

Chapter 1:

Securing Your Future

Learning Objectives

After completing this chapter, you will be able to:

- Differentiate between an Alberta Approved Farmers' Market and all other public market venues
- Explain why food safety is important to farm direct marketing

Chapter 1: Securing Your Future

Why Marketing Food Safely: Farm Direct Advantage?

Farm direct marketing channels, including farmers' markets, are a valuable marketing option for producers and processors involved in Alberta's value added agriculture industry. Consumers are confident that the food products they're buying direct from the producer at farmers' markets or farm gates are safe for their family to eat and enjoy. It's important that this confidence is maintained as the Alberta farm direct industry continues to grow. One negative foodborne illness incident could damage and possibly destroy the industry's good reputation.

An increasing number of farm direct marketers are producing more foods deemed potentially hazardous by Alberta Health and Wellness, increasing the potential for food safety incidents. This resource responds to the need to address public health concerns regarding the potential for foodborne illness associated with potentially hazardous foods sold through Alberta farmers' markets and other farm direct marketing channels. *Marketing Food Safely* is intended to ensure all farm direct marketing channels, including Alberta farmers' markets, remain safe, viable and profitable marketing options for marketers and consumers alike.

“It's important to address food safety because of the health concerns surrounding food issues. People want to know that they are eating foods that have been prepared in a safe manner, stored safely and presented in a safe situation at the market as well.” Crystal Loewen, Sylvan Lake Farmers' Market

Marketing Food Safely addresses food safety issues related to marketing, not production, activities in the farm direct industry.

Farm direct marketing is a marketing method whereby producers sell their products and services directly to consumers. Farmers' markets, farm gate sales, farm stands, farm stores, direct to restaurants, U-pick, and community-shared agriculture are examples of farm direct marketing.

Alberta farm direct marketers are not alone in seeking information on best practices that reduce food safety risks. In a recent Michigan State University study, producers and processors identified assistance to produce safe food products as one of their top five needs.

Marketing Food Safely is one tool farm direct marketers can use to ensure their marketing practices reduce food safety risks. This resource addresses *food safety issues as they relate to marketing activities* in the farm direct industry. It is anticipated a future volume will focus on food safety issues impacting very small scale food processing operations.

Marketing Food Safely is for farmers' market managers and those who sell an agricultural food product in Alberta direct to the final consumer. It is intended to increase the understanding and application of safe food handling practices by Alberta farmers' market managers, vendors and other farm direct marketers when marketing their products.

What is Farm Direct Marketing?

Farm direct marketing is the sale of agri-food products directly to the consumer. It is market focused relationship marketing. Producers know their target market and sell products that meet the specific needs of their consumers. A fundamental component of farm direct marketing is the trust relationship that develops between producers/processors and consumers. Successful farm direct marketers assume the accountability and rewards of consistently supplying quality agri-food products directly to the consumer through a variety of marketing channels. Some of these include farmers' markets, farm gate sales, roadside stands, farm stores, U-pick, community-shared agriculture and entertainment agriculture or ag-tourism ventures.

Ag-tourism – act of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness operation for the purpose of enjoyment, education or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation.

Community-shared agriculture – a partnership between consumers and producers in which consumers pay for farm products in advance and farmers commit to supplying sufficient quantity, quality and variety of products. Often consumers have the option to participate in the production of the farm products.

Farm direct marketer – person who grows/processors an agricultural product or develops a service and sells it directly to the end user.

Farm direct marketing – a marketing method whereby producers sell their products and services directly to the consumer. Farm direct marketing is relationship marketing between producer/processor and consumer that consistently offers a quality agri-food product through a variety of marketing channels. Farm direct marketing allows the producer to assume the accountability and rewards of delivering a product directly to the consumer.

In this resource, the term farm direct marketer describes agricultural producers who grow/process and sell their product directly to the end consumer regardless of the market channel. It includes all direct market operators from farmers' market vendors to market managers and U-pick to farm store owners. Farmers' market managers are included in this definition because they are more than business managers; they have a critical role in reducing food safety risks at the market.



For more information on farm direct marketing, contact any of the Alberta Agriculture Food and Rural Development farm direct specialists listed in Appendix K: Contacts or visit the website of AAFRD at www.agric.gov.ab.ca/diversify

Marketing channel – a system of individuals and businesses involved in the process of making a product available for use or consumption.

Farmers' market manager – person designated by the market or sponsoring body to oversee Alberta Approved Farmers' Market policies, operations, programs and legislative requirements and enforce the approved market guidelines.

Farmers' market vendor – person or business that sells product through an Alberta Approved Farmers' Market.

Farm stand – a temporary structure used for the sale and display of agricultural products; usually operated on a seasonal basis on or near the farm or along a road near the farm.

Farm store – a permanent structure that sells and displays a variety of agricultural and agriculturally themed products directly to consumers; may be operated on a year-round or seasonal basis; a retail outlet on the farm.

