

Supporting Worker Safety in Agricultural Operations during COVID-19 Outbreak

COVID-19 Spread

There is no evidence that COVID-19 has been transmitted through food or food packaging ([CDC](#)). COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person. It can spread between people who are physically close to one another through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouth or nose of people nearby or be inhaled into the lungs. To keep workers safe, physical distance of 6 feet or more is important in minimizing virus spread. Click [here](#) for more details. It is possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching surfaces where the virus is present and then touching their mouth, nose, or eyes. [Recent research](#) shows the virus remains viable in the air and on hard surfaces for 3 hours and longer.

Minimizing Risk of Virus Spread

Food producers and agriculture facilities need to follow protocols set by local and state health departments. Coordination with local health officials is vital. [Communicate with employees](#) about COVID-19. Put up [posters](#) in employee areas such as offices, break rooms, bathrooms, about how to minimize spread of COVID-19.

Sick Employees Should Stay Home

Staff who are sick should avoid working with any crops that will be eaten by others. If this practice is already part of the farming operation, enforce as usual. Make sure employees stay home if they feel sick and send them home if they develop symptoms at work. Review your sick leave policy. Consider how you can help employees stay home when ill by offering additional sick leave. Farm stands should post signs asking customers not to shop at your business if they are unwell.

Planning for Change

Many produce farms and farm stands are businesses run by a minimal crew. Plan for how your operation would run if there is a staffing shortage due to illness or need to care for children at home or sick family members.

Physical Distancing

[Where feasible](#), keep staff 6 feet apart while at work. This might mean reducing the number of staff in a crew or limiting the number of visitors allowed at your operation at any one time. Limit or prohibit meetings if you do not have a large meeting space. Avoid shaking hands.

Hand Washing

Remind staff of the importance of washing hands correctly when arriving at work, when changing tasks (e.g. moving from office work to wash/pack), before and after eating, after using the bathroom, before putting on gloves when working with produce, after smoking, after cellphone use, and after contact with animals. Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, rubbing all surfaces of hands and fingers thoroughly. Dry hands with single use paper towel that is disposed of in a lined and covered trash receptacle. Consider assigning one person per shift to be responsible for maintaining adequate supplies in the handwash areas. Consider adding extra hand wash stations. Discourage self-serve farm stand procedures and develop a process of “carry-out” service where staff pack individual customer orders. Make hand sanitizer products available at your farm stand and office.

Using Gloves

Gloves should be changed regularly. Gloves should be removed and replaced when visibly dirty, and after using the bathroom, eating, smoking, cell phone use, changing tasks, touching your face, hair or other exposed skin.

Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Drying

Review, improve, and reinforce standard operating procedures for cleaning, sanitizing, disinfecting, and drying any food contact surfaces, food handling equipment, bins, and tools. Access the EPA's list of cleaning products that are effective against COVID-19 [here](#). Allow surfaces to air dry completely before use.