

COVID-19 Considerations for the Agriculture Industry

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused organizations across industry lines to reassess workplace protocols and procedures—and the agricultural sector is no exception. After all, common industry practices such as having staff work in close proximity in the fields or frequently share farm tools could easily contribute to the spread of COVID-19 without proper precautions in place.

With this in mind, consider the following guidance to help maintain a healthy and safe work environment as you conduct agricultural operations in the midst of the pandemic. Keep in mind that this is general guidance based on recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)—depending on the location of your organization, you may need to account for additional state and local requirements or restrictions.

Employee Wellness Considerations

To reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 throughout your workforce, consider screening your staff for potential COVID-19 symptoms each day before they enter the workplace. Utilize this wellness screening guidance:

- Ask employees if they have experienced any cold- or flu-like symptoms (fever, chills, cough, sore throat, headache, stuffy or runny nose, vomiting or diarrhea) in the past 24 hours. If they answer “yes,” send them home immediately. If employees start to feel sick at any point during their shift, encourage

them to report their symptoms, and send them home immediately.

- Consider designating specific staff members to check employees’ temperatures at the beginning of every shift to identify anyone with a fever. If any employees have a temperature of 100.4 or higher, send them home immediately. When conducting temperature screenings:
 - Train temperature screeners to use temperature monitors in accordance with manufacturer instructions.
 - Utilize temperature monitors that remain effective in extreme hot or cold weather conditions, and allow temperature screeners to maintain social distancing guidelines with other employees.
 - If temperature screeners must be within 6 feet of employees, provide them with adequate personal protective equipment (PPE)—including gloves, gowns, surgical masks and face shields.

In addition to sending employees with symptoms home, encourage them to consult their health care provider. Make sure you provide staff with adequate wellness resources and information on COVID-19 testing as well. In the event that a worker tests positive for COVID-19, follow these steps:

- Require the infected employee to quarantine at home and self-isolate from family members until they fully recover. If you provide any workers with

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- on-site housing accommodations, be sure to quarantine sick employees in an isolated area on-site or offer temporary off-site housing arrangements.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect all areas (including common areas), tools and equipment that the infected employee came in contact with.
- Inform anyone in the workplace who has been in sustained, close contact with the infected employee. However, do so in a way that protects the infected employee's confidentiality and does not identify them—this is a legal requirement under the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Consult with state and local health officials to identify any additional individuals who may have been exposed to the infected employee through [contact tracing](#). From there, determine COVID-19 testing needs for exposed individuals. If any additional employees test positive for COVID-19, require them to self-isolate from family members and quarantine at home as well.
- Follow [CDC guidelines](#) for managing workers who have been exposed to the infected employee but do not show any symptoms.
- When the infected employee has fully recovered and is able to return to work, consult with state and local health officials and follow all [CDC guidelines](#) to develop a plan for safely transitioning the employee back to work.
- Consider modifying workplace policies to ensure employees are not penalized for taking sick leave. Be sure to properly communicate any policy changes.
- Provide an adequate supply of paper towels, soap and hand sanitizer to allow staff to maintain proper hand hygiene.
- Offer tissues to ensure employees follow proper cough and sneeze etiquette, as well as no-touch trash bins for tissue disposal.
- Consider installing touch-free clock-in and clock-out stations, or providing additional stations throughout the workplace to reduce the risk of employees crowding in the same area at the beginning and end of each shift.
- Provide employees with adequate PPE. Depending on their job roles and responsibilities, agricultural employees should consider using PPE such as gloves, gowns, surgical masks, respirators and face shields.
- Require employees to wear cloth face coverings at all times within the workplace. Cloth face coverings should be easy to take on and off, fit snugly over the wearer's nose and mouth, be properly secured with ties or ear loops, and include multiple layers of fabric. Do not allow employees to wear dirty or contaminated face coverings. Consider keeping spare face coverings in the workplace in case any employee's face covering becomes dirty or contaminated during their shift. Keep in mind that cloth face coverings are not PPE and should not be considered appropriate substitutes for respiratory PPE (e.g., surgical masks or respirators).
- Require employees to wash their hands after entering the workplace, working in close proximity with other employees or animals, using farm tools or equipment, touching their face covering, using the restroom and leaving the workplace.
- Adjust workplace procedures to promote social distancing measures as much as possible. This might include staggering work shifts or break times,

Administrative and Engineering Considerations

Apart from employee screening practices and illness response protocols, it's also important to implement a variety of administrative and engineering controls to help reduce COVID-19 exposures within your workplace.

Consider these measures:

- Utilize routine meetings and emails to communicate with employees about the steps being taken to prevent COVID-19 exposure within the workplace.

