

ENHANCING THE SAFETY OF LOCALLY PREPARED FOODS



Publication FST-380NP



What Do I Need To Know To Sell SEAFOOD at the Farmers Market?

Why sell seafood products at a farmers market?

Virginia is the largest seafood producer on the Atlantic Coast. Customers have access to a variety of fresh and local seafood, including oysters, sea scallops, clams, blue crabs, striped bass, flounder, croaker, and black sea bass, among many others. Selling at farmers markets provides another opportunity to make Virginia's fresh seafood accessible to more clients and helps to sustain Virginia's economy (figs. 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d).



Figure 1a. Cooked blue crabs. (Photo provided by Virginia Sea Grant.)



Figure 1b. Shrimp from Virginia aquaculture. (Photo provided by Virginia Sea Grant.)



Figure 1c. Whole fish for sale. (Source: Pixabay.)

"This work is supported by Food Safety Outreach Program [grant no. 2016 0020-25888/project accession no. 1010671] from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture"



Figure 1d. Dressed fish. (Source: Pixabay.)

What kind of license or permit do I need in order to sell my seafood at a farmers market?

To be able to sell seafood at a farmers market, you must apply and obtain a license from the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS). Familiarize yourself with the license application process by visiting the VDACS webpage, Home & Commercial Kitchen-Based Businesses, at www.vdacs.virginia.gov/dairy-kitchen-food-services-businesses.shtml.

Before you submit the application, decide if you are going to prepare your seafood product in your home kitchen or in a community/commercial kitchen. Once the appropriate application is submitted, VDACS conducts an inspection of the kitchen facilities. Training may be needed before the sale of certain seafood products.

Note: Nationally, seafood is regulated by the Food and Drug Administration. But in Virginia, seafood is regulated by two state agencies: VDACS and the Virginia Department of Health, Office of Environmental Health Service, Division of Shellfish Safety. Seafood that is sold at a farmers market is inspected by VDACS.

Farmers Market Selection

There are various interactive websites you can check when planning and selecting a market for your products. You can visit the VDACS website at www.vdacs.virginia.gov/vagrown/frmsmkt-farmvend.shtml for a list of farmers market. Also, the Virginia Farmers Market Association provides a list of farmers markets in Virginia, including their locations, contact information, and products for sale, at <https://vafma.org/tips-for-recruiting-vendors-for-your-market/>.

Call the market and inquire about their requirements and guidelines to help you get prepared for the sale of your seafood. Each county, city, town, and even each locality might have additional guidelines to follow when selling products at the market.

How do I know if I need training before selling seafood at a farmers market?

If you are handling seafood, including making products that contain seafood (clam chowder, oysters Rockefeller, crab cakes, crab dip, soups, smoked fish, etc.), you need to complete a Seafood HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) training program. This program provides a thorough understanding of safe food-handling practices, how to identify hazards, and how to put together a HACCP plan for your products. If you need information about the training, contact the director of the Virginia Tech Seafood Agricultural Research and Extension Center, by phone at 757-727-4861. For full details on whether or not you may need training, you can refer to the VDACS application.

What types of seafood and seafood products can I sell at a farmers market?

A variety of seafood and seafood products can be sold at a farmers market (fig. 2), including

- ▶ Fish – dressed, fillets.
- ▶ Live oysters, clams, and mussels.
- ▶ Scallops meat.
- ▶ Shrimp.
- ▶ Packed, shucked oysters.
- ▶ Cooked products:
 - Blue crabs, crab cakes.
 - Seafood soups, dips, smoked seafood.
- ▶ Prepackaged products:
 - Crabmeat (cooked and packed by permit holder).
 - Shucked oysters.
- ▶ Other value-added seafood.

Note: All seafoods offered for sale at a farmers market require a facility inspection by VDACS and must come from an approved source.



Figure 2. Covered seafood displayed on ice. Signs provide information to customers (Photo provided by Virginia Sea Grant.)



Can I transport seafood to a farmers market in my private vehicle?

Yes, you can. Make sure that the storage space in the vehicle is clean, since dust and debris can contaminate the product during transport. If you are accustomed to transporting pets, etc., protect products by placing them in insulated, cleaned containers to avoid tainting or contaminating the seafood during transit.

What should I take into consideration when transporting seafood to a farmers market?

