



NEWS RELEASE

St. Charles County Government

Department of Community Health and the Environment

Gil Copley, Director

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 18, 2010

Gil Copley, Director

(636) 949-7400

Pieter Sheehan, Environmental Health and Protection Division Director

(636) 949-1800

Cameron Satterfield, Public Information Officer

(636) 949-7408

Farmers Markets Growing in Popularity

Health department working to ensure food safety at area markets

St. Charles County, Missouri – St. Charles County’s Department of Community Health and the Environment does not require electrical hookups at farmers markets.

“We need to make it clear what our department does and does not do in regards to farmers markets,” said department director Gil Copley. “In the last two years, the number of markets has increased and the products offered have expanded beyond the traditional fruits and vegetables to include meats, cheeses, and other foods.

“In March, we published information about basic public health food safety requirements. However, there is still some confusion. Meat products, fish, and fowl must be held at the temperature required by the food code, but they can be kept at that temperature in an approved chest freezer that has been cooled to 0 degrees Fahrenheit or lower with the product inside before being transported to the market. Cheese and eggs can similarly be held in a container capable of maintaining the required temperature. Water ice is not allowed.

“We routinely assign an Environmental Public Health Specialist to work with vendors who want to sell these products. Our goal is to protect the public health in a way that is not cost-prohibitive to the vendor.”

Copley added, “Our department strongly supports the farmers market concept. At a time when most of us are not consuming nearly enough daily servings of vegetables and fruits, farmers markets provide fresh products straight from the farm to consumers. Not only are these products nutritionally good for us, they often taste better.”

The guidelines for farmers markets are posted on the department’s website at www.scchealth.org/docs/ph/ph_docs/phehs/farmersmarket.html. Vendors or consumers with additional questions can call the Division of Environmental Health and Protection at (636) 949-1800.

The St. Charles County Department of Community Health and the Environment is committed to the protection and enhancement of health and the quality of life for all members of our community. For more information, call (636) 949-7400 or visit www.scchealth.org.

#



Farmers Market Frequently Asked Questions

March 2010 (Expanded June 2010)

1. What is a farmers market?

There is no single dictionary definition of “Farmers Market.” The definitions that do exist talk about a place where those who produce food locally congregate and sell the food to the public. The only part of the definition that is of concern to public health departments is the word “food.” Health department food codes (and state and federal codes) regulate food that is provided to the public. Food is defined as “a raw, cooked, or processed edible substance, ice, beverage, or ingredient used or intended for use or for sale in whole or in part for human consumption....” Food codes have the objective of ensuring safe food regardless of the venue where it is sold or given away.

2. When is a permit needed to sell at a Farmers Market?

NO Permit is needed for the following items:

- Produce (whole, uncut fruits and vegetables)
- Nuts in the shell
- Jams, jellies, apple and other fruit butters, honey (as long as they are properly labeled)
- Baked goods (as long as they are non-potentially hazardous, labeled, and sold by the person or farm that baked them)
- Whole eggs (vendor must have Missouri Department of Agriculture Egg Permit and hold eggs at 45 degrees Fahrenheit or less)
- Cheese (must have been produced by the vendor and the vendor must have a valid manufacturing permit issued by the Missouri State Milk Board. Cheese must be packaged and properly labeled. Cheese must be held at the temperature required for the type of cheese being sold)

Permit IS NEEDED:

- Meats (must also be USDA or Missouri Department of Agriculture certified, properly packaged, properly labeled, and be transported and held at required temperature)
- Fish and fowl (must be properly labeled, have any required state or federal permits, and be transported and held at proper temperature)

Farmers selling meat, fish, and fowl that were produced on their farm need a permit and will be considered a Mobile Food Vendor but are exempt from the St. Charles County permit fee of \$75 per year as per Chapter 150, Missouri Revised Statutes, section 150.030. Non-Farmer meat vendors are NOT exempt from the fee. Meat vendors can get guidance and more detailed information by calling the Division of Environmental Health and Protection at (636) 949-1800.

3. Is the health department requiring permits for other food at farmers markets?

In the last year, the department became aware of a number of individuals who want to prepare food and sell it at the markets. Items like hamburgers, hot dogs, omelets, popcorn, etc. have been seen at some farmers markets. These items involve food preparation of potentially hazardous food, including food handling during preparation. There are state and local laws regulating the source of the food being prepared and how it is stored, prepared, held for sale, and handled.

This food preparation operation is no different than the food preparation and sales seen at scores of festivals, fairs, and other events in St. Charles County every spring, summer, and fall. THIS ACTIVITY IS REGULATED and requires either:

- A temporary 14 day permit (\$50 and restricted to one location) and an inspection by the health department of the temporary operation, or
- Mobile food vendors permit (1 year @ \$75 for use anywhere in the county). The mobile food vendor must have an approved mobile setup to be considered for a mobile permit. A department Environmental Public Health Specialist can discuss this with anyone interested in developing a mobile operation. This option avoids the necessity for multiple consecutive temporary 14 day permits.

4. Shouldn't an exception be made for vendors at farmers markets since they are just operating one or two days or half days a week but throughout a season?

The need for a permit is based on the food preparation activity and associated risk, not on the frequency or duration or location of the operation. We cannot overlook food safety and exempt any type of operation that involves food preparation, handling and selling of potentially hazardous food. These activities are no different at a farmers market than activities conducted by the many hundreds of other individuals and organizations that apply for and receive temporary permits every year for fairs and festivals.

5. Why do I also have to pay a vendor's fee to the market and what if I'm not happy with the market rules?

The health department does not charge vendors fees. In most cases (see #2 above) we do not charge fees. When we do, we only charge temporary food establishment fees or mobile food establishment fees and ONLY when the particular vendor is handling, preparing, and selling potentially hazardous food. Any concerns about market fees or rules are an issue to be discussed between the vendors and the market. We do not regulate the market operation.

6. What is a “Potentially Hazardous Food”?

A food that is natural or synthetic and that requires temperature control because it is in a form capable of supporting:

1. The rapid and progressive growth of infections or toxigenic microorganisms;
2. The growth and toxin production of *Clostridium botulinum*; or
3. In raw shell eggs, the growth of *Salmonella Enteritidis*.

Prepared by the
St. Charles County Department of Community Health and the Environment
Division of Environmental Health and Protection
1650 Boone's Lick Road
St. Charles, MO 63301

www.scchealth.org and www.sccmo.org

Phone (636) 949-1800