



Vancouver Farmers Markets
1316 Grant St
Vancouver, BC V5L 2X5
www.eatlocal.org

February 18, 2021

The Honourable Lana Popham, M.L.A., Minister of Agriculture
The Honourable Adrian Dix, M.L.A., Minister of Health
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Dear Ministers Popham and Dix,

First of all, thank you for your ongoing support of farmers markets and commitment to ensuring we get through the Covid-19 pandemic with our local and regional food systems intact. British Columbia has been an example to provinces across the country and regions across the continent for taking thoughtful, responsive action in regard to farmers markets.

Last year, throughout the pandemic, **Vancouver Farmers Markets (VFM) was able to facilitate over \$10 million in direct in-person sales for over 250 BC farmers and food processors, feeding over 270,000 British Columbians fresh, healthy food** when they needed it the most. Thanks to the Ministry of Health and BC Farmers Markets' Nutrition Coupon Program and our own expansion, Fresh to Families, VFM markets also provided 426 lower-income families, pregnant mothers and refugees in Vancouver the dignity of choosing the freshest, most culturally-appropriate foods for their families - worth over \$110,000 for families and \$110,000 for farmers.

VFM is proud of our ability to modify our markets and provide a safe, open-air grocery opportunity for our communities. **We are committed to continuing to operate as a critical food access point for neighbourhoods and lifeline for BC producers**, but there is a particular point in the *Order of the Provincial Health Officer, Gatherings and Events, February 10, 2021* under 'Episodic Markets' which threatens our ability to do so this year:

M.5.m: not permit a product other than food for human consumption to be sold at an episodic market

Farmers market operating costs are off-set by non-food vendor stall fees. During the winter season and in the early spring, markets rely on non-food vendors to remain viable. Last spring, when the non-food order came through, many farmers markets, including VFM, relied on reserve funds, subsidies, sweat, faith and volunteers to be able to continue operating.

Vision: To be a leading force toward a world of healthy farms and people

Mission: To transform our global food system by creating and nurturing a local, sustainable and vibrant marketplace for our community, environment and economy



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Our not-for-profit organization saw a \$50,000 reduction in earned income and a \$50,000 increase in expenses due to Covid-19 in 2020 - a \$100,000 impact on our budget, and we're the lucky ones. (It is due, in no small part, to the province's responsiveness and designating farmers markets as essential services that we did not suffer greater losses and are still operating today.)

If non-food items were restricted from in-person shopping in all jurisdictions, we would acknowledge that it is a necessary part of responding to the pandemic. However, farmers markets are unique in their restriction of non-food - malls and high streets are full of large chains that are able to sell imported household items, soaps and exotic flowers without restriction. It is still possible to shop in-person at non-food businesses or even pick up non-food items at the grocery store.

Our request is this: **please allow the return of non-food vendors to farmers markets by mid-March.** Removing non-food just before the holidays in December was a huge blow to our local artisans. Waiting until after the nursery and flower season to return non-food will be an equally devastating blow to our local growers.

As you know, farmers markets are not the bustling gathering places you recall from road-trips across the province. If the rationale for not including non-food vendors is related to a fear of congregating around crafts and flowers, please reconsider. **Many customers have told us that they feel safer shopping at markets than at the grocery store.** People are coming out, lining up safely and respecting rules and procedures because they believe in supporting their local businesses, and farmers markets are some of the only places they can support them.

Even without the crowds, farmers markets are working. They are connecting our local producers with critical sales channels and our local communities with food. Please help us keep operating so we can continue this work.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Laura Smit", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Laura Smit
Executive Director
Vancouver Farmers Markets

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- c.c. MLA Andrew Wilkinson
MLA Brenda Bailey
MLA Honourable David Eby, Attorney General
MLA Honourable George Heyman, Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy
MLA Honourable George Chow, Minister of State for Trade
MLA Mable Elmore
MLA Honourable Melanie Mark, Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport
MLA Michael Lee
MLA Honourable Niki Sharma, Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction
MLA Honourable Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Jobs, Economic Recovery and Innovation
MLA Renee Merrifield
MLA Sam Sullivan
MLA Spencer Chandra Herbert
MLA Sonia Furstenau

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