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KEEP OUR RETAIL MARKETS OPEN THROUGH THE CRISIS SAY TRADERS

IT IS VITAL that the UK's retail markets are kept open through the COVID-19 crisis, says the traders' national organisation.

The 20,000-strong NMTF (National Market Traders Federation) says that the majority of its members do not want the Government to shut down the UK's 1,200 indoor and outdoor retail markets — not only for the sake of their livelihoods but just as importantly for the health and welfare of many in the community.

NMTF CEO Joe Harrison said that already a few operators — mainly local authorities — had closed their markets or were planning to do so in the near future.

“Unless there are particular circumstances we think this is wrong,” he said.

“We have contacted all known market operators urging them to declare a rent-free period, which I am pleased to say quite a few of them have already done.

“We hope they recognise that providing traders with that rent-free assurance will help them keep their businesses open, and in turn keep their markets open and support the whole of the retail markets industry.

“Thankfully many operators appreciate that their markets are vital for vulnerable groups who rely on them to survive.”

Mr Harrison said there was a strong argument that market were safer places to shop than supermarkets — less handling of food, fewer touchable surfaces where infection could linger.

“We argue that markets are a healthier place to shop,” he added.

And there is some evidence that over the past few days the food offer on markets is proving even more attractive for shoppers, particularly fruit and veg lines.

Mr Harrison said there needed to be clearer guidance from the Government on what financial support the self-employed could claim.

“We know that traders who qualify for business rates — even though relief can mean they don't have to pay — are getting a grant and are able to apply for loans.

In answer to a MP's question in the Commons on Wednesday about the fate of the self-employed the Prime Minister said: “We will do whatever it takes to ensure all workers are protected throughout this crisis.”

“We want the Government to spell out what the means,” Mr Harrison said.

“We need the reassurance that our national traditional retail markets will continue to do business for the sake of traders and for the sake of the shopping public.”

NOTE TO EDITORS:

The NMTF is the only national UK organisation representing market and street traders, events retailers and mobile caterers.

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More information, including guidance on COVID-19, is available at www.nmtf.co.uk For a photo of Joe Harrison contact Communications Manager Roy Holland on 07876 190084 • email roy.holland@nmtf.co.uk