



BRYAN P. HURLBURT  
Commissioner

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EXTENSION

## COVID-19 GUIDANCE on FOOD SAFETY for CONNECTICUT FARMERS

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*These practices and protocols are for farmers to implement in an effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19. These recommendations are in addition to guidance provided by the [CDC](#), [USDA](#), and other federal agencies.*

Per Governor Lamont's [Executive Order 7H](#), and [DECD's guidance on essential services](#), farms and farmers' markets, including urban farms and community gardens are deemed an essential service.

Farmers can and should reinforce to their community that they are:

1. Essential to the local community
2. A venue to buy nutritious, local food
3. An opportunity for shopping while practicing social distancing
4. An avenue for consumers to connect with the person who grew their food. When a shopper can see a healthy farmer, it reinforces the benefits of the food they are buying from the market.

This guidance contains information, recommendations, and requirements for farms to implement to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. Because COVID-19 is widespread in the state, all workplaces must consider the disease a workplace hazard. The Connecticut Department of Agriculture wants to reinforce that by acknowledging the importance of food safety and maintaining appropriate food safety practices, farms can continue to operate and produce food in a safe manner.

This document cannot, and does not, cover every scenario that could arise. The recommendations provided herein represent best practices *at the moment* surrounding and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. This guidance will be updated as needed as we progress through the growing and harvest season.

### Employers should:

- Provide information to employees related to COVID-19 from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), including:
  - What COVID-19 is and [how it is spread](#).
  - [Preventing the spread of COVID-19 if you are sick](#).
  - [Symptoms of COVID-19 and when to seek medical attention](#).
- Encourage employees to avoid large gatherings and practice physical distancing during non-

work hours.

- Stress the importance of not coming to work if employees have a frequent cough, fever, or difficulty breathing, or if they live with or have had close contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19.
- Communicate your plan and procedures to protect employees from COVID-19 illness.
  - The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued Guidance on [Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#) that includes information on how a COVID-19 outbreak could affect workplaces and [steps all employers can take](#) to reduce workers' risk of exposure to COVID-19.
- Immediately send employees with acute respiratory illness symptoms home or to medical care as needed.
- Establish procedures to notify local health officials upon learning that someone has a COVID-19 infection. These officials will help employers determine a course of action.
- Encourage sick workers to stay home by not punishing them for missing work. If the farm has the ability, consider sick leave benefits to help prevent the spread among workers who might otherwise work out of economic necessity.
  - Inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace if an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19. Employers should but maintain confidentiality about individual employees' identities.
- Require employees to practice social distancing whether outdoors, in vehicles, or in structures.
- Limit the number of people riding in a farm vehicle whenever possible.
- Adjust the speed of packing lines and other processes to enable employees to maintain safe social distancing.
- Decrease the number of people working during a shift. To maintain productivity, shorten but increase the number of shifts in a day.
- Change the flow of workers in the greenhouse and field so that activities (i.e., seeding, transplanting, crop maintenance) are done in isolation and/or workers are separated by at least six (6) feet.
- Identify and implement operational changes that increase employee separation. When it's impractical for employees to maintain social distancing, effective hygiene practices and the use of masks and gloves, should be required to reduce the chance of spreading the virus.
- CDC recommends the use of cloth face coverings. Face coverings should:
  - fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face
  - be secured with ties or ear loops
  - include multiple layers of fabric
  - allow for breathing without restriction
  - be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape.

**NOTE:** The cloth face coverings recommended by CDC are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators. Those are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other medical first responders, as recommended by current CDC guidance.
- Stagger break and lunch times. Provide additional seating to allow employees to take breaks while staying at least six (6) feet apart.
- If possible, stagger work shifts or increase the number of work shifts.

#### **Create specific instructions for deliveries.**

- Establish a location for receiving deliveries away from on-farm high-traffic areas.
- Place drop-boxes or drop-off locations near the road so vehicles do not need to enter the

farm.

- Provide suppliers and customers with the location of and all the procedures to be used at the drop-off point.
- Create signage to easily identify drop-off points. Include contact information on the signs to assist with questions leading up to deliver and upon arrival.

**Good Sanitation Practices.** COVID-19 persists on surfaces for a few hours and up to several days; cleaning is critical.

