

# Guidance for Fruit and Vegetable Farm Operators and Processors: Considerations for Seasonal Operations Supporting Fruit and Vegetable Harvesting and Processing and Management of Shared/Communal Housing During the COVID-19 Pandemic

*As of June 8, 2020, Version 3.0*

The purpose of this guidance is to provide useful advice and recommendations to help farm owners and operators prepare for seasonal operations including onboarding of seasonal workers, field and facility procedures, and shared/communal housing and transportation to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Department of Labor have also released guidance to address all agricultural workers and their employers the challenges pertaining to prevention and control of COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> Special considerations exist for the prevention of COVID-19 in shared housing situations as residents often gather together for dining, social leisure, and recreational activities. Below we have outlined some strategies to ensure a healthy working and living environment. Occupational Safety and Health Agency (OSHA) and CDC have also released guidance for preparing workplaces and on certain types of shared housing, such as apartments, condominiums, and student or faculty housing that could apply to your facility.<sup>2,3</sup> Nothing in this document should be interpreted as superseding guidance issued by federal agencies.

## **To Maintain Safe Operations**

### *Hiring and Onboarding Practices*

- Provide seasonal workers with clean cloth face coverings, instruct them on how to [wear and remove them appropriately](#), and maintain social distancing by keeping employees isolated from others, whether individually or as a group.<sup>4</sup>
- Although CDC suggests that workers who are essential to maintaining critical infrastructure, such as food and agriculture, can work as long as they are asymptomatic and follow other precautions, employers should seek to understand the risks posed by newly added seasonal workforces.<sup>5</sup> For example, seasonal workers may travel to farm and processing worksites from other regions which may have or are currently experiencing high rates of transmission or they may have potentially been exposed to ill COVID-19 patients in the days and weeks prior to their joining the worksite. The following recommendations are aimed at mitigating spread of COVID-19 in farm and processing operations and protect all workers during seasonal operations.
  - quarantine seasonal workers for up to 14 days prior to beginning work. This may mean that operations will have to consider bringing in these workers prior to the start of activities, if housing and workers are available, to train, onboard, and assess health
  - test seasonal workers for COVID-19
  - implement stringent social distancing (greater than 6 feet at all times) or use physical barriers/partitions if 6 feet cannot be achieved and equip all workers with

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<sup>1</sup> CDC guidance for farm workers and employers <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-agricultural-workers.html> Accessed 08 June 2020

<sup>2</sup> CDC guidance for shared or congregate housing <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/shared-congregate-house/guidance-shared-congregate-housing.html#accepting-new-residents> Accessed 29 April 2020

<sup>3</sup> OSHA COVID-19 guidance <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf> Accessed 30 April 2020

<sup>4</sup> CDC Use of face coverings to help slow the spread of COVID-19 <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html> Accessed 30 April 2020

<sup>5</sup> CDC guidance for critical infrastructure workers <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/critical-workers/implementing-safety-practices.html> Accessed 30 April 2020

appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) such as face coverings/masks, gloves, and personal hygiene needs, if none of the above measures can be achieved.

- Employers should screen seasonal employees daily prior to work<sup>5</sup>, including at facilities and prior to transport to fields, for symptoms (e.g., fever, > 100.4 °F or 38 °C) using no-touch thermometers
  - Avoid group gatherings during screening by providing a staggered schedule to screen workers
  - Ask employees to self-monitor and report symptoms for the duration of the seasonal work program (i.e., fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, and loss of taste or smell)
  - Employers should consider implementing a daily screening questionnaire to identify employees who may have symptoms of COVID-19<sup>6</sup>
- Modify on-boarding procedures to minimize person-to-person contact, if possible
  - Adhere to physical distancing through visual cues and spacing chairs, etc. (i.e., minimize and/or create physical distance during on-boarding or orientation meetings)
  - Include information related to COVID-19 in training, in a language and format that will be understood by residents

#### *Workplace and Housing Practices*

- Communicate relevant news, directives, and guidance from state, local, and federal officials regarding COVID-19 to residents/employees
  - Consider posting information and graphics about COVID-19 prevention that illustrate how workers can protect themselves and their families from COVID-19 in multiple languages in common areas such as breakrooms and bathrooms
- Establish and train on personal hygiene and preventive measures to protect entire staff from the spread of COVID-19
  - Wash hands often, with soap and water for 20 seconds
    - Before, during, and after harvesting, handling and/or processing food
    - Before preparing meals and prior to eating
    - After using the toilet
    - After coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose
  - If soap and water are not readily available, clean hands with a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
  - Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth, especially with unwashed hands
  - Avoid close contact (within 6 feet or 2 meters) with people who are sick
  - Use cloth face coverings when around others
  - When not wearing a face covering, cover mouth and nose with a tissue or use the inside of the elbow.

