

## **Best Practices for Resuming Farm and Agricultural Business Operations During COVID-19**

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As we slowly get back to business it is critical that we change the way we think about our safety and the safety of the food that we provide for consumers. During this ongoing pandemic we are already changing the ways we interact with people and safely produce food. While the main focus of most guidance is on how to “slow” the spread and impact of COVID-19, there still are many questions about the risks associated with agricultural workers and their employers. Significant changes have been implemented and some are still being developed to ensure a robust and safe food supply for the public. While this truly is a continuously changing circumstance, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has provided an interim guidance for agricultural workers and employers. As states are opening up for business, it is important to understand that this is still an ongoing pandemic.

The interim guidance provided by the CDC is a template to protect agricultural workers from COVID-19. However, it is critical to remember that each situation on the farm, in the processing plant, or in market areas presents unique challenges for preventing the spread of COVID-19. Therefore, the goal of the interim CDC guidelines is to provide consistent measures that can help reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19. While the guidance is very detailed and thorough, some key points to keep in mind as we get back to the “new normal” way of business are:

- Determine COVID-19 risks within your business that pose a threat to the safety and health of agriculture workers and develop “practical” prevention strategies. Remember, if instructions are hard to follow, they most likely will NOT be followed.
- Develop and implement an aggressive and intentional strategy to address shared spaces as the risk of spread is higher in such situations. Shared spaces include but are not limited to shared vehicles, workspaces etc.
- Educate employees about the risks and provide basic information on prevention of COVID-19. If you have multilingual employees, provide this information in languages that can be followed by people. This can lead to a better chance of success in implementing policies and procedures.

Several pandemic-motivated practices, as well as practices that were important to reduce disease spread prior to the pandemic, will continue to be of utmost importance.

1. Handwashing with soap and water for 20 seconds is critical to reduce disease spread. Hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) may be used on clean hands to supplement frequent hand washing but does not replace hand washing. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizers.

**As a reminder, cleaning and sanitation are two different steps e.g. if hands are dirty, use of sanitizers only will not be effective for inactivation of SARS-CoV-2.**

2. Mask use should be encouraged among employees who work in close proximity with others. Training should include proper wearing, safe mask removal, and proper cleaning or disposal protocols. Masks should never be shared, should not interfere with ability to breath easily, and a clean mask should be worn each day. Masks are NOT a replacement for social distancing.
3. Keep workers at least 6 feet apart when possible. This may require modification to existing workspace, or physical barriers between workers (e.g. plexiglass shields).
4. Consider assigning workers into cohorts that work exclusively with members of their cohort. This protects your workers by reducing the number of people in which they come in contact, and also reduces the number of workers you may have to quarantine should an employee test positive for COVID-19 (i.e. you would only have to quarantine workers within the same cohort as the positive worker, and not your entire workforce).

More information about resuming business operations can be found at

<https://extension.uga.edu/topic-areas/timely-topics/emergencies.html> as well as

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2020. Agricultural workers and Employers: Interim Guidance from CDC and the US Department of Labor. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-agricultural-workers.html> (accessed 9 June 2020)

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