Agritourism is the fastest growing tourism in Illinois. During COVID-19, most agritourism businesses remain an essential access point to food. These businesses are opportunities for local consumers to pick farm-fresh produce onsite, learn more about local outlets and enjoy time outdoors.

The U-Pick or “Pick Your Own” season is fast approaching for berries, cherries, peaches, apples, pumpkins, and more. Now is the time to implement best practices to maintain physical distancing, minimize community spread of COVID-19, and safely sell products.

It is important to note, not all U-Pick and agritourism operations are the same. This is a series of suggestions and are intended as a starting point. Choose what works for you based on your size, capacity, and business operation. You are responsible for complying with all federal, state, and local guidelines. These recommendations and best practices are subject to change considering newly provided information about COVID-19.

These recommendations are to help U-Pick and agritourism businesses operate under uncertain times by offering suggestions on:

- Adjustments to logistics
- Customer interactions that minimize potential exposure to COVID-19
- Alternative methods to U-Pick and agritourism activities

It is important that before opening your operation for the season, check with your insurance providers to ensure your liability insurance coverage has protection from risk of COVID-19. As this is a new threat, they may require an addendum or not cover this liability. Insurance companies may handle customer and employee risk as separate liabilities; furthermore, not all providers may be making the same liability offerings. It is important to be clear and walk through your entire operation with your provider. If you have a lawyer available, make sure they review your coverage and discuss all potential liability risk with them to ensure you are protected or have reduced risk.
Changes to Logistics:

It is important that any U-Pick or agritourism operation complies with current executive orders. This includes limiting the number of people attending an event.

- Contact county health departments and county / local law enforcement.
- Confirm in advance that intended guidelines are consistent with local requirements, to avoid conflicts.
- Consult your liability insurance carrier for any restrictions or limitations.

Infrastructure / Management Practices to Encourage Distancing and Limit Capacity:

- Implement a reservation or ticket system.
- Allocate a capacity for 1-2-hour slots on the farm. Require visitors to make reservations or purchase tickets in advance.
- This method will move visitors away from high numbers during peak hours.
- Set limits on produce purchases if there are concerns about enough product to go around throughout the day.
- Develop gates or barriers with directional information guiding customers where to go.
- Determine certain rows from which customers can buy, segmenting people to a smaller space.
- Increase the number of staff tasked to enforce physical distancing and enhanced sanitation.
- Have one-way entrances and exits in harvesting area and at stores.
- Limit additional on-farm activities to reduce the amount of time spent on the farm.
A Guide of U-Pick Producers/Agritourism Farms
During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Sanitation, Packaging, and Onsite Transportation:

- Rent portable handwashing stations and/or create hand-sanitizing stations to use onsite. Set-up hand-sanitizing stations at all points of entry and exit.
- Provide single-use containers or thoroughly disinfect reusable containers whenever they are returned.
- Have a designated drop-off and pick-up location for people to delivery used containers and carts for sanitation and pick-up clean equipment.
- Adjust wagon rides to meet public transit requirements or, if not able to adjust wagon, consider additional hand-wagons and carts.
- Make all food container single use and disposable.
- Have ‘pop-up’ stores throughout the site to encourage purchases outsides and space customers.
- Evaluate all play equipment as to how to reduce risk of spread through sanitation, usage, and interactions.
- Operate indoor stores based on Illinois operating guidelines for food retail space.
- Space tables at 6-ft distancing requirements and have a sanitation procedure available based on restaurant outdoor eating guidelines.
- Encourage online or credit-card payment where possible to avoid money handling.
- Those handling money should regularly wash their hands and/or use hand sanitizer.
Customer Interactions:

Maintaining regular, informative contact with customers is the best way to successfully implement any new procedures or policies. This way, customers will know about your efforts to minimize potential community spread of COVID-19 and keep all involved healthy.

- Use social media outlets, your business website and other normal means to communicate any and all changes in policy, including details about:
  - Time blocks.
  - Caps on the number of people allowed onsite.
  - Limitations on the amount of produce that can be picked.
  - Reiterate that no one should visit the farm if they feel ill, are showing signs of illness or have tested positive for COVID-19 (or had close contact with someone who has tested positive) within the past two weeks.
  - The same criteria apply to anyone in that visitor’s household.
  - Advise those attending in any capacity — customer, vendor, worker, volunteer — to wash their hands before arriving and upon returning home.
  - In such a public setting, masks are required in Illinois.
  - Have masks available for customers that did not bring one.
  - Post signs onsite asking customers to practice physical distancing of at least 6 feet and not touch products they aren’t purchasing.
  - Recommend that all customers follow CDC recommendations on minimizing the community spread of COVID-19.
  - Reiterate that there is no indication that COVID-19 is transmitted via food.
  - Standard guidelines for washing produce with clean water before eating still apply.

Alternative Methods

Remember: Just because U-Pick or agritourism activities are permitted, you don’t have to continue them. If you feel you aren’t able to safely handle this influx of customers to your farm — or simply prefer not to — consider converting to an alternative delivery method.