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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
3/30/2020

Hood River Farmers Market will open for the outdoor season on Saturday, April 4th! Strict safety protocol will be followed to ensure the health and well-being of our community.

Farmers Markets have been deemed essential businesses in Oregon and allowed to open during the COVID 19 pandemic. Gorge Grown and the market's vendors are taking action to keep themselves and shoppers safe. "We are fortunate that we are able to use the 5th & Columbia parking lot to really spread vendors and customers out to ensure safe social distancing" says Hannah Ladwig, Farmers Market Manager. The market has canceled all nonessential programming, including youth activities and live music. No onsite consumption of food will be allowed, and shoppers will only find food vendors, no craft makers or artists. "It's important to note that the CDC, FDA and USDA are not aware of any reports that suggest coronavirus can be transmitted by food or food packaging. However, it is always important to follow good hygiene practices when handling or preparing foods" notes the Western Regional Center to Enhance Food Safety.

Farmers markets provide a valuable outlet for local farmers and producers who are struggling while local restaurants who typically buy from them temporarily close or limit their operations. The market also serves as an important shopping option for customers. "Our open-air market provides key access to local food and relieves stress on grocery stores. High quality, nutrient dense food is more important than ever for our immune system and mental health", says Gorge Grown Food Network's Executive Director, Sarah Sullivan.

"Our regular outdoor season typically doesn't start until May. But these are not normal times and we needed to cancel the remaining indoor market season that was held at May Street Elementary. So we're opening the outdoor season a month earlier this year", explains Ladwig.

With changes to market operations, the market may look a little different for a while. Gorge Grown's Mobile Farmers Market will have fresh produce from regional and local growers through the month of April while farmers are still cultivating early crops for the market. Vendors will not have products within reach of customers and many items will be prebagged. Customers are encouraged to pre-order from vendors directly and pay with payment aps, such as Venmo, or debit/ credit cards to reduce use of market tokens. Rules and expectations for



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customers will be posted at the market. “We’re encouraging our customers to come, shop and head back home. We also ask that anyone who is sick or may have been exposed to COVID 19 to stay home. We are committed to ensure the health and well-being of our community and will continue to operate the market only if it can be done safely” says Ladwig.

Gorge Grown asks that customers:

- Bring hand sanitizer to the market. There will also be a hand washing stations.
- Keep your distance: stand 8’ from others and don’t shop in groups. Follow social distancing markings that will be outlined with chalk. Oregon Department of Agriculture requires that the market has designated “social distancing officers”, please listen to these officers at the market.
- Download the Venmo ap to your smart phone before the market for no-contact transactions. Vendors have been asked to do the same.
- Wash any reusable bags in your washing machine with warm water before bringing them to the market

Senior citizens and those with compromised immune systems are most at risk for COVID-19. If you are healthy, Gorge Grown recommends reaching out to vulnerable neighbors to see if you can shop for them and deliver groceries.

As unemployment rises and needs of vulnerable community members grow, the market’s food access programming will be of increased importance. Hood River Farmers Market accepts SNAP EBT (“food stamps”) and provides an additional \$10 free for customers using their benefits at the market.

Customers can find more information about the market at www.gorgegrown.com/hoodriver or contact Gorge Grown at 541-490-6420 or communications@gorgegrown.com.