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<sup>5</sup>CDC. Implementing Safety Practices for Critical Infrastructure Workers Who May Have Had Exposure to a Person with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/critical-workers/implementing-safety-practices.html>. Accessed 30 April 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Washington State Department of Health sample employee/visitor screening questionnaire <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/Employervivitorscreeningguidance.pdf>

- Regularly (more than once a day, if possible) clean and disinfect<sup>7</sup> shared areas and frequently touched surfaces using [EPA-registered disinfectants](#)<sup>8</sup>
  - Frequently touched surfaces are associated with an increased risk of spreading COVID-19 and includes surfaces such as tables, doorknobs, stairway railings, light switches, microwave doors, refrigerator doors, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks
- Provide soap, alcohol-based hand sanitizers (60% or more), [diluted bleach solutions](#), [alcohol solutions \(60% or more\)](#), paper towels, tissues and trash bins in common areas
- Encourage [social distancing](#) in the community and communal spaces, as appropriate, and physical barriers and directional signage to establish movement flow within and outside facilities
  - Social distancing at the individual level is ideal but may be difficult to accomplish in shared housing environments. In such settings, a face covering is recommended
  - Consider staggering start and stop times to reduce crowding in communal spaces and work settings
  - If carpooling cannot be avoided, encourage the same group of individuals to carpool together (i.e., cohorting). This may include rooming, dining, and working together as a cohort.
- Provide cloth face coverings, and/or provide supplies and instructions on how to make their own and how to [wear and remove them appropriately](#)<sup>9</sup>
  - Cloth face coverings should be laundered before each daily use
- Make sure residents/employees are aware of the [symptoms](#) and underlying conditions related to COVID-19 using training sessions, tailgate meetings, posters, [videos](#), websites, emails, and text messaging
- Provide employees/residents with phone numbers for healthcare facilities and alternative care sites where residents/employees can receive appropriate care for injuries and illnesses, including COVID-19
- Ensure the shared/communal housing address is clearly posted so that it can be provided to health officials, if needed
- Provide residents with the housing supervisor's contact information
- Encourage residents who are suspected or confirmed COVID-19 positive to [self-isolate](#). Work with health officials and follow recommended guidance for individuals identified as having close contact with the ill individual (e.g., roommates, house mates, etc.)<sup>10</sup>.
  - If possible, provide separate living and eating areas and designate separate bathrooms for residents with COVID-19 symptoms

<sup>7</sup> EPA. EPA and CDC Release Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Spaces Where Americans Live, Work, and Play. <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-cdc-release-guidance-cleaning-and-disinfecting-spaces-where-americans-live-work-and>. Accessed 29 April 2020.

<sup>8</sup> EPA. List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2. <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>. Accessed 29 April 2020.

<sup>9</sup> CDC. Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>. Accessed 30 April 2020.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/critical-workers/implementing-safety-practices.html>

- Suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases should only be housed with other suspected or confirmed cases. They should have separate bathroom, cooking and eating facilities from people who are not sick.<sup>11</sup>
- If there are multiple housing units in close proximity or if illness begins to be seen within the community, consider designating separate units for ill and healthy workers who are living in shared housing. This could include the use of motel rooms or developing agreements with local farmers or processors to re-allocate shared housing units, as permitted by law
- Ventilate the room where persons with COVID-19 are housed on regular intervals, as much as possible.
- Your plan should outline how and who will pay for and provide food, water, and medical supplies to symptomatic workers in isolation or exposed but asymptomatic workers in isolation as they may be unable to provide for themselves during this time
- Consider a transportation plan for medical evaluation and treatment of workers. This should include who will transport and how to protect the driver. Also, pre-identify the healthcare clinic and payment for services<sup>11</sup>
  - Follow CDC guidance to [protect drivers](#) and [clean and disinfect vehicles](#)
- [Previously ill workers should only be allowed to return to work after they have met public health criteria](#)<sup>12</sup>

