

# ASKING FOOD SAFETY QUESTIONS AT THE FARMERS' MARKET



One of the benefits of shopping at a farmers market is that often the vendor selling fresh produce, meat, dairy or eggs is either the producer or works directly for the producer. Farmers' markets are an ideal place to connect with food production engage in a discussion about the growing practices, storage and handling of food. The below questions, culled from industry guidance and evidence-based grocery retailer requirements are a starting point

**Q: What is your water source, and how is it tested for safety?**

A: Knowing about the water source(s) used during the growing and production is important for understanding the potential for microbial contamination. Lakes, rivers, or ponds may become contaminated from wildlife, like deer, that carry pathogens. Water sources should be evaluated by the producer (and this may include testing before and during the growing season), and steps like fencing, chlorination or using drip irrigation can all be used to reduce risk.

**Q: What types of soil amendments do you use? If you use manure, is it composted?**

A: Raw, uncomposted manure can increase the risk of pathogen contamination of the produce. Ruminants are natural harbors of pathogens like *E. coli* O157 and can shed them in their manure. Composted manure is lower risk as

the heat has been used to reduce the chance that pathogens remain when added.

**Q: Are animals raised on your farm? If so, how are they kept separate from produce?**

A: Livestock produce manure and are likely to carry pathogens and may contaminate fields. Working with both livestock and produce also provides a chance for cross-contamination. The producer should be able to tell you about the measures they take to make sure that livestock is kept out of the fields.

**Q: Are staff trained on food safety practices?**

A: Food handlers should be taught basic food safety and sanitation related to the preparation, storage, and handling of produce, animals, and other farm products. For example, they must learn proper handwashing technique; how to clean and sanitize equipment, utensils, and food contact surfaces; and, how to prevent cross-contamination.

## Engage in food safety discussions at the farmers market

### **Q:** How are products transported?

A: Transportation vehicles should be clean and sanitary. Dirty vehicles, can be a source of cross-contamination. This includes the containers or packaging that are used to transport food in to the market. Some foods, like meats, should be held at refrigeration temperatures during transportation, and simple coolers will do the trick.

### **Q:** Do you provide handwashing stations and restroom facilities for your staff?

A: It is a best practice to have restrooms with handwashing facilities available in a location where farm staff will use them. Most commercial hand sanitizers are not good substitutes for handwashing stations with soap and water as the compounds may be inactivated by soiled hands and are not effective against norovirus. Stations should have a clean water source, soap, paper towels, a basin to catch wastewater, and a trash container.



### **Q:** How are equipment, utensils, and food contact surfaces cleaned?

A: Equipment, and food contact surfaces should be cleaned sanitized - whether at the market or on the farm. Sortint tables, harvest containers, knives, and other utensils should be easy to clean and sanitize (not porous). When utensils or equipment become dirty or contaminated, they can transfer that contamination to the food causing a foodborne illness.



### **Q:** What do you do if an employee is sick?

A: Food handlers who are ill should not come to work. Effective handwashing can help prevent the spread of illness. It is imperative that food workers are in good health while preparing food. A food worker that has been diagnosed with

### GOOD FOOD SAFETY PRACTICES

- The market and vendor stands appear clean and organized. Food should be displayed on non porous, cleanable and sanitizable surfaces or one-use only packaging
- Stands are sheltered by an overhead covering to protect from direct sun, rain, and birds.
- Bathroom and handwashing facilities are available for customers and vendors.
- Samples (except uncut produce) are covered, held on ice and served with utensils or by a vendor wearing disposable gloves.
- Foods requiring refrigeration are kept at appropriate temperatures. Raw meat, eggs, dairy, seafood, cut produce, leafy greens, and sprouts are stored on ice or in coolers to keep them below 41F. Hot, ready-to-eat foods are held at least at 135F. Vendors should have thermometers to check.

an acute gastrointestinal illness, or is showing symptoms such as diarrhea, or vomiting in conjunction with diarrhea, could potentially contaminate food. It is possible for a food worker to transfer their illness to others through the food they are handling.