

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Editorially speaking by Joy

It Just became Easier to Have a Farm Stand or U-Pick Operation

On September 27, it became easier for farmers to sell their fresh produce or certain processed products such as jams, pies and olive oils or even a bottle of water to a thirsty customer. The new legislation, sponsored by the California Farm Bureau Federation and carried by Assemblyman Dave Jones of Sacramento, encourages the direct sale of California-grown produce from farmer to consumer.

Previously on weekends, farm stands could be crowded with people, some asking for water or sodas. Yet, prior to Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's signing of AB 2168, these farm stands and u-pick operations were prohibited from selling either of these items. You could give water or soda away, but you couldn't sell it. Now bottled water and sodas from an approved source can be sold in your farm stand, in up to 50 square feet of farm stand space.

Products such as jams, pies and oils, which need to qualify as "non-potentially hazardous prepackaged food products" must still be prepared in a health-department-approved commercial kitchen. But if the ingredients are "grown or produced in close proximity to the farm stand," you can sell the products at a farm stand—something that was unthinkable prior to September 27.

The only actual food preparation allowed at farm stands is for food sampling, such as slicing an apple or peeling an orange to sample-serve customers. If you have food sampling, then—and only then—will you need to have approved toilet and hand-washing facilities. Such facilities

only need to be available for "use by farm stand operators and their employees."

Prior to the passage of AB 2168, farm stands fell under the state's retail food code. Under this code, you were required to have an approved clean water system, septic system, restroom and special scrubable flooring. These requirements represented a \$20,000 to \$30,000 cost that most farm stand operators could not afford. AB 2168 was an effort to improve this situation.

Noelle Cremer, director of Natural Resources and Commodities at the California Farm Bureau, says "There's this huge consumer demand right now for locally grown agricultural products, and we would like to help our members capitalize on that demand."

Cremer continues, "We want to make sure that it's (farm stands and u-picks) doable and feasible for the farmer. But, we're doing it in a way that still ensures safe food. We're just making it easier for farmers to comply."

Guidelines to Assure Foods Stay Safe

- foods are foods from an approved source that do not need refrigeration.
 - as simple as adding chocolate milk.
 - enclosed area to control area for food safety.
 - processing, you need a permit, and there will be unannounced inspections.
- For questions about food safety requirements operation, call Laurie Salo at the SLO Environ-

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