilience/best-management-practices-for-u-pick-farms-during-the-COVID-19-pandemic/>

North Carolina: https://foodsafety.ces.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/U-Pick-Farms_COVID-19_flyer.pdf?fwd=no

Manitoba: <https://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/crops/crop-management/fruit-crops/pubs/berry-farm-upick-COVID-19-growers.pdf>

Webinar Recording - Practical Strategies for U-Pick Farms During COVID-19 (University of Minnesota Extension)

<https://blog-fruit-vegetable-ipm.extension.umn.edu/2020/05/webinar-recording-practical-strategies.html>

Examples of signage to use for customers (Purdue):

<https://extension.purdue.edu/article/37222>