
March 23, 2020

Arlington Friends of Urban Agriculture

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Dear Virginia Farmers Market Association (VAFMA):

Arlington's Friends of Urban Agriculture (FOUA) supports your efforts to ensure Virginia Farmers Markets remain open and are deemed essential in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Please include this letter, and the enclosed list of supporting signatures, in future correspondence with Commonwealth leadership.

Today, Virginia Governor Northam announced [Executive Order 53](#), which provided a list of "Essential Retail Businesses" and relegated Farmers Markets (FM) operations to delivery and take-out services. This guidance is vague and does not specify how municipalities should govern FM operations. Worse, as experienced this past weekend in Arlington County, municipalities may opt to shut down FMs entirely. FOUA implores the Governor, the Virginia Secretary of Agriculture, and the Virginia Department of Agricultural and Consumer Services (VDACS) to include FMs as "essential" businesses in future executive orders, proclamations, and public safety notifications, and encourage municipalities to keep FMs open. State and Local Governments across the United States list FMs with the same importance as food, retail, shelter, and medical support. To date, Maryland, the District of Columbia, California, New York, Oregon, North Carolina, Georgia, Kentucky, Florida, Missouri, and Texas allow FMs to remain open in support of their communities' needs.¹

FOUA represents Arlington's local food economy, a diverse community of producers, vendors, and residents committed to cultivating a resilient, sustainable food ecosystem. FMs provide affordable, fresh, and nutritious food directly to consumers, and are deliberately located throughout the County to serve neighborhoods with limited public transportation infrastructure, and those who rely on WIC, SNAP, and Senior Citizen benefits. In times like these, FMs are best postured to provide affordable and convenient access to food for many Arlington residents who are hit hardest by this crisis..

Moreover, we are also committed to VAFMA's mission areas of stimulating local economies, supporting healthy communities, increasing access to fresh food, and preserving farmland and rural livelihoods. FOUA highlights local FMs operators' commitment to safety and health protocols, for example: social distancing, limiting congregation around vendor stalls, pre-bagging produce, and encouraging online orders for expedited pick-up.

Sincerely,

Friends of Urban Agriculture Board

¹ <https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/farmers-markets-covid19/>
<https://news.maryland.gov/mda/press-release/2020/03/19/farmers-markets-should-continue-operations-during-state-of-emergency/>

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