## Considerations for Common Spaces

### *Kitchens*

- Clean and disinfect all surfaces before and after mealtimes
- Restrict the number of people allowed in a kitchen or dining room at one time to ensure 6 feet (2 meters) of separation between individuals
  - Individuals who room together should eat together
  - Those who are sick and their roommates, as well as individuals at higher risk of severe illness should eat in their rooms, if possible
- Do not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups or eating utensils
- Wash all non-disposable food service items with dish soap and hot water or in a dishwasher
- Wash hands before and after handling food service items
- Wash hands after removing garbage bags and handling or disposing of trash

### *Laundry Rooms*

- Maintain access to adequate supplies for laundry facilities
- Restrict the number of people allowed in laundry rooms to ensure 6 feet (2 meters) of separation

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<sup>11</sup> NC Department of Health. Interim COVID-19 Guidance for Migrant Farmworkers, Their Employers, and Housing Providers. <https://files.nc.gov/ncdhhs/documents/files/covid-19/interim-covid-guidance-migrant-farm-workers.pdf>. Accessed 30 April 2020.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/disposition-in-home-patients.html>

- Provide gloves, soap for handwashing, and household cleaners and disinfectants for staff and residents to clean and disinfect buttons, knobs, and handles of laundry machines, laundry baskets, and shared laundry items
  - Consider designating staff to ensure laundry facilities are cleaned daily
- Post guidelines for [washing instructions](#) and handling dirty laundry and proper use of gloves
  - Do not hang cloth face coverings to dry in laundry rooms. They can be machine washed and dried

### **Bathrooms**

- Should be cleaned regularly (at least twice per day – morning and evening or after heavy use)
- Restrict the number of people allowed in bathrooms and restrooms at the same time to maintain physical distance recommendations
- Ensure bathrooms are stocked with soap and paper towels
- Make sure trash cans have liners and are emptied regularly
  - Provide information on proper hand washing, instruct them to wash with soap and warm or cold water for at least 20 seconds
- Residents should be instructed to avoid placing toothbrushes or other personal items directly on counter surfaces, as they can be an infection source
  - Totes could be used for personal items to limit their contact with bathroom surfaces
  - Clean and disinfect any personal storage totes before and after bathroom visits

### **Considerations for Seasonal Field and Harvesting Workers**

- When new employees arrive, provide them with clean cloth face coverings and keep employees isolated from others, whether individually or as a group/cohort
- Although CDC suggests that workers who are essential to maintaining critical infrastructure, such as food and agriculture, can work as long as they are asymptomatic and follow other precautions<sup>4</sup>, employers should seek to understand the rate of transmission in regions from where workers have travelled prior to their arrivals. Based on these factors, an employer can consider implementing one or more of the following measures, based on potential risk and the resources available locally.
  - quarantine seasonal workers for up to 14 days prior to beginning work. This may mean that operations will have to consider bringing in seasonal workers prior to the start of activities, if housing and workers are available, to train, onboard, and assess health
  - test seasonal workers for COVID-19
  - implement stringent social distancing (greater than 6 feet at all times) or use of physical barriers/ partitions if 6 feet cannot be achieved and equip all workers with appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) such as face coverings/masks, gloves, and personal hygiene needs, if none of the above measures can be achieved.
- [Screen employees](#) daily for symptoms (e.g., fever, > 100.4 °F or 38 °C) using a no-touch thermometer
  - When performing temperature checks, clean and disinfect no-touch thermometers according to the manufacturer's instructions and company policies
    - Ensure individuals conducting screening are adequately protected
  - Ask employee to self-monitor and report symptoms (i.e., fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, and loss of taste or smell)

