

Cowichan Valley Co-operative Marketplace

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Cow-op.ca Website Seller Guidelines - Last updated Feb. 2025

All potential sellers must read and agree to these Seller Guidelines prior to submitting a Web Seller Application Form.

A. About Us

1. Cow-op.ca is an initiative of the Cowichan Valley Co-operative Marketplace (CVCM), a non profit Community Services Co-op, incorporated in October 2014, to develop collective initiatives addressing local food security and farm viability in the Cowichan Region.

B. General

1. **Cow-op.ca is an online ordering system designed to improve access to and distribution of Cowichan-Region grown and processed foods.** We provide buyers a catalog of available local food products that includes information about who, how, and where the product was grown, processed or handmade. We receive orders, notify the appropriate sellers, aggregate and pack orders, distribute the food, and process payments from the buyer and to the seller. As of 2021, we offer our service to Cowichan, Victoria and Nanaimo buyers.
2. One must become a member of the CVCM and receive approval from our Board of Directors and Market Manager(s) in order to sell through our online market, www.cow-op.ca.
3. Each seller will be assigned a user name and invited to create a unique password as well as receive training on use of the web platform before selling online. It is the **seller's responsibility to provide their own bios, photos, and add and manage their product inventory.** Training videos are available at any time by logging in to the seller's account. While the website is designed to be intuitive, our staff can assist sellers experiencing problems.
4. As noted in Section C (Seller Acceptance Criteria), a seller's approval to the site is largely based on the food/product categories and specific items they identify for sale upon their initial application. **Should a seller wish to add a Processed item not identified in their initial application, they must first obtain permission from the Market Manager & submit the necessary Island Health regulatory paperwork as set out in Section H.**
5. In order to enable buyers to make informed choices and to further our mandate of supporting local farms, we make available to buyers certain information about each seller's products or production practices, such as

information relating to the geographic origin of a product's ingredients. Seller agrees to provide any product information reasonably requested by us, and further agrees that (a) such information may be disclosed to buyers on Cow-op.ca, and (b) such information may be incorporated into functionality that allows users to rank or filter product listings.

C. Seller Acceptance Criteria

1. Cow-op.ca strives to help local farmers succeed by connecting them with buyers. To this end, we seek to attract and retain a strong network of buyers by offering a diverse array of products including local produce, value-added food items, BC- made grocery items, and other agricultural products.

2. Products that may be listed on Cow-op.ca fall into the following three categories:

- (i) Locally grown produce and agricultural products (vegetables, grains, meats, eggs, flowers, etc.)
- (ii) Locally processed products made primarily from locally grown ingredients (jams, pickles, baked goods)
- (iii) Locally processed products made primarily from non-locally grown ingredients

All new seller applications are reviewed by the Market Manager and Board of Directors. Submissions that fall into categories (i) and (ii) are given priority, and submissions that fall into category (iii) are assessed on a case-by-case basis, having regard to whether the product category and/or specific items identified for sale materially enhance the overall product mix on Cow-op.ca. In the case of processed foods, consideration will be given to the percentage of ingredients grown locally. All seller approvals are at the absolute discretion of the Board of Directors.

For the purpose of these guidelines, "local" means within the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) boundaries, including North Cowichan and City of Duncan.

Within the product categories, the ranking of priority is as follows:

- 1) Locally grown and processed
- 2) Locally grown, but not locally processed
- 3) Not locally grown, but locally processed

When there is availability of a more local product (ranked 1-3) that is similar to products on the Cow-op that are neither locally grown nor locally processed, the more local product will take its place. The replaced product will no longer be made available for sale on Cow-op.ca; if this is the only product that a co-operative member sells, a full refund of the membership fee will be made.

D. The Order Cycle of Cow-op.ca (Also known as a Sales Period)

1. Buyers order and enter their payment information online (via their computer and mobile devices) from Thursday 12:01am to Monday at 11:59PM every week.
2. Sellers receive a list of all orders early (12:01 am) Tuesday morning (called 'Pick lists') after the virtual market has closed at midnight on Monday.

Sellers deliver all orders to the current (as of November 2023) packing

facility: Providence Farm (1843 Tzouhalem Rd, Duncan.)

