

FARM PRACTICE

DIRECT FARM MARKETING AND AGRITOURISM

Description

Some British Columbia farmers sell the products they raise or grow directly to consumers. Direct farm marketing operations take many forms. The most common are farmers' markets, U-pick operations, farm gate sales, and roadside stands. Some operators may decide to expand or evolve their direct farm marketing operation to an agritourism operation that includes on-farm experiences that visitors will pay for.

Generally, an agritourism operation is a farm-based business open to visitors. Agritourism activities and experiences combine rural settings with agriculturally-based products. Some operations include a restaurant, retail store, winery lounge, bakery, processing plant or other related business on site. Agritourism activities are very broad and may include corn mazes, bed and breakfasts, on-farm cabins, guest ranches, picnic areas, animal displays, hay rides, sleigh rides, wagon rides, camping, working farm/ranch holidays, cooking classes, barn dances, haunted houses, U-Cut Christmas trees and the like. Some operators offer educational tours to schools or bus loads of visitors. Alternatively, self-guided tours or open houses may be available.

Both direct farm marketers and agritourism operators provide local residents and visitors with an opportunity to visit the farm and meet the farmers who grow or produce the food they consume.

The range of on-farm products that are sold directly to consumers is extensive and includes everything from fruit, vegetables, dairy, meat, baked goods, poultry products and fish to flowers, ornamental plants, Christmas trees, and assorted processed products and gifts. Direct marketers and agritourism operators will occasionally organize festivals and special events to attract new and existing customers.

Activities and Operations

Farm Festivals

Special festivals attract customers. They provide entertainment and an opportunity for consumers to visit a working farm. To minimize disturbance to neighbours caused by crowds and noise, festivals and special events should not start before 7:00 A.M. and should stop by 10:00 P.M. Hours of operation are usually regulated by regional or local government bylaws.

Under the *Liquor Control and Licensing Regulation*, a special-occasion permit must be obtained if liquor is to be served at a festival or special event. This permit will specify hours of operation for the event.

Retail Activities

The Agricultural Land Commission's farm retail sales order specifies which retail activities may be carried out on a farm within an Agriculture Land Reserve. Restrictions on retail of products grown off the farm and the size of the on-farm market area that can be used for off-farm products are also specified.

Most jurisdictions restrict the hours of operation for on-farm markets from 7:00 A.M. to 10:00 P.M. Under the *Liquor Control and Licensing Regulation*, farm wineries must obtain a special license if they are going to serve or sell wine to consumers. Hours of operation are specified on the license.

Traffic

Farm markets can cause substantial increases in traffic volumes, especially during the selling season and when special events are held. Farmers are responsible for providing adequate off-road parking for their customers.

See also Farm Practice: [Transportation](#)

Related Farm Practices

Other farm practices that pertain to direct farm marketing and agriculture tourism include, but are not limited to, the following.

Lighting

Lighting is used for a variety of purposes including security, work areas and crop production.

See also Farm Practice: [Lighting](#)

Mobile Equipment

During the growing season, equipment and vehicles may be required to operate night and day in order to complete seeding, harvesting, processing and other essential operations.

See also Farm Practice: [Mobile Equipment](#)

Organic Production

Organic farmers conduct farm activities in a manner similar to other production methods except that chemical fertilizers, pesticides, growth regulators, hormones and antibiotics are not used. Generally, organic producers belong to an organic certifying association that guides production and processing practices.

See also Commodity: [Organic Production](#)

Stationary Equipment

Production, storage, processing or marketing may require the use of stationary equipment which may be operated 24 hours per day.

See also Farm Practice: [Stationary Equipment](#)

Structures

Direct farm marketing activities may occur in a stand-alone building or be located in a larger building that may also incorporate storage, offices, processing operations, and public washroom facilities. Buildings used for direct farm marketing activities should be assessed to determine whether they fall under a low human occupancy designation as defined in the National Farm

Building Code of Canada. Farm retail centers and other public gathering locations are not to be considered as low human occupancy areas. Areas of both high and low occupancy may be located in the same building provided that the structural safety and fire separation requirements for high human occupancy are met in that part of the building assigned to such use.

See also Farm Practice: [Structures](#)

Principal and Accessory Buildings

Farm operations that incorporate direct marketing and agritourism activities typically feature a variety of structures. From a watercourse protection perspective, it is essential to determine which structures fall under the definition of principal buildings and which are accessory buildings. For the purposes of determining applicable setbacks from watercourses and property lines, therefore, local government bylaws or the *Guide for Bylaw Development in Farming Areas* should be consulted. Building assessments may need to be conducted on a case-by-case basis. It may be helpful to refer to the specific commodity or farm practice document for which direct marketing or agritourism activities are applicable to determine the scope and definition of principal and accessory farm buildings that may exist on the farm site.

Legislation

Information on federal and provincial legislation can be found in Appendices B and C. Acts, regulations and bylaws that regulate or may affect direct farm marketing and agriculture tourism include, but are not limited to, the following.

Federal Legislation

The *Consumer Packaging and Labeling Act and Regulations* establishes basic labeling requirements for prepackaged consumer products.

The *Food and Drugs Act* covers the sale and marketing of food, drugs and cosmetics in Canada.

Provincial Legislation

The *Agricultural Land Commission Act* provides the framework for the preservation of farmland.

The *Public Health Act* provides the framework that permits monitoring of the health of British Columbians.

The *Transportation Act* governs subject areas such as signage, safe access and sufficient parking.

Local Government Legislation

Applicable local government legislation may include noise and zoning bylaws.

Publications

For more information on direct farm marketing, farmers markets and agritourism, visit the *Networking Association for Farm Direct Marketing Association* at www.nafdma.com. Publications that provide information on direct farm marketing and agriculture tourism include, but are not limited to, the following.

British Columbia Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Guide

Direct Marketing: A Handbook for Producers

On-Farm Food Safety

On-Farm Processing: A Handbook for Producers