

Going the Greater Distance

A story of adaptation and service about a general store in New Market, Virginia during the pandemic. This short vignette is part of our “Virginia Food Systems and COVID-19 Story Collection Project” that aims to highlight, collect, and share stories of hope and resilience in our food system amidst the pandemic. Find out more about this project and view our entire series on [our website](#).

June 10, 2020

By Hunter Hilbert and Katie Trozzo

VT Center for Food Systems and Community Transformation

<https://foodsystems.centers.vt.edu/>

Amidst the Coronavirus pandemic, Jon Henry General Store attracted new faces from new places in efforts to keep rural and urban residents alike stocked with food and essential items. Typically, customers outside the county traveled to the New Market-based retailer from Rappahannock County or from across the state line in West Virginia.

However, due to the stark implications of the pandemic, a new customer base arose among residents further away in the Washington, D.C. area.

Many D.C.-region residents were not aware of the New Market area prior to the pandemic, but as restrictions increased and wait times to enter grocery stores grew, residents found convenience in driving to New Market for a faster, safer grocery run. In the effort of care and resiliency, residents ordered boxes of food from Jon Henry General Store to bring back and share with their neighbors in the city. With connections to the Shenandoah Valley’s food system, the General Store



Photo by Jon Henry retrieved from WMRA: More News, Less Noise

did not face product shortages—unlike many large retailers and big box outlets.

To keep everyone well-stocked, the General Store came together with other small businesses in the area. The “small, local networks” banded together to provide and serve as one, said the store owner (Hagi, 2020). For example, after finding a bulk flour merchant, Jon Henry worked with a local candy store to package the flour in smaller quantities for selling to the public.

In an effort to consider safety precautions and to meet the demands of consumers, Jon Henry started offering curbside pick-up to keep contact to a minimum. Further, the store was the first participant in Virginia Cooperative Extension’s “Shop Smart, Eat Smart” initiative, which aims to help consumers make informed and healthy food choices. Jon Henry General Store qualified for the Extension-based initiative when they started accepting electronic benefit transfer (EBT) payments. Their process of navigating the pandemic gives us an inspiring story of adaptation. Throughout the many challenges in these uncertain times, positivity never seemed to be in short supply at Jon Henry General Store.



Photo by Jon Henry retrieved from WMRA: More News, Less Noise

This vignette highlights a [WMRA feature article](#) that was published on April 19, 2020. To learn more about Jon Henry General Store, click [here](#). For more information about Virginia Cooperative Extension’s “Shop Smart, Eat Smart” initiative, follow [this link](#).

References

Hagi, R.B. (2020, April 19). *New Market General Store Extends Reach During Pandemic*. WMRA News. Retrieved from: <https://www.wmra.org/post/new-market-general-store-extends-reach-during-pandemic?fbclid=IwAR2Mri-IDNs59Lhtk8IRMoLLw8YkIFZnRUX7unJqi9MQmEOuH3m5Qn6XA#stream/0>