Tuesdays: 9am – 12pm (counter items & frozen*)

Wednesdays: 9am - 12:00pm (fresh products)

3. Sellers will unload their orders onto a table & take their totes/boxes etc. home with them. Market Managers, staff, and/ or volunteers will receive the produce, ensure correct quantities, and organize it into customer orders. **It is expected that sellers wait before leaving to confirm that the order is correct and accounted for.** All frozen items are stored in a commercial freezer overnight. All other items are stored in walk-in coolers overnight unless different storage requirements are requested by the producer.
4. On Wednesday evenings, orders bound for Victoria customers are transported to Lockwood Farms; on Thursdays these orders are transported to Zero Waste Emporium (1728 Douglas St.) for customer pick up from 1-6PM. Orders for Cowichan customers are distributed Thursdays for home delivery or available for pick up at one of the food hubs.
5. Unclaimed orders are still charged to the buyer and will go to the food bank or community kitchens if not claimed during the allotted time.
6. Final transactions are processed on Friday morning, allowing correction for any missing items or orders rejected in accordance with section F5 hereof.
7. Sellers should update their inventory on Wednesdays between 12:01 am and midnight for the next week's selling period. Autofill occurs every Wednesday morning at 12:01 am for those sellers who have products they wish to automatically relist every week.
8. Each Thursday at 12:01am, the market reopens for the next selling period.
9. The market will be open year-round with the exception of Christmas week, and closed for any time at the discretion of the General Manager and Board of Directors.

E. Fees, Commission Rates, and Payment schedule

1. Producers can become members of the CVCN for a one-time membership fee of \$100. The share is redeemable any time they leave the co-operative.
2. All sellers pay an annual \$60 web listing fee, which may be subject to future increases.
3. **As of February 2025 the rates are as follows:**

Farm Fresh & Primary Producer Products: 25% Margin (Markup of 33%)

Valued Added Food Products: 30% Margin (Markup of 42.8%)

Non-food or Farm Products: 40% Margin (Markup of 66.6%)

Wholesale Products: 20% Margin (Markup of 25%)

[The “Margin” is found by taking total sales minus the cost of goods sold. This is different from the “Markup”, which is the percentage amount by which the cost of a product is increased to arrive at the selling price.]

Farm Fresh & Primary Producer Products: is defined as on-farm produced fruits & veggies, livestock sold as cuts or ground raised and sold by the farmer, and whole fish or filets that were caught and sold by the fisherman. This category also includes seeds and transplants that were grown and sold by the farmer.

*note that livestock cuts and fish filets sold by a secondary producer (not the original farmer or fisher) are considered Value Added Food Products.

Value Added Food Products: is defined as the production of a product that changes the raw ingredients in a manner that enhances its value. This includes prepared meals, seasonings, canned items, breads & pastries, cheeses, spreads & sauces, etc. For example, pork cuts and grounds are classified as a Farm Fresh Product whereas burger patties and sausages which include a secondary production are classified as value added.

Non-food or Farm Products: is defined as products on the Cow-op marketplace that are not classified as food products. This includes products such as hand sanitizer, soaps, candles, books, etc.

Wholesale Products: All products on the Cow-op, regardless of the unit size, can be sold as wholesale products. The wholesale margin follows the customer, not the product. Wholesale customers are vetted to ensure that they qualify as wholesale purchasers. There is a \$50 minimum order for wholesale customers.

For example: A retail customer will login and see the end price of a Value Added Food Product as the producer’s cost with a 42.86% markup added. A wholesale customer will login and see the end price for the same product as the producer’s cost with a 25% markup added.

Please contact staff for support uploading wholesale products or to request a copy of the current Cow-op product sub-category commission rate chart.

4. Sellers are responsible to upload products for sale each week and set the price they wish to

receive. The marketplace website program automatically adds the applicable markup to the listed price to arrive at the displayed customer price.

5. CVCM will pay sellers by EFT bi-weekly: paying for two previous sales periods 2 weeks after. For example: week 1 & 2 will be paid for on week 4. Week 3 & 4 will be paid for on week 6. Sellers will be paid for all accepted orders unless the quality of the products delivered by the sellers to the warehouse are deemed unsaleable by Cow-op standards (Section F. Quality Standards). Any changes to the payment cycle must be approved by the board of directors, and sellers will be notified in advance.

6. If your product requires the collection of tax, you must notify the Market Managers upon application to the market.

F. Quality Standards

1. Food products must meet standards for Food Products Sold through a Food Facility as outlined in Item H. Non-food items must meet standards for Sale of Nonfood Items as outlined in section I.

2. All products must be delivered market-ready: clean, in excellent condition, and packed in the correct quantity (See F5 below). If requested by the Market Managers, certain products may need to be labeled with product name that matches the website product name, farm name, weight/quantity and buyer name. Label use is not required if not specified. **Sellers are encouraged to print a detailed pick list to be dropped off with their order.**

3. All fresh produce that must be bagged, should be bagged in food safe packaging consistent with Island Health Guidelines. Items normally sold in pints or other open containers (strawberries, cherries, tomatoes, etc.) must be placed in a contained package to avoid spillage during the transport of the orders (ex: placing pint container in a small paper bag).

