



## Market Ready Farm to Restaurant – Food and Food Product Packaging Considerations

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There are many factors to consider before selling your farm products directly to restaurant owners, managers, and chefs. Marketing management is an important component in the startup and decision-making processes for new and beginning producers interested in direct sales. The purpose of this series of publications is to inform Virginia producers about marketing and legal risk management tools, techniques, and resources available to help them prepare to sell food and food products directly to restaurant clientele.

Topics covered in this paper are expected to improve producer decision-making by providing a better understanding of food and food product packaging considerations to help them manage risks associated with the legal aspects specific to direct marketing relationships. The topics covered in this resource are not all-inclusive, but after reading this publication, producers should be better prepared to build relationships with restaurant clients.

This is one publication of a 7-part series, available on the Farm to Fork Direct Market portal. A resource list that include examples, resources, blog posts and case study YouTube video interviews of successful farm to restaurant business owners, and upcoming training dates is available at the end of this publication.

For questions about this or other farm startup topics, contact your local Virginia Cooperative Extension office.

Packaging rarely comes to mind as a major consideration for producers. After all, they are involved in food production, rather than packaging experts or creative presentation consultants. However, the packaging chosen for a product can affect the way consumers view the items, shelf stability of the food product, preferred quantity and overall quality, and intended consumer use of the product. The packaging used may also need to meet regulatory and legal specifications. Packaged foods are required to follow U.S. Food and Drug Administration label requirements (VCE, 2012), yet regulations vary in the case of fresh produce, meats, and dairy based on location, annual farm sales, and product type.

When choosing packaging for a product, the first thing farmers should consider is the main purpose. Is the packaging simply a means to protect the product during delivery and storage? Is the packaging intended to draw the eye to the product or advertise it? Is the packaging intended

# PACKAGING 101

*Why is packaging important?*

- Influences perception of product upon delivery
- Impacts product quality over time
- Associated costs effect operation's bottom line

## PRODUCER CONSIDERATIONS

<b>Main purpose of packaging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protection</li> <li>Advertisement</li> <li>Education</li> </ul>	<i>Don't Forget</i> Certain types of packaging have legal or regulatory concerns they must fulfill
<b>Buyer and producer needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Re-usability</li> <li>Transportation Conditions</li> <li>Storage Time</li> </ul>	<i>First Impressions</i> Products should be packaged with time, resources, and attention to detail
<b>Characteristics of packaging material</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality/Shelf Life Control</li> <li>Weight</li> <li>Protection</li> </ul>	<i>Product is Important</i> The physical type of packaging will mostly depend on the product in question

 Packaging can seem like a minor concern, but type and quality of packaging can have a huge impact on product quality over time





to convey information about the product or how it is used? Are there legal or regulatory concerns the packaging must fulfill?

The next thought should be buyer and farmer needs. Should the packaging be reusable? Will it need to withstand rough conditions during transport? How will the product and packaging be stored, and for how long? Should the product be sorted by grade and marked to reflect this?

Functional packaging considerations also include various forms required to meet needs along the food supply chain. When a farmer presents his/her food product offering in its packaging, they want to their buyer's first impression to result in a sale. Professional arrangement of fresh, clean, produce items conveys the care and pride invested by the farmer to the chef. Upon seeing the packaging, the chef should immediately assume the farmer has invested time, resources, and attention to detail in arranging the package and product.

Finally, consider the characteristics of the packaging material itself. How expensive is it? How will it contribute to product quality and shelf life? Is it lightweight, and therefore cheaper to ship? Will it protect the product from light, air and moisture if necessary?

The type of packaging used often depends on the product in question. Wrap meat cuts in butcher paper or plastic. Package and present vegetables in waterproof cardboard boxes. Wrap greens in food grade plastic bags. Plastic clamshells are appropriate for berries and other small fruits.

In sum, the type of packaging may have a huge influence on product quality over time. In addition, the attractiveness of the packaging and the appearance of the product inside can greatly influence the way a chef perceives a product upon delivery. Finally, the cost of packaging may have a great effect on a farmer's bottom line. Farmers are encouraged to be diligent and

take the time to consult with customers and relevant experts when choosing packaging for their products.

For more information about direct marketing of your farm products in Virginia, please contact Kim Morgan at [klmorgan@vt.edu](mailto:klmorgan@vt.edu) or 540-231-3132, or, visit the Farm to Fork Direct Marketing Resources portal at [ext.vt.edu/agriculture/market-ready.html](http://ext.vt.edu/agriculture/market-ready.html). For more information and resources directly aimed at beginning farmers, visit the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Program at [www.vabeginningfarmer.org](http://www.vabeginningfarmer.org).

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## References

Virginia Cooperative Extension. 2012. "Required Food Labeling Information." Virginia Cooperative Extension Service Publication, FST-55NP. Link: [https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs\\_ext\\_vt\\_edu/FST/FST-55/FST-55NP-PDF.pdf](https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/FST/FST-55/FST-55NP-PDF.pdf)

## Resources

Vallotton, A., A. Battah, R. Knox, A. Vargo, T. Archibald, R. Boyer, N. Cook, and T. Drape. 2017. "Accessing Virginia's Market Sectors: Fresh Produce Purchasing Considerations." Virginia Cooperative Extension Service Publication, HORT272-NP. Link: [https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs\\_ext\\_vt\\_edu/HORT/HORT-272NP/HORT-272NP.pdf](https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/HORT/HORT-272NP/HORT-272NP.pdf)

Virginia Cooperative Extension Market Ready Farm-to-Fork Direct Marketing Resources portal. 2019. Link: <https://ext.vt.edu/agriculture/market-ready.html>

Virginia Cooperative Extension Market Ready Farm-to-Fork Direct Marketing Resources YouTube Channel. 2019. Link: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnlhujb2Yq966WytPz4GuEw>

Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Program. 2019. Link: [www.vabeginningfarmer.org](http://www.vabeginningfarmer.org)