You can transport and sell seafood out of insulated coolers. Use cleaned and sanitized containers or coolers with plenty of crushed ice to keep seafood at 41° F or below throughout transport, storage, and display. Use various coolers to keep seafood **cold and separate** from other foods during transportation to a farmers market. Wash, rinse, and sanitize insulated containers after each use.

Keep cold seafood products at temperatures of 41° F or below for safety. Also, the colder that the seafood is maintained, the better it will keep its freshness and shelf life. Protect seafood from coming in direct contact with ice and other foods by packing them in food-grade bags, plastic food containers with tight lids, etc.

Keep cooked seafood completely separated from other raw seafoods by using sealed food-grade bags or containers with tight lids.

When transporting live shellfish (e.g., oysters, clams, mussels), place them in a separate cooler or container and keep temperatures around 45° F. Keep live shellfish from coming in contact with ice by placing a barrier (clean plastic, etc.) between them and the ice.

At the Market on the Day of Sale

Items you will need on the day of sale include the following:

- ▶ Gloves and tongs to handle cooked products.
- ▶ Food-grade bags and containers to store and display products.
- ▶ Certified scale (if you are weighting product).
- ▶ Coolers and extra ice.*
- ▶ Thermometer.
- ▶ Signage.
- ▶ Information on product and uses, recipes.



Figure 3. A vendor sells seafood at a farmers market. (Photo provided by Virginia Sea Grant.)

* Make sure you have an adequate amount of ice or other means to sustain a cold temperature during your entire stay at the farmers market (fig. 3). Constant opening and closing of coolers or other cooling equipment will cause the ice to melt. Drain and replace melted ice from the coolers to make sure product is not submerged in water, potentially contaminating it. Use a thermometer to verify that food is being maintained at or below 41° F.

What considerations must I keep in mind when displaying seafood on ice at a farmers market?

During display, keep products heavily iced and in the shade (fig. 4). Remember that melted ice can be a source of contamination, so draining it away from the product is vital. Prevent cross-contamination and cross-contact by keeping ready-to-eat products (such as cooked crabs, cooked crab cakes, cooked shrimp, and smoked seafood) **completely separated** from other raw seafood products (such as raw fish, fish fillets, oysters, clams, etc.) by storing in plastic food-grade containers, food-grade bags, and trays during display. Since oysters and clams can be consumed raw as a ready-to-eat product, display them away and completely separated from other seafoods.

During display, bury packaged products such as crabmeat and shucked oysters in ice rather than keeping them on top of ice.



Figure 4. Seafood products displayed on ice and covered. (Photo provided by Virginia Sea Grant.)

Note: Protect allergic customers by keeping products that contain the eight major food allergens — milk, eggs, crustacean shellfish, finfish, tree nuts, wheat, peanuts, and soybeans — separate and by providing signs or other materials that alert customers to their presence in the product.

What do I need to know about selling oysters (shellstock) at a farmers market?

Oysters sold at a farmers market (fig. 5) must have a tag that shows that they come from an approved source and a certified dealer. A certified dealer is the person who harvested the oysters or the dealer who sold you the oysters is certified by the Virginia Department of Health to do so. The approved source information refers to the area or location where the shellstock was harvested and is found in the tag that accompanies the oysters. The tag or label provides you with information such as who packed and shipped the oysters, the date of harvest, and even the harvest location. Once the product is sold, you must keep the tags for 90 days after sale in case there is a recall and the product need to be identified. Customers may want to check this tag to tell how fresh their oysters are.



Figure 5. Virginia oysters. (Photo provided by Mallory Huxford, Virginia Sea Grant.)

At what temperature do I need to maintain oysters?

Keep live oysters, clams, and mussels cold (45° F or less; fig. 6) during transport and display at the market either by the use of refrigeration and/or ice. Keep in mind that this is a live product and quality may be affected if kept too cold. Make sure that the bags or boxes of oysters remain intact with their harvest tags. Do not mix batches or sources of oysters.



Figure 6. Keep live oysters at 45° F or below. (Photo courtesy of Danielle Schools.)

Do I need a thermometer?

Yes. You need to use a calibrated metal stem thermometer to monitor the temperature inside the coolers or insulated containers, especially if you are opening and closing them throughout the day. If you are reheating or cooking products, use a thermometer to ensure proper temperatures have been reached and maintained.

