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COVID-19 GUIDANCE for MAPLE SUGARHOUSES

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The practices and protocols below are for maple sugarhouses to implement as necessary in an effort to minimize the spread of COVID-19. These recommendations are in addition to guidance provided by the [DECD Sector Rules](#), [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), [USDA](#), and other federal agencies.

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture continues to reinforce that maple sugarhouses can operate in a safe capacity during this time and is issuing this document to provide guidance on how to safely do so with regard to Governor Lamont's Executive Orders.

In order to provide a safe, reliable, and nutritious food source, all farm owners, employees, and volunteers must be committed to adhering to health and safety standards identified by the [CDC](#) and this guidance. Farmers should promote these efforts and use them as a tool to encourage people to shop and visit at the sugarhouse.

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 necessary.

Most importantly, be sure to follow the recommendations from the [CDC](#):

- Wash hands regularly, at least 20 seconds each time, multiple times throughout the market day.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover mouth with a bent elbow when sneezing or coughing. If a tissue is used, dispose of it immediately and follow with proper handwashing.
- Maintain the recommended social distancing protocols of at least six (6) feet of separation between individuals.
- Limit access to and disinfect common areas regularly.
- Stay home or seek medical attention as needed if you are sick.
- Wear a face covering or higher level protection when in public per [Executive Order 7NNN](#).
- Businesses have the right to refuse service to someone not wearing a face covering, even with a doctor's note. This is expanded upon in the [DECD Sector Rules](#).
- Consider conducting daily health checks for staff.

Executive Order 9B allows for the issuance of fines for any person or business who organizes, hosts, or sponsors a gathering that violates the gathering size restrictions set forth in the [DECD Sector Rules](#), **occurrences at a farm which occur within standard business practices shall not be construed as “events” for the purposes of this order. Tickets being sold in an effort to control capacity or appropriately stagger entry to maintain social distancing guidelines are permissible.**

Farm Owners and Employees

- 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](#).
- The CDC has released the [Agricultural Employer Checklist for Creating a COVID-19 Assessment and Control Plan](#). Agricultural employers can use this checklist to create a COVID-19 assessment and control plan for applying specific preparation, prevention, and management measures to prevent and slow the spread of COVID-19. The checklist is divided into five sections: assessment, control plan, shared housing, transportation, and children.
- 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 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.
- Stress the importance of not coming to work if employees have a frequent cough, fever, or difficulty breathing.
- If an employee has a sick person at home or has been in contact with someone who has either tested positive for COVID-19 or has symptoms of COVID-19, they should follow the CDC’s guidance on [Implementing Safety Practices for Critical Infrastructure Workers Who May Have Had Exposure to a Person with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19](#).
- Inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace if an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19. Employers should maintain confidentiality about individual employees’ identities.
- Follow CDC and Governor Lamont’s [Executive Order 7NNN](#) on 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.
- Disinfect common/high touch areas frequently with a disinfectant from the [EPA-Approved List of Disinfectants](#).

- Provide a staff/patron hand washing or hand sanitizer stations with proper signage. Restock hand washing supplies, including soap, paper towels, and/or hand sanitizer, and empty garbage cans frequently.
- For employee transportation - consider allowing employees to drive to the area. If farm vehicles are used:
 - Utilize open-air farm vehicles
 - Limit the number of people per vehicle as much as possible
 - Provide hand sanitizer on the vehicle
 - Sanitize handrails and surfaces between trips
 - Owners/operators should maximize opportunities to place farmworkers residing together in the same vehicles for transportation and in the same cohorts to limit exposure.
- Connect with your insurer to understand your insurance limits, etc. to help determine to what extent the maple sugarhouse can be open to the public.
- Consider developing online tours and online ordering platforms to limit the number of customers/visitors in the maple sugarhouse. A list of options to create an online ordering platform can be found on our [COVID-19 Resources for Farmers](#).
- Additional information can be found in the [COVID-19 Food Safety Guidance](#)

