Small Business at Farmers Markets

Interested in becoming a food vendor at a Farmers Markets? Peoria City/County Health Department receives multiple phone calls each year with residents inquiring about how to participate in one of the many local farmers markets. Different vendors offering a variety of food items will require different types of licensure.

Starting with the most common reason to attend farmers markets - fresh produce, which includes: fresh fruits, vegetables, leafy greens, grains, seeds, beans, nuts, popcorn kernels, and herbs. Selling these products requires no license if it is field harvested, whole, uncut, and only rinsed to remove large clumps of dirt and debris. Additionally, pure unadulterated honey may be sold, if the seller produces less than 500 gallons a year and observes proper federal labeling laws.

Interested in selling farm fresh eggs or frozen meats? Peoria City/County Health Department requires a license along with mechanical refrigeration or freezers to ensure foods are kept at a proper temperature. Fresh eggs must be stored at or below 45F and frozen foods must be maintained frozen. Sellers will need to have at least a Limited Egg License, and/or a Meat and Poultry Broker’s license issued by Illinois Department of Agriculture. Eggs can be candled, cleaned, and packaged on the farm while chicken, beef, pork, and some other meat must be processed and packaged in a USDA inspected facility.

Cottage Food has become a popular option at local farmers markets. Cottage Food vendors can sell pre-packaged baked goods, canned jelly’s, jams, acidified vegetables, candies, and a variety of other products. If you are interested in becoming a Cottage Food vendor, you will need to complete an American National Standards Institute (ANSI) approved Certified Food Manager Course along with registering with the county you reside in. In Peoria County there is no fee to register, and registration is annually. One item to keep in mind is labeling requirements are strict. Each pre-packaged item must include: address of where it was produced, ingredient list by weight, common allergens, and must have the phrase: “This product was produced in a home kitchen not subject to public health inspection that may also process common food allergens.” While Cottage Food is a great option for anyone wanting to test their baking skills or start a small business, there are specific items that cannot be sold due to food safety. Some of these items include: meats, cheesecakes, pumpkin pies, creme
pies, garlic in oil, fresh or dehydrated tomato or melon, non-cultivated mushrooms, sprouts, and kombucha. A full list of prohibited foods can be found on our website www.pcchd.org.

The last licensing option to sell food at local farmers markets is a temporary license. Temporary licenses are used for multiple reasons. If you want to sell fresh-made products such as donuts, pretzels, omelets, or any other foods that would require preparing or handling of the food product, a temporary license will be required. This would also include any item that is pre-packaged and requires temperature control. Foods must be made on site or in a licensed establishment and transported to the market. Take note: foods may not be cleaned, prepared, or packaged in an unlicensed location or home.

As a consumer, follow these Farmers Market Tips for a food-safe summer:

- Fruits and vegetables sold at farmers markets are only minimally rinsed to remove visible debris. Wash all produce thoroughly under potable running water, and dry with a clean cloth towel or paper towel before cutting, cooking, or eating.
- Cut away any bruises or visible damage before preparing or consuming the produce.
- Bag fresh fruits and vegetables separately from raw meats to avoid cross contamination.
- Bring blue ice packs to maintain temperatures of hazardous foods.
- Wash reusable bags between uses.

For important information on public health issues, visit the Peoria City/County Health Department website at www.pcchd.org.

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The Peoria City/County Health Department continues efforts to improve community health in Peoria County with the overarching goal “to increase the number of people who are healthy at every stage of life.”