



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
of BRITISH COLUMBIA

March 3, 2021

Hon. Lana Popham  
Ministry of Agriculture  
Room 325, Parliament Buildings  
Victoria, B.C.

Dear Minister Popham,

I am writing to you today in advance of the annual farmers' market season which is fast approaching. These markets not only connect British Columbians to locally produced goods, they are also an important source of income for the hard-working vendors who participate in them.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought numerous challenges for business owners of all kinds. Luckily, farmers' markets are one way that B.C. farmers, ranchers, fishers, producers, and processors are still able to share their food products with British Columbians who increasingly want to purchase local goods.

Unfortunately, artisans and crafters who produce non-food items are no longer permitted to sell their wares at farmers' markets due to public health orders. While I am fully supportive of measures to keep people safe during this global pandemic, I can't help but wonder how a farmers' market is much different than a department store or grocery store where a wide variety of goods continue to be stocked and sold. These types of stores have been able to operate with guidelines such as physical distancing, mask-wearing, and the provision of hand sanitizer — so why not all vendors at farmers' markets?

For the most part, farmers' markets are held outdoors. Unless you have heard otherwise, my understanding is that organizers have been diligent in implementing the health measures needed to keep shoppers and vendors safe. It seems that we should be allowing non-food producers to sell goods like flowers, clothing, beauty products, jewelry, and home décor items as they have done safely and successfully in the past.



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These crafters have produced goods throughout the winter and are eager to share them with consumers this coming season. I would also add that many of these vendors likely do not qualify for your government's Small and Medium-Sized Business Recovery Grant program, so participating in farmers' markets may be vital for these artisans to stay in business.

Additionally, the Vancouver Farmers Markets organization notes many markets rely on non-food vendors to remain viable, thanks to the stall fees they pay that offset operating costs.

Non-food vendors make a substantial contribution to our markets and our communities, and to our local economy as well. If we are going to encourage British Columbians to buy local, you can't get more local than a farmers' market. I urge the government to allow the return of non-food vendors to B.C. farmers' markets for the coming season.

Sincerely,

Ian Paton

MLA, Delta South

Official Opposition Critic for Agriculture

cc: Hon. Adrian Dix, Minister of Health