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reducing crew sizes and having staff alternate rows when working in the fields. When providing any employee training, try to do so in an outdoor area, where all employees can stay 6 feet apart. When social distancing is not possible, consider having the same groups of employees work in close proximity each time, and—if possible—install physical barriers between employees (e.g., a plastic sheet) to limit face-to-face contact.

- Train employees on the following topics:
 - How to safely put on, use, remove and store PPE
 - How to maintain proper hand hygiene and follow sneeze and cough etiquette
 - How to maintain social distancing guidelines
 - How to clean and disinfect surfaces, tools and equipment properly
 - How to recognize areas or practices that increase the risk of COVID-19 exposure, as well as how to report these concerns
- Implement proper signage throughout the workplace to remind staff of proper health and safety practices.
- Establish a process for reviewing employees' workplace health and safety concerns related to COVID-19 exposure and determining mitigation methods in a timely manner.

Cleaning and Disinfection Considerations

Because many agricultural operations require employees to be in close proximity and share various farm tools or equipment, utilizing proper cleaning and disinfection measures is vital. Use these cleaning and disinfection best practices:

- Maintain a stocked supply of cleaning and disinfection products. Be sure to purchase products that meet Environmental Protection Agency criteria for use against COVID-19. Further, review all product labels, safety data sheets and manufacturer

specifications to ensure proper storage and use. Store all cleaning products far away from animals.

- Designate specific employees to be responsible for maintaining proper cleaning and disinfection practices.
- Keep in mind that, if surfaces or equipment are dirty, they should be cleaned with soap and water or detergent prior to disinfection.
- Utilize a well-documented system to track how often cleaning and disinfection take place. Increase cleaning and disinfection frequency for the entire workplace, paying special attention to high-risk areas and objects—such as farm tools or equipment, common areas, vehicles and restrooms.
- Consider the following changes to restrooms:
 - Allow for doors to restrooms to be opened and closed without touching handles, if feasible. This could entail adding a foot pull or encouraging occupants to touch the door handle with a paper towel rather than their bare hands.
 - Use signage to encourage occupants to close toilet lids before flushing and wash their hands before and after using the restroom.
 - Provide paper towels for drying hands and adequate trash bins. Prohibit the use of air dryers.
- Install numerous hand-washing (or hand-sanitizing, if hand-washing is not possible) stations throughout the workplace. Specifically, make sure you have these stations located at the entrance and exit of the workplace. Implement signage encouraging employees to use these stations frequently.
- Try to limit the need for employees to share any farm tools or equipment (e.g., rakes, crates and animal saddles or harnesses). If employees must share any tools or equipment, establish proper cleaning and disinfecting procedures before and after each use.

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- Ensure proper air ventilation throughout the workplace—especially in enclosed areas. Be sure to clean HVAC systems regularly.
- Have employees place their work clothing and cloth face coverings in a sealed plastic bag after each use, as if the materials are contaminated. Have these materials laundered by washing and drying on the highest temperature setting possible for the fabric. Ensure staff wear masks or face coverings when handling dirty laundry. If your workplace does not provide laundry services, provide employees with instructions for safely washing and drying their materials at home.
- Do not permit employees to bring their children into the workplace—even if they live in on-site housing.
- If you provide shared transportation options at the workplace, implement these measures:
 - Keep as much space between riders as possible, and require all riders to wear face masks or coverings while in the vehicle.
 - Encourage employees to ride with the same group for each trip. Increase the frequency of trips to limit the number of riders in each vehicle at a time.
 - Require riders to wash their hands before and after each trip, as well as follow proper cough and sneeze etiquette while in the vehicle.

Additional Considerations

Lastly, be sure to review your workplace operations and on-site housing accommodations, and make any additional adjustments necessary to help limit the spread of COVID-19. Follow these measures:

- Promote proper sanitation, ventilation and social distancing [measures](#) within all on-site housing accommodations. In addition, take the following precautions:
 - Keep each family or household unit as separated as possible, and restrict the number of occupants permitted in shared living spaces (e.g., dining areas or laundry facilities) at a time. Restrict nonessential visitor access.
 - Require occupants over the age of 2 to wear a face mask or covering in shared living spaces at all times. Discourage occupants from sharing household items (e.g., cooking utensils).
 - Consider conducting daily wellness screening procedures for all occupants—not just employees. Provide adequate wellness resources and information on COVID-19 testing as well. In the event that an occupant tests positive for COVID-19, follow the same protocols as you would for an infected employee.
- Maintain adequate records of all employees (and any families that live on-site)—including names, contact information and shift schedules—to be able to properly assist if contact tracing is needed.
- Ensure that all of your operations are compliant with CDC, OSHA, federal, state and local guidelines, as well as industry best practices. Consider designating one or multiple employees to be responsible for ensuring compliance.

By following these precautions, your organization can continue conducting successful agricultural operations, while also limiting the spread of COVID-19. For additional COVID-19 resources, contact us today.