U-pick – operations where the customer comes to the farm to buy fruits, vegetables or flowers that they have harvested for themselves.

Value added – adding additional value to agri-food products or services by further developing or processing a primary product; any activity or process that alters the original agricultural product or commodity for the purpose of gaining a marketing advantage. Value added may include bagging, packaging, pre-cutting, processing, etc.

The term “farmers market” only refers to those markets operating under the Approved Farmers’ Market Guidelines and recognized as an Alberta Approved Farmers’ Market.

Farmers’ Market or Public Market?

Farmers’ markets are probably the oldest and most common form of marketing direct to the consumer. The difference between a public market and an Alberta Approved Farmers’ Market lies in the ownership/management of the market and the privileges accorded to each type of market.

Throughout this resource the term farmers’ markets always refers to Alberta Approved Farmers’ Markets. The term is not used to describe public, flea, craft or any other type of market.

A public market is generally one that is privately owned and includes all types of operations including flea markets. As a public market, each food vendor must have an individual food establishment permit and be operating in a facility approved by the regional health authority. Some municipalities have bylaws that are applied to public markets and include public markets in the same classification as pawn shops. Most municipalities require each vendor at a public market to have a business or peddler’s license, whereas only a single license is required for the farmers’ market. A public market does not receive any of the benefits enjoyed by an approved farmers’ market.

Alberta Approved Farmers’ Markets

The Alberta Approved Farmers’ Market Program creates an operational framework that facilitates direct market access for community-based entrepreneurs who make, bake or grow the product they sell. Basic operating guidelines, provincial program-awareness initiatives, and the education of vendors, managers and consumers are the key components of the program.

Alberta Approved Farmers’ Markets operate under the *Approved Farmers’ Market Guidelines* developed and enforced by Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (AAFRD). Approved farmers’ markets meet the requirements of the program guidelines and receive their status from the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. They are monitored annually to ensure continued compliance with the guidelines. Privately owned markets are not eligible to operate under the banner of an approved farmers’ market.



For more information on the Approved Farmers' Market Guidelines see Appendix N.

The most significant benefit of Alberta Approved Farmers' Market status is the one permitted under the *Public Health Act*. Alberta Approved Farmers' Markets often serve as business incubators or test markets for start-up processors. Food vendors selling at Alberta Approved Farmers' Markets have unique status under the *Public Health Act* and Food and Food Establishments Regulation. The Act states that "a local board may issue a food establishment permit only to a person or group of persons who have been approved by the Minister of Agriculture to operate a farmers' market." The entire market is allowed to operate under a single food establishment permit and individual vendors may operate out of home kitchens. Food products sold at all other venues such as public markets, flea markets and farm stores do not qualify for the same exemptions.

Alberta Approved Farmers' Market vendors usually share market insurance, advertising and other marketing costs. However, product liability insurance is still required. The Alberta Farmers' Market Association offers a group policy that meets the basic needs of each member market and vendor.

Alberta Approved Farmers' Markets' unique status under the Public Health Act is subject to frequent review. Minimizing food safety risks at farmers' markets helps maintain the current status.

Alberta Farmers' Market Association (AFMA) – provincial organization providing leadership and support to AAFRD approved member markets, farmers' market managers and vendors through education and promotion.

It's important that food sold at Alberta Approved Farmers' Markets doesn't pose a food safety risk. The unique status of farmers' markets is examined with each review of the *Public Health Act*.

“Food safety is important to us for two reasons. We have a genuine concern for our customers' well being and liability implications are a big issue in our business.” Helen Doef, Doef's Greenhouses Ltd.

Foodborne Illnesses

Food safety is a top-of-mind issue for today's savvy food consumers. Consumers expect all food they purchase to be 100 percent safe. They understand the food handling practices that can lead to foodborne illness and are demanding that suppliers follow recommended procedures to keep their food safe.

Consuming unsafe or contaminated foods or beverages causes foodborne illnesses. Foodborne illnesses frequently result in temporary disorders such as nausea, diarrhea and flu-like symptoms but can lead to serious long-term health consequences and even death. Food that looks, smells and tastes good can still cause serious foodborne illness.

Foodborne illness is preventable. Make sure you're doing your part in reducing food safety risks.

Food Safety Systems

Consumers are looking for assurance that their food is being produced in a safe manner. Together industry and governments are developing food safety process control systems that focus on preventing hazards rather than detecting problems during inspection of the end products. These systems are based on the principles of Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) and support Alberta's gate to plate approach to food safety.

Implementing these systems shows due diligence in production and product manufacturing, meets consumer demands and may facilitate market access. There are different food safety programs that can help you provide consumers the assurance they are seeking.