- Employers should consider implementing a daily screening questionnaire to identify employees who may have symptoms of COVID-19<sup>13</sup> recognizing that OSHA record keeping requirements will apply<sup>14</sup>
- Modify on-boarding and training procedures to minimize person-to-person contact, if possible
  - Consider limiting the number of employees (i.e., small groups) during on-boarding and training sessions to maintain physical distance
  - Include information related to COVID-19 in training
- Before starting work shifts, screen employees before entering transportation vehicles. Ensure employees are protected during transportation to and from operations and harvesting:
  - Require hand washing or sanitizing immediately before stepping into the bus, truck or car
  - Clean and disinfect vehicles as often as possible, especially surfaces that are touched frequently
  - Clean hand/power tools wipe down steering wheels, grab handles, controls on tractors, forklifts, and other shared company vehicles.
  - While transporting workers, allow space between workers on buses or other transport vehicles. Limit the number of passengers to help create physical distance, for example filling only every other row of a bus. Consider using assigned seats so that an employee sits in the same seat during each leg of the commute.
  - When there are multiple individuals in vehicles, they should wear cloth face coverings
  - Have tissues and hand sanitizer available for passengers
- Maintain social distancing in a field by:
  - Limiting the number of individuals in a harvest crew
  - Harvesting every other row, or equivalent, to maintain 6-foot distance
  - When mechanical harvesting aids are utilized, consider engineering controls such as the use of physical barriers (impermeable dividers or partitions to separate workers). Consider sanitary design and adherence to standard cleaning and sanitation procedures for these barriers
- Limit the use of shared tools, buckets, and equipment
- Clean areas that people share:
  - Guide rails on buses or vans
  - Guide rails on harvester ladders
  - Door handles on bathrooms/portable toilets
  - Tables and counter tops
  - Shared water jugs
    - When using communal water jugs, consider cleaning/sanitizing them more frequently (e.g., before and after each use), consider the use of alcohol-based wipes at each water station, requiring field workers and

<sup>13</sup> Washington State Department of Health sample employee/visitor screening questionnaire <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/Employervisitorscreeningguidance.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> CDC Meat and Poultry Processing Workers and Employees. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/meat-poultry-processing-workers-employers.html> Accessed 2 May 2020

- harvest crews to wash their hands before touching the spigot of a water jug and/or if feasible provide individual water bottles or containers.
- Ensure there are adequate handwashing stations and portable toilets available, and if possible, decrease the ratio of number of workers to each available station (e.g., instead of one station for every [20 workers](#), consider one station for every 10 or 15 workers).
- Intensify tailgate meetings for harvesters on hygiene practices and worker health policies.
  - When running tailgate meetings and other training events, break employees into smaller groups and provide worker separation within the meeting area.<sup>15</sup>
- Allow extra time for workers to wash hands throughout the workday

### Considerations in Post-harvest Processing Operations

- Consider the development of a COVID-19 assessment and control plan applicable to anyone entering or working in the facility.<sup>16</sup>
  - These plans should include engineering and administrative controls:
    - Engineering Controls, such as the use of physical barriers (curtains, impermeable divider or partitions to separate workers) or assessing current cooling and ventilation systems.
    - Administrative controls, such the use of signs, floor markings and traffic flow, avoiding carpooling, building additional short, staggered breaks into staff schedules, splitting workers into two or three shifts (saving one shift for cleaning and sanitation)
  - Screen and monitor workers before entry into the workplace. Consider implementing a daily screening questionnaire to determine employees who might have been exposed and recovered and employees who may have remained asymptomatic of COVID-19<sup>17</sup>
  - Conduct a hazard assessment to determine Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) needs, follow OSHA's PPE [standards](#) to select and provide appropriate PPE, and instruct employees about PPE proper use and wear.
- Employers should [screen employees](#) for symptoms (e.g., fever, > 100.4 °F or 38 °C) using a no-touch thermometer, and adhere to OSHA record keeping requirements<sup>18</sup>
- Ask employee to continue to self-monitor and report symptoms (i.e., fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, and loss of taste or smell) social distancing (6 feet or 2 meters between individuals)
- See CDC recommendations below for practices in meat and poultry processing facilities<sup>19</sup> that could be useful in your facilities

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.wga.com/sites/default/files/wg\\_COV19\\_Preventative\\_Measures\\_2020\\_0331.pdf](https://www.wga.com/sites/default/files/wg_COV19_Preventative_Measures_2020_0331.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> CDC Meat and Poultry Processing Workers and Employees.. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/meat-poultry-processing-workers-employers.html> Accessed 2 May 2020

<sup>17</sup> Washington State Department of Health sample employee/visitor screening questionnaire <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/Employervisitorscreeningguidance.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> CDC Meat and Poultry Processing Workers and Employees. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/meat-poultry-processing-workers-employers.html> Accessed 2 May 2020

<sup>19</sup> CDC. MMWR Weekly Report. COVID-19 Among Workers in Meat and Poultry Processing Facilities. [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6918e3.htm?s\\_cid=mm6918e3\\_w](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6918e3.htm?s_cid=mm6918e3_w). Accessed 1 May 2020.

