

# Local Food Markets

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As we all know, food markets change rapidly as consumer preferences evolve and respond to new information, trends, and fads. However, due to the recent outbreak of COVID-19, food markets and supply chains are changing at an even faster rate, daily in some cases. Through this blog, I hope to provide local food system updates, as well as suggestions and strategies for small and urban producers in the Intermountain West/Great Basin region.

As of today, there is some good news, possibly even great news, and some not so good news with regards to local food markets. In this blog post, I will provide an overview of general trends and provide links to resources. In the coming weeks, I will discuss one or two topics in each blog posting.

First the good news. Consumers who were not previously focused on “buying local” are now doing so as farmers’ market attendance, where farmers’ markets remain open, is higher than normal and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) subscriptions are up as much as 200-300% for some programs. Why? First, consumers fear potential food shortages and second, there is some concern that food supply chains may be contaminated. Whether these concerns are warranted or not, isn’t really the issue. Consumers see empty grocery store shelves and media attention focused on meat processor shutdowns and employee strikes at warehouse and distribution centers ([Community Supported Agriculture Is Surging Amid the Pandemic; As Supermarkets Feel Hazardous and Sparse, Small Farms Deliver](#))

What does this mean for you? A few things. First, encouraging your local and state officials to allow your farmers’ markets to stay open, obviously with distancing and safety procedures in place, would allow you to maintain this important outlet and perhaps increase your customer base. Second, if you don’t sell through a CSA program and/or farm stand, you should strongly consider it. In these programs, consumers order one basket or a whole season of baskets online, and then they pick up their box/basket weekly or its’ delivered to them. There are a number of resources on CSAs on the USU Extension publications area. Just search CSA at: [https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/extension\\_curall/](https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/extension_curall/)

Finally, selling through existing online stores or creating a store on your own website, where consumers can order individual items and have them shipped or delivered would provide a new outlet for your products to replace those that may be down. Frankly, any additions to your online/ social media sales and promotional program are highly suggested ([The Local Food Revolution Goes Online – For Now](#)).

Okay, the bad news. Almost all restaurants are closed or selling limited meals through take-out or delivery. I realize many of you may have spent countless hours establishing relationships with restaurants and chefs and now to have this market fly away or at the least be dramatically reduced is disheartening. Don’t worry, the restaurants will be back, and personally, I think Americans will eat out even more the first few months after the full reopening of the economy. In a similar vein, schools are shut down and many are not offering meals for students. In some cases, the local food bank is picking up the slack for school districts in terms of providing meals to low income students. The loss of the farm-to-school market is a big blow to local food sales, but there may be an opportunity to donate to food banks servicing school children if you are not able to sell all of your product.

Also, I realize many of you have customized your product offerings to certain markets, and that making changes when the seeds are already in the ground is problematic. Serving different markets or new consumers will require some modifications. Chefs are likely to use specialty produce items that are not familiar to many “normal” consumers. Also, schools may require certain packaging or bulk shipments that may not be suitable for CSA customers. Some creativity and communication with your customers and other producers serving markets you are considering will be helpful in devising your strategy.

That is all for now. I am going heavy on the information and resources provided today, as I don’t want you to miss

out, as many of the online webinars and workshops started last week already.

Stay healthy!

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## **Online workshops, courses, webinars, and podcasts:**

- [Cultivating Success, University of Idaho Workshops](#)
- [Purdue Women in Agriculture, Webcasts](#)
- [Michigan State Marketing Munchies, Podcasts](#)
- [Produce Safety Alliance Online Grower Training Course](#)
- [Virginia Tech, Food Safety Protocols for COVID-19 Webinar](#)

## **Food system updates and articles:**

- [NY Times food section](#)
- [Civil Eats](#)
- [Modern Farmer](#)

## **Other resources:**

- [USU Extension COVID-19 Resources](#)
- [UDAF Utah's Own Program](#)
- [Colorado State University Food Systems Group](#)
- [USDA Federal Resource Guide](#)
- [Tax Information](#)

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