4. Fragile items must be packed in a manner that appropriately protects against breakage or loss during transit.

5. In order to guarantee a minimum standard and provide Cow-op customers with consistent product quality, CVCM reserves the right to refuse products at drop-off or during packing that are not what buyers ordered (based on the online product listing), underweight, or which are spoiled, contaminated, visibly defective, or otherwise not acceptable. Furthermore, any orders rejected by the buyer at time of pick-up due to issues of quality or quantity will not be sold, and that part of the buyer's order will not be processed, nor will the seller receive payment for that portion of their delivery. As of March 2022, any seller in excess of three such refusals or rejections in a calendar year as a result of producer error will be subject to the following penalties:

- After the third incident, a \$50 fine will be issued to the seller's account for each additional incident, to cover costs of the additional staff time required to rectify the situation, handle customer complaints, seek substitutions etc.

- After six such incidents, i.e. after receiving three \$50 fines in one calendar year, the seller may have their ability to sell on the website revoked, at the discretion of the CVCM Board of Directors and Market Managers.

6. Any buyer complaints post pick-up/delivery will be screened by staff and communicated to the seller. In most cases, Cow-op staff will encourage sellers to offer a customer refund.

G. Production Systems and Related Claims

1. Sellers are responsible for disclosing accurate information about their production techniques, products and ingredients.
2. Complaints or accusations of improper production practices or sourcing by others should be made to the Board of Directors for resolution.
3. Any "Organic" claim must be accompanied by the certification number and name of the certifying body. These products will be identified on the products listing with the organic certification number.
4. For any product containing multiple ingredients, all ingredients must be listed on the website in the product description field.
5. The CVCM is not responsible for the claims made by sellers about their products or practices. The CVCM does not make any guarantees relating to the pricing, quality, or safety of the products sold through Cow-op.ca. **These responsibilities lie solely with the sellers.**
6. Regardless of production practice, sellers shall make their farm/production facility available for inspection by the CVCM, Executive Director, Market Managers or Board of Directors as needed. The CVCM, Executive Director, Market Managers and Board of Directors retain the right to verify any claim made by a seller, including production claims and geographic production location. Provision of false or misleading information may lead to removal of unsubstantiated claims, removal of affected products, disqualification of seller, and/or any other action deemed appropriate by the Board and Executive Director.

H. Island Health Standards for Food Products sold through a Food Facility.

1. All produce sellers must comply with the government's rules relating to weights and measures.
2. All fresh egg sellers must comply with the Island Health rules relating to sales of farm eggs: Eggs must be clean and crack-free.
3. All meat sellers must provide proof of certified slaughter and processing facility and all meat products must be labeled with product type and name of slaughtering and processing facility.
4. All processed goods for human consumption must be made in an Island Health approved commercial kitchen/processing facility. A copy of the Island Health inspection report or decal must be provided upon application to the Cow-op.ca.
5. All foods that require refrigeration or are frozen will be transported to the distribution center under the applicable Food Safe Guidelines.

I. Standards for Sale of Nonfood Items

1. Any nonfood items must meet reasonable expectations of product life, function and safety, and must comply with all applicable requirements set out in federal, provincial, and local laws, regulations, and rules.

J. Liability and Insurance

1. The CVCM assumes no liability for products represented in our site. All sellers listing products for sale on the Cow-op website are strongly advised to consult with their insurance provider for liability insurance.

2. Seller shall indemnify the Cow-op, the CVCM, and their respective directors, officers, agents, and employees against all claims arising out of seller's breach of these

guidelines. **K. Application Process**

1. Sellers can visit www.cow-op.ca and download the required forms or contact marketmanager@cow-op.ca to have these forms sent to them.

2. Sellers are required to submit their Web Seller Application Form, and all necessary Island Health paperwork requirements as outlined in Item H.

3. Producers wishing to become a member of the CVCM must also submit a Membership Application form at this time.

4. Payment for web listing fees and membership can be made by cash or cheque payable to Cowichan Valley Co-operative Marketplace, or by e-transfer to marketmanager@cow-op.ca. Payments will not be processed until the seller's application has been approved. Applications will be reviewed by the Market Manager and Board of Directors and the seller's account will be activated as soon as possible.

5. If a seller has submitted all the required paperwork and has received approval, the Market Manager will schedule a training session with the seller and get an account set up for the seller as well as assist with getting products listed.

I, _____ representative and/or owner of

_____ have read all of the above and agree to be bound by the Cow-op.ca Website Seller Guidelines.

Signature

Date