

Last-minute backflip on farmers' markets closure during Stage 4 Victoria lockdown

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A file image of vegetables for sale at a farmer's market. Credit: Nora Carol Photography/Getty Images

There's been a last-minute backflip after a decision was made on Thursday to ban farmers' markets this weekend as part of Victoria's Stage 4 coronavirus lockdown.

Hundreds of Victorian farmers demanded answers from the Andrews government after the decision was announced.

There were plans to ban five markets planned across Melbourne at the weekend, including ones at Richmond and Bentleigh.

The ban would have left hundreds of primary producers left with thousands of dollars in fresh meat, seafood and vegetables - and no way of selling it.

There was a backlash against the markets last weekend after they drew big crowds - and not everyone was social distancing.



A file image of vegetables for sale at a farmer's market. Credit: Nora Carol Photography/Getty Images

Markets back on

But on Friday night Agriculture Minister Jaclyn Symes confirmed the markets would go ahead.

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"I want to confirm that farmers markets can continue to operate, to ensure Victorians have access to the fantastic fresh produce our farmers work tirelessly to provide," she announced on Friday evening.

"For those attending farmers markets, please follow the necessary health measures that are in place to protect our community and ensure these markets can continue to operate."

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The Victorian Farmers' Market Association said they were "thrilled" with the decision to go ahead.

“We’re thrilled to share that our accredited Victorian farmers’ markets are again permitted to trade as essential food retail in Stage 4 lockdown areas,” they said in a statement on Twitter.

“We wholeheartedly thank Minister Symes for intervening in this issue.”

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The Farmers’ Market Association claims the Department of Health and Human Services made the original decision to ban the markets on Thursday but did not notify them.

Markets including Queen Victoria and South Melbourne markets are still allowed to trade on the grounds that they sell food and drink.

The farmers argued that their markets are the same.