- Increase the frequency of surface cleaning and disinfection including containers and vehicles used to move or transport product.
- Packaging and Transportation
  - Use containers that are single use whenever possible.
  - Prepacking produce whenever possible.
  - Establish a no touch/no interaction policy at deliveries.

**IN ADDITION, BELOW IS GUIDANCE ALL GROWERS SHOULD INCORPORATE INTO THEIR GROWING OPERATION IF YOU DO NOT CURRENTLY PARTICIPATE IN AN ALREADY ESTABLISHED FOOD SAFETY INSPECTION PROGRAM INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO CGAP, PSR, USDA GAP, ETC.**

All farms should perform an assessment on their operation to ensure adequate food safety measures are in place. This should include:

- Restrooms, in adequate numbers, should be appropriately stocked and cleaned. Ensure handwashing stations are located near restrooms.
- Restroom(s) should be designed, located, and maintained to be directly accessible for servicing, be serviced, and cleaned at a frequency sufficient to ensure suitability.
- Employees should have access to handwashing station(s). Ensure sufficient stock of the supplies required to maintain a properly stocked handwashing station. These include soap, water, single-use towels and a garbage can. Wherever a handwashing station is not possible, hand sanitizers should be provided.
- Check these units frequently to ensure they are properly stocked. The frequency will vary based on usage and operation size.
- Ensure the location of the units will not lead to contamination of crops or water sources used by the farm.
- Water used for handwashing and cleaning purposes needs to originate from a municipal source or needs to be tested by a state certified lab and have 0 E.coli. Water testing laboratories in Connecticut are listed at the [CT DPH website](#).
- Review health and hygiene protocols to ensure all farm owners and employees have appropriate training to ensure proper health and hygiene, cleaning, and sanitizing efforts are being made.
- Proper hand washing techniques:
  - Following CDC guidelines to wash for at least 20 seconds.
  - When employees arrive at work and before they leave work.
  - Before and after eating or using the toilet.
  - After close interaction with other persons.
  - After contacting shared surfaces or tools.
  - Before and after wearing masks or gloves.
  - After blowing nose or sneezing.
  - Methods to avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth.

- Coughing and sneezing etiquette, including covering a cough or sneeze with a tissue or a sleeve instead of a hand.
- If gloves are required, assure an adequate supply is available and provide proper training on glove usage.
- Review cleaning protocols:
  - Identify what needs to be cleaned.
  - Identify frequency.
  - Based on what the item is and risk associated with its usage.
  - Consider breaking these items into categories: Hourly/Daily/Weekly/etc.
  - Review proper cleaning methods.
  - Cleaning of all surfaces should:
    - Rinse with water (O E.coli)
    - Apply detergent appropriate for cleaning food contact surfaces
    - Scrub
    - Rinse with water again
- Review Sanitizing protocols:
  - A dirty surface cannot be sanitized, follow cleaning steps listed above before sanitizing.
  - Read the label and ensure the sanitizer is approved for the usage.
  - Click the link for products that are [EPA-approved](#) for use against the virus that causes COVID-19.
  - Follow the instructions.
  - Use specific concentration listed – more is not better.
  - Ensure the sanitizer does not require a post usage rinse with water.
- Create a phone listing of emergency contacts include regulatory agencies for the products, services, and activities performed on the farm.
  - Local Health Department
  - Connecticut Department of Agriculture
  - Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection
  - Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection
  - Business Attorney
  - Manager/Supervisor/Other Farm Contacts in case of emergency
  - Point of contact for each employee

Connect with your insurer to understand your insurance limits, etc.

For additional guidance for the agricultural industry, including selling your product at your farm store, or at a farmers' market, please visit the Connecticut Department of Agriculture's page, [Resources for Farmers During COVID-19](#).

If you have a farm *currently open* for the purchase of farm products and you'd like to be listed on [CTGrownMap.com](#), please complete this [online form](#).

For ideas and additional outreach on social media platforms that encourage Connecticut residents to [#StayHomeBuyCTGrown](#), take a look at the [Social Media Toolkit](#) on the agency website.

Please reach out to [AGR.Covid19@ct.gov](mailto:AGR.Covid19@ct.gov) with any COVID-19 related questions or concerns you may have. The Connecticut Department of Agriculture is actively working to support our industry and will continue to provide the most up to date information as it becomes available.