Inside the Sugarhouse/Farm Store

- Be mindful of how many people can fit in the sugarhouse while implementing the social distancing requirements. You will likely need to limit the number of customers within the sugarhouse at one time per [DECD Sector Rules](#).
- Per [Executive Order 7NNN](#) , cloth face coverings are required in public.
- Do not allow pets.
- Use non-porous plastic tables that can be easily disinfected whenever possible. Do not use tablecloths.
- Eliminate samples, children play areas, and picnic/eating areas.
- Install plexiglass shields to separate employees from customers at checkout lines where practical.
- Have employees to handle product and separate/additional employees to handle money, reminding them to wash their hands per the CDC recommendations or use hand sanitizer after every transaction
- Prevent customers from congregating, including at the checkout area, by posting signage to reminding customers of the six (6) foot social distancing requirements. Here's a [poster, in English and Spanish](#), from the CDC for posting around the market and take a look at [DECD's signage options](#) as well. You can also utilize floor markers, cones, etc. Signage produced for farmers' market may also be utilized in your farm store and can be found on the [COVID-19 Resources for Farmers](#).
- If you have two doors, designate one as an entrance only and one to be an exit only.
- If you're able to implement a one-way flow of traffic throughout the sugarhouse, do so. Be sure to clearly communicate this through floor markers and eye-level signage.
- Wipe down the EBT/credit card terminal with an approved disinfectant ([EPA-Approved List of Disinfectants](#)) after each use and/or provide single-use Q Tips for button pushing and easy disposal. (use of credit card/EBT is highly recommended instead of cash transactions)
- Pens: consider getting inexpensive pens and letting the customer keep them or sanitize between uses.
- If you don't take credit card, consider using [Venmo](#) or [PayPal](#) as a form of payment to limit the amount of tender exchanged.

- Plastic Bags: Remind customers the \$.10 plastic bag fee waiver is no longer in effect and any plastic bags used, other than plastic bags used to contain loose produce, must be charged the fee.
- Encourage customers to come during off-peak hours.
- Encourage customers to limit the number of family members shopping, ideally to the primary shopper only.
- Put a sample of the product(s) available for purchase out on display and hand purchased items to customers from behind a counter/plexiglass area as they make a purchase.
- Post signage to remind patrons that maple syrup and other food purchased should be taken home to be consumed.

Managing Sugarhouse Tours

- Consider offering tour sign ups by time slot and identify the maximum group size through [SignUpGenius](#) or another online system.
- Require that groups waiting to come in for their allotted tour time must remain in their vehicle until their allotted time.
- Take a name and phone number for one person in each tour group should contact tracing be necessary.
- Require hand sanitizing prior to entering the sugarhouse in addition to masks per [Executive Order 7NNN](#).
- If possible, have a one-way flow of traffic in/out of the sugarhouse.
- Do not allow tour guests to touch tools or other implements used in maple syrup/sugar production.
- Do not provide samples.
- Use non-porous plastic tables that can be easily disinfected whenever possible. Do not use tablecloths.
- Procedures for frequent hand washing, changing gloves, and disinfecting surfaces, should be established with appropriate signage wherever required.
- Create an online tour of your sugarhouse (and link it to an online ordering system!)

Outreach

- Put information on websites, social media, and hang signage around the sugarhouse to explain any changes, delivery options (if available), or extra precautions taken to limit exposure to COVID-19.
- In any marketing/promotional messaging, communicate changes to sugarhouse tours and farm store shopping. Remind guests to wear face masks or face coverings when they visit.
- Promote/advertise that there will be additional precautions in place to ensure the safest experience for everyone.
- Farm owners should communicate to their guests that they should not come to the sugarhouse if they are displaying symptoms of COVID-19, or have come in contact with someone who has.
- Share that you will be requiring all guests to maintain a 6-foot social distancing amongst themselves.
- Emphasize that you do not allow any pets on the farm.

For additional guidance for the agricultural industry, please visit the Connecticut Department of Agriculture's page, [Resources for Farmers During COVID-19](#).

If you have a farm stand *open* 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 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.

This guidance was compiled through the review of the following resources:

CT Food Association Safety Guidelines for Grocery Stores | DECD's Safe Stores Guidance | CT Department of Consumer Protection Guidance for Selling Produce and Packaged Food for Curbside Pickup | New Hampshire Extension CSA Farmers Amid COVID 19 Guidance