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By Michael Barker

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Huge rise in farm shop sales

Sales of fresh produce through farm shops have been buoyant, with the sector hoping for a lasting change in consumer behaviour



Farm retailers are hopeful that shopping habits forged as a reaction to coronavirus will last long beyond the pandemic, following an unprecedented surge in new customers.

Providing reliable access to abundant fresh seasonal produce, sourced with low food miles directly from local family-run farms at fair prices, the country's huge network of independent farm shops has become a more attractive option to shoppers than ever before, according to research by the Farm Retail Association (FRA).

Some 92 per cent of farm retailers surveyed by the FRA reported a "significant" rise in new customers since lockdown rules began in March. Farm shops have offered continually replenished shelves to establish themselves as quality local alternatives to supermarkets.

FRA said farm shops provide calm environments with easy-to-follow social

distancing measures that allow shoppers to feel safe, whilst communities are also benefitting from a raft of new services that were not available before.

The organisation estimates that the UK's network of farm shops has a combined turnover of more than £1.5bn, including sales from farm shop cafés.

Some 79 per cent of farm retailers polled said they had introduced a click-and-collect service because of coronavirus, including in the form of completely contactless drive-thrus. Another 67 per cent said they had introduced home deliveries.

As a result, farm shops across the UK have processed an estimated 1.4 million-plus orders for home delivery or collection since the government's lockdown measures began.

FRA chairman Rob Copley said: "The last couple of months have clearly shown that farm retailers can react nimbly to customer demands because of their size, independence and direct relationships with local farmers.

"They have also shown that they are proactive, supportive members of their local communities. We have members who prepare and deliver ready meals to local community groups that support the most vulnerable members of society. Others are donating produce to local school hubs, frontline NHS staff and other key workers.

"As well as going above and beyond in this time of crisis, farm retailers are helping to keep the nation fed, offering easy access to fresh, nutritious and affordable British food. They are demonstrating that they are both caring neighbours and viable alternatives to the supermarkets, boasting shorter supply chains with lower carbon footprints."

<http://www.fruitnet.com/americafruit/article/1474/parts-of-san-diego-quarantined-as-psyllid-count-mounts>

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