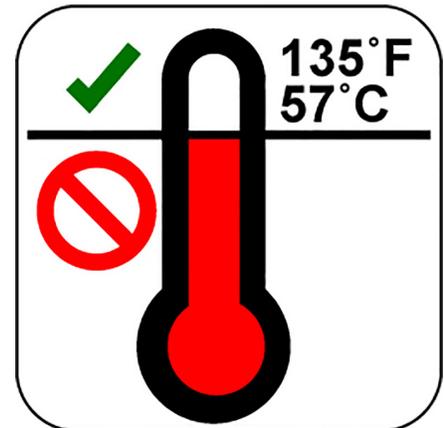
Can I cook and serve or reheat cooked seafood products at the farmers market for immediate sale to customers?

It will depend on the farmers market you have selected whether cooking or reheating seafood products is allowed (fig. 7). You may also be required to obtain additional permits depending on the locality or town. If cooking is allowed, cook raw seafood to an internal temperature of at least 145° F. Reheat cooked seafood

products that are served hot to the public to at least 165° F. Once the food reaches that temperature, keep it at 135° F or greater until sold (fig. 8a). If serving cold, keep seafood products at 41° F or lower (fig. 8b). Use a calibrated metal stem thermometer to ensure you meet these required temperatures.

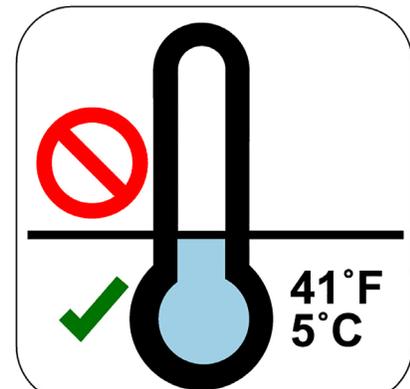


Figure 7. Crab cakes. (Photo provided by Aileen Devlin, Virginia Sea Grant.)



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Figure 8a. Keep hot products at 135° F or above.



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Figure 8b. Keep cold products at 41° F or below.



Do I need to provide labeling for my prepackaged seafood products?

Yes. If you package the product ahead of time and it is ready to be sold to the customer, then the product needs labeling information.

Information must include at least:

- ▶ Name of product.
- ▶ Net weight.
- ▶ Name and address of processor.

If a product contains more than one ingredient, additional information such as lists of ingredients and allergens (if present) are needed on the label. Please refer to the VDACS application for full details on labeling of prepacked products.

Additional Resources

Boyer, Renee R. 2012. *Direct Market Food Sales in Virginia*. VCE publication FST-72NP. www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/FST/FST-72/FST-72.html.

Boyer, Renee, and Joell Eifert. 2018. *Going to Market: A Guide to Selling Raw, Processed and Prepared Food Products at Farmers' Markets, Stores & Roadside Stands*. VCE publication ANR-46NP. www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/ANR/ANR-46/ANR-46.html.

Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Food Safety Program. Guidelines for Providing Safe Food Samples at the Market. <https://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/vagrown/pdf/foodsamplessafety.pdf>

Selected VCE Publications About Selling Foods at Farmers Markets

Eifert, Joell, Renee Boyer, Emily Pomfrey Wells, Thomas Saunders, and Lily Yang. 2019. "What do I need to know to sell SHELL EGGS at the farmers market?" *Enhancing the Safety of Locally Prepared Foods*. VCE publication FST-347NP. www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/FST/FST-347/FST-347.html.

Eifert, Joell, Renee Boyer, Emily Pomfrey Wells, Tommy Saunders, and Lily Yang. 2020. "What do I need to know about selling REFRIGERATED DIPS, SPREADS, DRESSING, and SALADS at the farmers market?" *Enhancing the Safety of Locally Prepared Foods*. VCE publication FST-300P. www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/FST/FST-300/FST-300.html.

Eifert, Joell, Renee Boyer, Emily Pomfrey Wells, Thomas Saunders, and Lily Yang. 2020. "What do I need to know to sell JAMS, PRESERVES, JELLIES, and FRUIT BUTTERS at the farmers market?" *Enhancing the Safety of Locally Prepared Foods*. VCE publication FST-367P. www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/FST/FST-301/FST-301.html.