

Talking Points: Farm Worker and Food Safety

Headline Messages:

- Safety remains a top priority across the food chain, with everyone—from the farm to the grocery store—doing their part to take great care and precautions to get food safely to your tables.
- Farmers and ranchers work alongside their employees and know how best to implement CDC guidelines on their individual farms.
- Farm Bureau is sharing resources with our state affiliates and encouraged by the reports we're receiving about communication, planning and actions being taken on individual farms to ensure safety of farm workers.
- We know that many farms have instituted a range of precautions, including daily employee briefings, periodic sanitation of equipment and housing, and posted signs about social distancing.
- We all depend on the security of our food supply. Protecting our nation's farms and the men and women who keep them running will require our full attention across the agriculture industry to stay a step ahead in taking precautions and decisive action to promote the health of those on the frontlines of our food supply.

On the Farm:

- Farmers are mindful of how quickly COVID-19 could devastate their families, workers, operations and communities. Even one case is too many on the farm.
- Like all employers, farmers have a role to play in stopping the spread by educating and protecting their employees.
- Handwashing and hygiene training for workers is already standard for U.S. farms to meet our nation's strict food safety standards.
- Farm Bureau has been working hard to get word out to all state Farm Bureaus and farmer members regarding CDC guidelines and precautions, as well as guidance being developed by university experts and others specifically for farms. [*i.e.* [Cornell University](#)]
- Farms come in all shapes and sizes, and circumstances will differ from between them. We encourage farmers to evaluate their operations and adopt ways to:
 - Screen and distance workers arriving to ensure health and safety
 - Limit person-to-person interactions and create more distance between workers out in the field
 - Provide food delivery services to limit workers' exposure to community spread
 - Set up handwashing and sanitation stations in the field
 - Provide additional cleaning and disinfectant supplies for worker housing
 - Educate employees on safety and cleaning practices through posters and notices, as well as providing local health care and telemedicine information
 - Establish a plan of action for quarantining sick employees to prevent spread
- Like the rest of the country, farmers are taking this day by day, and as new information and resources become available from trusted sources like the CDC and land grant universities, farmers are responding.

In Grocery Stores:

FARM BUREAU TALKING POINTS: NOT FOR PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION

- Recommendations for the public to reduce the frequency of their trips to grocery stores, as well as time spent in store, is to limit exposure to other people, not due to any heightened risk in the safety of the food supply.
- CDC guidelines recommend focusing on cleaning frequently touched surfaces, both inside and outside the home. Customers should maintain a safe distance from others on essential trips to the store and use wipes on grocery cart and door handles.
- The CDC does not recommend wiping down grocery items at home, as there is “currently no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food or food packaging.” (Source: [Time](#))
- Everyone should continue to follow CDC guidance for handwashing whenever preparing or eating food.

IF ASKED:

[These questions/answers attempt to anticipate likely questions from reporters. They are intended for use only on an “if asked” basis.]

Aren't undocumented workers at a disadvantage for medical treatment and could that increase the spread of undiagnosed cases?

- Every worker's health is of the utmost importance on the farm, and farmers will continue to urge all their employees to consult medical professionals at the first sign of any COVID-19 related symptoms.
- Farm workers also have a strong sense of community, and they are just as eager to protect the health of their fellow workers, neighbors and families.

Isn't it true that undocumented workers don't qualify for federal aid? If so, what will farmers do to ensure they are treated fairly?

- While farmers have been asking for a better system for decades, it is true that many workers lack documentation. But that should not prevent them from having access to necessary care during this national emergency
- Farmers are facing a situation that underscores how broken the system is. We've been trying to change it for 25 years. While farmers didn't choose to rely upon undocumented workers, we must do our best to take care of all our workers regardless of their background or legal status.
- The current circumstances are not ideal, but we are urging State and County Farm Bureaus, as well as our farmer members, to make sure farm workers are being well cared for.

Does Farm Bureau support hazard pay for farm workers considered essential and still working?

- We know that in the face of a down farm economy, with many farmers already struggling to get by, additional pay coming straight from the farmer's pocket may be the difference between staying in business and shutting down. That said, for farmers financially able, we wholeheartedly support rewarding workers who stay on the job to help ensure a safe, stable food supply in America.

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- One distinction of farm work is that, unlike in grocery stores where employees may come in contact with hundreds of people a day, most farms are not open to the public and tend to be remote, further removing farm workers from community spread.

Isn't it true that housing for immigrant workers often requires that they are grouped together more closely than CDC guidelines allow?

- This is one of the unique challenges facing agriculture. We are exploring every opportunity to help provide farmers the resources and support they need to continue to ensure their workers have access to safe accommodations.
- Based on reports we are receiving, farmers in all regions are doubling down efforts to provide workers all they need to keep housing and shared spaces clean and disinfected.
- Farm Bureau is urging federal agencies to allow for additional emergency housing (to isolate the sick and provide additional space for expanded social distancing needs).
 - Worker housing needs are not “one-size-fits-all” across the country. Temporary additional, safe housing could be provided by renting spaces in local motels, apartments, or trailers.
 - As this situation quickly evolves, farmers also need the flexibility to work with local authorities to perform any required safety inspections, following the guidance set out by federal agencies.
- We are also advising farms have a plan in place to quarantine workers who may become ill.