Prerequisite Programs

Effective food safety systems are built on a solid foundation of prerequisite programs. These programs provide the basic environment and operating conditions that are necessary for the production of safe, wholesome food. They include protocols for premises, storage and transportation, equipment, sanitation, food handling, personnel, product recall and traceability. Provincial prerequisite program guidelines are described in the document Meat Facility Standards while federal prerequisites are outlined in the Food Safety Enhancement Program (FSEP). Like the food safety system itself, all prerequisite programs should be documented and regularly audited. This resource focuses on the prerequisite programs.

On-Farm Food Safety (OFFS) Programs

OFFS programs help create a proper operational environment for food safety through the implementation of Good Production Practices (GPPs) on the farm. These types of practices can be applied to any type of agricultural production operation. OFFS programs reduce the risk of unsafe food products originating from the farm. On-farm food safety programs are developed by the national commodity associations. Contact your provincial association for more information.

Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP)

The HACCP (pronounced HA Sip) system is a proactive program that is internationally recognized as an effective approach to food safety in processing facilities. HACCP requires an assessment of what food safety problems can occur at any stage of the process. Control measures are then identified to prevent, reduce or eliminate these hazards to an appropriate level to avoid adverse human health consequences. While HACCP is still voluntary, many companies are choosing to develop and implement a HACCP program.

Food Safety Enhancement Program (FSEP)

FSEP is the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's approach to encourage and support the development, implementation and maintenance of HACCP systems in specific types of federally registered establishments.

Effective food safety systems are built on a solid foundation of prerequisite programs. These programs provide the basic environment and operating conditions that are necessary for the production of safe, wholesome food.

Currently, the On-Farm Food Safety and HACCP programs are voluntary.



Details and links to further information on OFFS, HACCP and FSEP programs are available in Chapter 6: It's the Law.

For more information on establishing a food safety program for your business contact the Food Safety Division of AAFRD. Visit their website at [www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/afs7806?opendocument](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/afs7806?opendocument) or call (780) 427- 4054. For toll free calling, dial 310-0000 first.

“It’s important to us to be aware of food safety from raising our bison right through processing, packaging and marketing our meat. We made a point of asking our processor about the procedures and temperature controls they use. We visited our processing facility to see first hand what happens as they make sausages and cut and wrap our meat. We think this is critical to providing safe food products for our customers.”

Darlene Hegel, Valta Bison



Food Safety Programs

What is the OFFS program for your commodity?

Who is the contact for more information on this OFFS program?

Have you implemented the prerequisite programs or HACCP in your food business? _____

Who is the contact for more information on prerequisites or HACCP?

HACCP – acronym for Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point, a systematic approach used in food

production as a risk-based means to ensure food safety.

Food Safety is Your Responsibility

It is your responsibility to produce your products as safely as possible and to abide by all legislation that impacts your products and business. Regulations and licensing requirements are in place to protect consumers from unsafe food.

It's important to build a good working relationship with the inspector who will be inspecting and approving your facilities and products. Not only do inspectors enforce critical legislation, they can also direct you to other contacts and resources. If you sell at numerous locations across the province, you will need to develop relationships with the public health inspectors in other regional health authorities from the one in which your business is located. Be aware that each regional health authority can establish requirements in addition to those set out in provincial legislation.

“My relationship with the RHA goes back a long way. I came into the industry as a green market manager and I depended on them to train me. I've had a long standing relationship with the same three health inspectors over 15 years. They tell me what they need and I try to comply.” Jackie Lacey, Millarville Farmers' Market



For more information on the federal and provincial legislation that may impact your business see Chapter 6: It's the Law! and Chapter 7: It's the Law II.

Summary

Farm direct marketing is one way that producers can get their products and services to market. It encompasses a number of methods of selling products directly to consumers. Selling at Alberta Approved Farmers' Market is one such method.

Approved markets are not the same as public, craft or flea markets. Approved farmers' markets must meet certain requirements established by AAFRD to maintain their status. Additional advantages are provided by the unique positions approved markets have under the provincial *Public Health Act* Food and Food Establishments

It is your responsibility to produce your products as safely as possible and to abide by all legislation that impacts your products and business.

All foods sold in Alberta, with the exception of some foods sold at Alberta Approved Farmers' Markets, must be prepared in a facility permitted by the regional health authority.

Business growth and success is one of the main benefits to minimizing food safety risks in your operation.

Regulation.

There are many benefits to minimizing food safety risks in your operation:

- Pride in producing safe food products
- Improved quality of your products
- Improved appearance in your products and establishment that attracts new customers
- Satisfied customers who continue to support and promote your business
- Continued business growth and success
- Peace of mind in knowing that you are complying with legislation and exercising due diligence

Recognizing and addressing food safety issues ensures the sustainability of your business and helps secure your future.

What's Next?

Do consumers really care about food safety? Do you need to be concerned about food safety? If you still have questions about what this food safety hype is all about, proceed to the next chapter and discover why food safety is important.