



## **BERRY GROWERS OF ONTARIO**

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### **Guidelines for Berry Growers and Pick-Your-Own Operations**

Many Ontario berry growers rely on direct marketing, including pick-your-own and on-farm sales, to market their crop. An estimated 90% of Ontario berry growers market a portion of their crop through pick-your-own (PYO). These guidelines provide recommendations for pick-your-own operations to operate safely in 2020. **The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) states that there is currently no evidence that food or food packages can be a source or route of transmission of the virus.**

PYO operations will provide customers with an alternative to going to a grocery store for fresh berries and will reduce the number of people handling produce before it reaches the end consumer. Local berry farms play a critical role in food distribution in Ontario, and by continuing to offer PYO the crop will be harvested, and customers will continue to have access to safe, healthy fruit.

Other businesses, including grocery stores, have adapted to encourage physical distancing. PYO in 2020 will be different than previous years as growers adjust to producing, harvesting, and selling berries during the COVID-19 pandemic. These guidelines were created to help berry growers provide a safe and healthy product to their customers and a safe work environment for staff.

If you are not comfortable with operating PYO this season, or are unable to satisfy the physical distancing requirements, consider providing alternative options to customers instead of PYO, such as:

- Farm stands
- Online sales & curbside pick-up
- Join a multi-farm CSA (community supported agriculture)

#### **Recommendations:**

Consider creating a map to show the flow of traffic, and flow of customers to and from the check-in area, and to and from the field. Have this map available for customers online and/or when they arrive at the farm.

#### **Communicating with customers:**

Communicate with customers before they arrive at the farm about new practices and expectations surrounding COVID-19. Communication can be through websites, social media, newsletters, phone messages, etc. Provide as much information as you can to customers before they arrive at the farm so they are aware of the new practices and expectations in place to maintain a healthy and safe environment for customers and staff. Include your container policy in any communication to customers.

Communicate to customers that they should complete a self-assessment prior to arriving at the farm. Refer your customers to this link: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/>

Create signage on the farm and in the field with new practices or expectations for customers to keep the farm a safe place for healthy, local food. Encourage customers to maintain physical distancing at all times and practice proper sanitation. Emphasize that keeping customers and staff safe and healthy is the number one priority for the farm. Consider signage in the field that discourages customers from sampling fruit in the field.

#### **Customer expectations:**

- Stay at home if expressing symptoms of COVID-19.
- Wash or sanitize hands before and after leaving the field
- Stay in their assigned row.
- Move the flag in their row to indicate where the next customer should pick.
- Maintain 2m distance from other customers and staff.
- No sampling and will pick cleanly.
- Anyone not respecting social distancing may be asked to leave the property.
- Leave pets at home

Use farm signage to communicate the customer flow, so physical distancing is always maintained.

#### **Crowd Control**

- Consider booking different appointments for customers to reduce volume at one time and to provide a safer environment for all.
- Consider offering specific hours for those most vulnerable to COVID-19 infection.
- Assign a row to each individual customer or family.
- Encourage customers to come on their own.
  - If a family arrives in one vehicle together, they can pick in the same row. Emphasize the importance of the family staying in their row and 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.
- Limit the number of customers on your farm based on space. Postpone any large events or gatherings.
- Discourage customers from congregating by eliminating seating areas, tables, or entertainment.
- Create a flow of customers to maintain physical distancing (2m) at all times in the field and when checking in or out. Clearly communicate this flow to customers.
- Provide one-direction foot paths for customers to go to and return from the field.
- A flow in and out is important to maintain for customers checking in for containers and checking out afterwards for payment. Minimize customers crossing paths as much as possible. Consider separate check-in and check-out stations.
- Clearly number all your rows.
- Assign specific rows to each customer/family.
- Use cones or wire flags to indicate where customers should be picking.
  - Customers should leave the flag where they finish picking to indicate to the next customer where to start.
- Consider having additional employees in the field for supervision to encourage physical distancing.
- Have new containers available in the field so customers do not have to leave and re-enter fields.
- Have clear signage for customers before they enter the field to emphasize the importance of staying in their row and maintaining physical distancing.

The number of customers that can be picking at any one time will depend on the number of rows that can be used while maintaining 2m physical distance:

### **Strawberries**

- Place pickers every other row at a minimum.
- Consider shortening your rows, with an herbicide strip or mowing a strip down, to manage the flow of customers. This will help create a one-direction flow of foot-traffic and a pathway for customers to exit the field.

### **Raspberries**

- If two or more customers/families are picking in the same row encourage physical distancing so that a minimum of 6 feet between customers is maintained at all times.
- Consider starting customers at opposite ends of the rows or consider flagging sections of the row for a customer to start at and have customers pick between their two flags.

- Define what a customer should be picking (from both sides of the row or only on one side).

### **Blueberries**

- If two or more customers/families are picking in the same row encourage physical distancing so that a minimum of 6 feet between customers is maintained at all times.
  - Consider starting customers at opposite ends of the rows or consider flagging sections of the row for a customer to start at and have customers pick between their two flags.
  - Define what a customer should be picking (from both sides of the row or only on one side).
- Create a foot-traffic pattern for entering and exiting the fields where practical.

### **Transport**

- If possible, avoid moving customers with vehicles; let customers drive to the field.
- If customers must take a wagon to a berry patch limit the number of customers per ride to maintain appropriate physical distancing.
- Have hand sanitizer available on wagons.
- Sanitize handrails and surfaces between trips.

### **Payment**

- Separate and redesign check-in and check-out to maintain physical distancing.
- Install a plastic shield at the check-in and check-out between customers and employees.
- Mark out 2m spacing for any customers waiting in line.
- Provide hand sanitizer dispensers or handwashing stations near check-in and check-out stations.
- Minimize cash transactions and use card transactions when possible.
- If possible, 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. Information about disinfectants and COVID-19 can be found at <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19.html>.

- 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). Containers should either be single-use or be able to be cleaned and disinfected between uses.
- To further reduce interactions, consider providing customers an opportunity to book an 'appointment' to pick, and provide instructions and a map digitally when they confirm an appointment. Have containers available in a self-serve format, and instructions in the field. Staff can be available in the field for customer management, but no check-in would be required.
- 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 vehicle.

### **Employees**

- Train employees on new practices and policies.
- It is very important for employees to wash their hands before beginning work, when changing activities, before and after eating, after using the bathroom, etc.
- Employees should use gloves when handling money.
- Employees should wash their hands when putting gloves on or taking gloves off.
- 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.
- Employees will not be able to work if they have symptoms or were exposed. Employees should complete a self-assessment prior to arriving for work. Direct your employees to this link: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/> to complete the assessment.
- Disinfect surfaces regularly. This gives your customers confidence that you are taking every necessary precaution.
- Additional employees may be required in 2020 to help with check-in and check-out stations, and customer management in the field.
- Every effort should be made to reduce the number of interactions between customers and employees.

### **Handwashing Stations & Washrooms:**

- If possible, place handwashing stations at check-in, in the field, and at the exit.
- If there are washrooms or handwashing stations available for your customers create a schedule for staff to clean them 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 as needed or at least once daily.
- Include signs for customers emphasizing the importance of thorough hand washing after using the washroom facilities.