

Health Unit Media Release

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Over the past few weeks, several media articles have raised concerns regarding the Health Unit's intentions towards local farmers' markets.

Food safety is in everyone's interest. By conservative estimate, over two million Canadians will be stricken with food borne illness each year. **This is not just a serious personal health issue for the victims but has significant costs to society** through demands on the health care system, lost productivity and potentially devastating consequences for the producers of the food products involved.

Local Health Units are mandated to minimize the food safety risks to which the public may be exposed. We prefer to accomplish this through food safety education and technical support that we routinely offer to food vendors in our community. In addition, decades of historical evidence of the causes of food borne illness have resulted in laws being put in place to control those risks. The most significant regulation in this regard is the Food Premises Regulation.

This regulation is not new. **The current Food Premises Regulation has been in place since 1990.** It applies equally to all food vendors regardless of the size or seasonal nature of their business.

Our approach to farmers' markets is based on a risk assessment of the products being offered for sale. In an effort to discover what products were being offered, we asked the market boards to provide a list of their vendors. **Our intention was to contact each vendor, prior to the opening of the market, and to determine that their products were being produced and displayed in a safe manner.** We viewed this as being advantageous to both the vendors and the public.

We are currently conducting a legal review to determine the appropriate level of supervision for home-based food production. Some products are inherently dangerous, they easily support the growth of hazardous bacteria. If the product is not produced in an appropriate manner or is improperly handled or stored, serious illness can result.

The Health Unit's primary concern is the public's health. Our food safety program is conducted with that responsibility in mind.

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