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Disclaimer: The authors of this document have made every effort to ensure that it is accurate at the time of publication. Given how rapidly the COVID-19 pandemic response is evolving, we strongly recommend that you check the websites of the Maine Dept. of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, the Maine Center for Disease Control & Prevention, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regularly. This document does not provide legal advice or create an attorney-client relationship.

Recommended Steps for Farm Safety during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The best way to combat the spread of COVID-19 is to remain informed about public health precautions and best practices. **Check both state (maine.gov) and federal (cdc.gov) government websites daily to ensure you have the most up to date information and incorporate the practices on your farm accordingly.** This document is a collection of practical steps to keep your employees and consumers healthy and safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Employee Safety

Employers should communicate clearly with their employees during this ever-changing situation. Communication with employees is critical to helping them cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. Communication should include:

- Keep employees apprised of their rights and the tools that you are providing to support them.
- Print and hang informational posters from the CDC, which can be found [here](#).
- Visit [Maine's Center for Disease Control & Prevention](#) and send updates to employees to ensure they are receiving the most up to date information.
- Review your sick policy, be sure it is up to date, and give all employees the most recent version.
- Calibrate your business's decision-making process to ensure that you consider all aspects of this complex situation when it comes to the physical and mental health of your employees.

Employers also need to implement measures that reduce risk of workplace transmission. These risk reduction steps should include:

- Regularly sanitize all tools and surfaces.
- Increase access to hand sanitizer and hand washing stations.
- Create workstations that are at least 6 feet apart.
- Rotate shifts to decrease the number of employees in proximity of each other.

Governor Mills has given guidance for cleaning and disinfecting food establishments. Many of the same practices can be applied to a farm, including the following:

Cleaning and Disinfection: Cleaning removes germs, dirt and impurities from surfaces or objects. Disinfecting kills germs on surfaces or objects. Individuals should use any protective equipment (i.e. gloves) as recommended on product labels. Carefully read and follow all label instructions for safe and effective use.

Step 1 – Cleaning: Always clean surfaces prior to use of disinfectants in order to reduce soil and remove germs. Dirt and other materials on surfaces can reduce the effectiveness of disinfectants. Wash surfaces using soap/detergent and water to reduce soil and remove germs.

Step 2 – Disinfection: Cleaning/washing of soiled areas must be completed prior to disinfection to ensure effectiveness.

Step 3 – Disposal: Place all used gloves and other disposable items in a bag that can be tied closed before disposing of them with other waste. Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds immediately after removing gloves or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available. Soap and water should be used if hands are visibly soiled.

Respiratory Hygiene:

- Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or the corner of elbow.
- Dispose of soiled tissues immediately after use.
- Employees who have symptoms (i.e., fever, cough, or shortness of breath) should notify their supervisor and stay home.

Visit [Maine DACF Interim Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfection of Food Manufacturing Facilities and/or Retail Food Stores for COVID-19](#) for more information. Keep an eye on the DACF website for more farm-specific information, too.

Resources:

- Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association: [COVID-19 Farm Best Practices](#)
- Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources: [Considerations for Fruit and Vegetable Growers Related to Coronavirus & COVID-19](#)
- Future Harvest Chesapeake Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture: [COVID-19 Safety Protocols](#)
- State of Vermont: Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets [COVID-19 Information for Agriculture](#)
- Eaton Peabody, Attorneys at Law: [COVID-19: Maine Employer Update](#)

Consumer Safety

As of March 23, 2020, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not anticipate that food products handled by an ill employee will need to be recalled. Currently, there is no evidence that suggests the virus has been spread by food. However, it is possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it. Farms need to ensure that they are taking the right steps to keep their food safe and protect their customers.

It is important to comply with evolving guidance from state and federal agencies on best practices for handling food on the farm and when selling direct to consumers during the pandemic. In addition, you should always be sure you are following existing health and safety laws and regulations for your farm.

On March 26, 2020, Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) released Guidelines for Farmers Marketing Direct to Consumers. Familiarize yourself with this document and share it with employees. Below is a snapshot of Maine’s guidance on sanitation.

Best Practices for Direct-to-Consumer Marketing Sanitation from DACF:

- Offer hand sanitizer and/or hand washing stations for customers and vendors
- Pre-package foods whenever possible (“grab and go” bags)
- No samples
- Ensure that staff handling money, vouchers, and credit cards wear gloves, and consider keeping separate staff for payments and product handling/packaging. Disinfect commonly touched surfaces regularly.
- Follow established disinfectant protocols (such as [these](#) from the National Pesticide Information Center)
- [Follow simple CDC rules](#) for washing hands and not touching faces.

Other best practices include:

- Masks, handkerchiefs or gloves can be worn to remind employees not to touch their face while handling produce.
- Ensure hand sanitizer is close to workstations and if feasible, set up a portable hand washing station.
- Adjust your operations to minimize the number of times produce is touched by workers.

Resources:

- U.S. Food & Drug Administration: [FDA Offers Assurance About Food Safety and Supply for People and Animals During COVID-19](#)
- Future Harvest Chesapeake Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture: [On-Farm Pickups & CSAs](#)
- Virginia Tech: [COVID-19 and Food Safety FAQ](#)
- Cornell University: [Novel Coronavirus Prevention & Control for Farms](#)
- University of Vermont: [Considerations for Fruit and Vegetable Growers Related to Coronavirus & COVID-19](#)