TABLE: Observed Challenges and Recommended Changes in Practices in Response to COVID-19 among Workers in Meat and Poultry Processing Facilities – Selected States, \*April 2020

<b>Category</b>	<b>Challenges to Effective Prevention and Control of COVID-19</b>	<b>Recommended Changes in Facility Practices</b>
<b>Structural</b>	Maintaining physical distancing during breaks and when employees enter and exit the facility	Adjust start and stop times of breaks and shifts; Add outdoor breakrooms
	Maintaining physical distancing on production line	Install physical barriers between workers
	Excluding symptomatic workers	Screen all workers and visitors entering facility and plan for effectively isolation for workers who become ill
<b>Operational</b>	Maintaining physical distancing on production line	Reduce rate of animal processing
	Adhering to face covering recommendations	Require universal face covering; Ensure face coverings conform to CDC guidance; Provide training on donning and doffing
	Adhering to heightened cleaning and disinfection guidelines	Assign additional staff to sanitize 'high touch' areas (e.g. handles, buttons, railings) more frequently
<b>Sociocultural</b>	Communicating through language and cultural barriers	Engage community partners to develop culturally informed messaging; Disseminate messaging in languages spoken among the workforce
	Employees live in crowded, multigenerational settings	Include messaging about behaviors employees should take to limit the spread of the virus at home
	Employees share transportation to and from work	Add additional vehicles to shuttle routes; Require use of face coverings during commute
<b>Economic</b>	Employees are incentivized to work while ill	Implement personnel policies that provide additional medical leave and disability benefits without loss of seniority or pay; Remove financial incentives such as attendance bonus

**Abbreviation: COVID-19 = Coronavirus 2019**

\*Based on CDC field team deployments to four sites and information gathered from calls with state health departments; Based on on-site and remote technical assistance, many facilities have implemented or planning to implement these strategies

Table taken from Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, May 8, 2020. Vol. 69, No. 18. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention

**Additional Resources:**

<b>Useful References for Food and Agriculture Operations housed at <a href="https://www.feedingus.org">feedingus.org</a></b>	
Proper Usage of Face Masks	<a href="#">Click Here</a>
Social Distancing in Food Operations	<a href="#">Click Here</a>
Instituting Employee Screening	<a href="#">Click Here</a>
Company Decision Tool – Employee Symptoms/Testing Status	<a href="#">Click Here</a>
Protocol: When an Employee Tests Positive for COVID-19	<a href="#">Click Here</a>
Considerations: Identifying Employees Exposed to an Individual Positive for COVID-19	<a href="#">Click Here</a>
CDC COVID-19 Guidance (various languages)	<a href="#">Click Here</a>
Proper Hand Washing	<a href="#">Click Here</a>
How to Stay Healthy – Videos, Fact Sheets, Posters	<a href="#">Click Here</a>

*This voluntary industry guidance is based on recommendations of federal and state health authorities and industry advisors. This voluntary industry guidance was originally published on May 12, 2020 and was updated on May 27, 2020. On June 2, 2020, after this voluntary industry guidance was last updated, the CDC and the U.S. Department of Labor issued guidance for Agricultural Workers and Employers. This CDC guidance does not address certain issues that may be raised by state and local health authorities, such as practices to address seasonal workers arriving from outside the community. Readers should consider the above voluntary industry guidance on this topic and are encouraged to review any and all updated guidance from either industry or governmental authorities that may be issued in the future.*

*Following guidance from industry and government is not a complete defense to liability, and readers should consider whether, under their individual circumstances, additional measures are reasonably available and would further reduce risks related to COVID-19.*

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