



# Guide to Operating your Essential Farm Business during COVID-19

There are many ways to manage risk and improve the safety and wellbeing of your farm business workplace, while doing your part to reduce the risk to public health and supply chain disruptions.

This Guide for farms and farm businesses is split into three parts: Facilitating Business Interactions on the Farm, Responding to Exposure to COVID-19, and Managing Risk During Business Operations. OFA recognizes that these new protocols and procedures can be overwhelming. Please review the document as needed and implement these procedures based on your farm and your situation.

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## Disclaimer

The following information is for guidance only and should not be interpreted as medical or legal advice. As protocols may change rapidly and frequently, all farm businesses should regularly review information and procedures from their local public health unit, the Ontario Ministry of Health, and Health Canada, to remain up to date on current policies and protocols. This document was updated on April 3, 2020.

# I. Facilitating Business Interactions on the Farm

As an essential workplace, farm businesses must facilitate business interactions such as: receiving farm input supplies, necessary veterinary care, equipment repairs by mechanics and other specialists, milk trucks, deliveries or shipments of livestock and poultry, and many more. The list below provides some considerations when coordinating these essential business activities.

## i. Planning for Essential Visitors

- COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly through close contact from person-to-person in respiratory droplets from someone who is infected. All non-essential on-farm visits should be postponed.
- Farm entry should be limited to personnel performing essential activities (i.e. those required for the care and wellbeing your farm and farm animals, employees and facilities).
- Pre-authorized visitors to your farm (e.g. feed delivery, seed delivery, milk truck, veterinarian, farrier, etc.) should call ahead and schedule a meeting or drop-off time. Limit the number of visitors at any one time to reduce interactions.
- Designate and provide signage for a specified area where the interaction (e.g. drop off, pick-up, service) will take place.
- Limit face-to-face contact wherever possible. Always ensure a minimum distance of two metres between yourself and others. Avoid physical contact such as shaking hands or hugging.
- Limit signature requirements and utilize online and/or phone transactions wherever possible.
- People who are sick or have signs of illness (e.g. fever, coughing, sneezing, runny nose, tiredness, shortness of breath) should stay home and call a doctor or healthcare provider.

## ii. Protocols During the Visit

- You may deny entry of any visitor to your farm if you suspect that you are at risk of contracting COVID-19.
- Upon entry on the farm, visitors should immediately wash their hands with soap for 20 seconds. You and your visitors should avoid touching your/their face, eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands or gloves.
- Disinfect incoming materials using cleaning and sanitization protocols. Handle the materials with disposable gloves, if available.
- While the risk of contracting COVID-19 from handling packages is believed to be low, materials received on the farm should be left untouched for as long as possible to lessen the viability of any virus that may be present on surfaces. This does not replace taking adequate safety precautions and practicing frequent hand hygiene by washing hands with soap or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Notify your suppliers if you, an employee or a family member:
  - Has travelled outside Canada within the previous 14 days
  - Is ill with flu-like symptoms

- Has been in close contact with anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19.

If any of these conditions are present, these individuals must stay away from all drivers or suppliers. They must maintain self-isolation and avoid being present for loading or unloading.

### iii. Availability of Washroom Facilities

- Visitors should avoid using the same washroom facilities as farm employees whenever possible.
- Make every reasonable effort to provide portable washroom facilities with handwashing and sanitation supplies for farm visitors.
- Ensure regular cleaning and disinfecting of washroom facilities, after each use if possible.
- If portable washrooms that include water for handwashing are not available for rent, running water could be provided by way of a large water jug which includes a spout or a pump, a soap dispenser and paper towels, in addition to the portable washroom.
- While there is currently a shortage of hand sanitizer, make every reasonable effort to obtain a supply of hand sanitizer for the farm business.

### iv. Guidance from Commodity/Industry Associations

Be sure to check with your industry association or commodity organization to determine if there are specific procedures related to your commodity or industry. Many excellent resources have been developed. Some are accessible through our Resources list at the end of this Guide.

## II. Responding to Exposure to COVID-19

### i. Reporting Exposure

If a family member, employee, or someone who has visited your farm recently, is sick, or tests positive for COVID-19, your business is required to follow public health measures put in place to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Public health authorities have communicated the following directions:

- Employees who have COVID-19 symptoms must advise their manager immediately, contact their local public health authority (Ontario 1-866-797-0000) and follow their recommendations, immediately isolate from others and be sent home, without using public transit, if possible.
- Employees who are at home and who may have COVID-19 are to follow the advice of their local public health authority regarding self-isolation to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

### ii. Implementing Self-Isolation

You are required to self-isolate and follow Ontario Ministry of Health (MOH) guidelines if:

- You have been exposed to, or suspect exposure to COVID-19;
- You are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19;
- You have travelled outside of Canada. Even if you are not experiencing symptoms, you must self-isolate for 14 days upon return, as per MOH guidelines.

Farmers and employees who are self-isolating cannot be present when industry personnel visit their farm. You are required to designate an alternate person who has not been exposed to you to be present, or you can be available by telephone to answer visitors' questions or concerns.

*Farmers and employees who are self-isolating should not work, or be in their barns at any time, during the 14-day period.*

### iii. Notifying of Personal Exposure

Your local public health unit will provide guidance on how to notify those you have come in contact with that they may have been exposed to COVID-19. You will need to remember anyone you have come into

contact with, including at your farm business and at home. To stop the spread of COVID-19, it is important to be as accurate and thorough as possible.

#### iv. Notifying of Employee Exposure

- Ensure your employees are aware of their responsibility to properly notify you if they are feeling unwell, or of any risk of exposure to COVID-19 they may have encountered.
- Communicate clearly with your employees about your sick leave policy. If you do not have one, templates are available in the [Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council AgriHR Toolkit](#).
- Ensure that employees with symptoms of, or exposure to, COVID-19 feel supported by your farm business if they decide to self-isolate.
- Do not provide information regarding the name, date of birth, or other identifiers of any employees diagnosed with the COVID-19 virus. Your employees are entitled to privacy under Canadian privacy legislation. There are special circumstances when you may have to have to share this information (e.g. life-threatening reasons). Consult with legal counsel before sharing any personal medical information of your employees.
- Do provide information to your employees if they have been exposed to COVID-19 in the workplace. If known, provide:
  - date(s) of their potential exposure; and
  - the extent and circumstances of their potential exposure (e.g. incident indirect contact versus prolonged direct contact).
- Continue to monitor and follow recommendations provided by public health agencies.

#### v. Disinfecting Your Workplace

If your farm business workplace has been exposed to COVID-19, your local public health unit will provide guidance on how to disinfect the area. Frequently touched surfaces are most likely to be contaminated. See the section on Cleaning and Sanitization for more information.

#### vi. Managing Exposure to Animals

There is currently no evidence to suggest that this virus is circulating in animals in Canada. It is possible that some types of animals may be able to get infected with COVID-19, but it is not yet clear whether they would show symptoms. Until we know more, if you have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and have been in contact with animals:

- Avoid close contact, coughing or sneezing on the animals;
- Have another member of your staff care for the animals;
- If this is not possible, always wash your hands before touching or feeding them;
- Limit the animal's contact with other people and other animals.

### III. Managing Risk During Business Operations

#### i. Communicating with your Workforce

- Ensure employees are informed of the risks, symptoms, and steps to self-isolate.
- Ensure your employees are aware of their responsibility to properly notify you if they are feeling unwell or at any risk of exposure to COVID-19 they may have encountered, and that they feel supported if they need to self-isolate.
- Communicate clearly with your employees about your sick leave policy. If you do not have one, templates are available in the [Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council AgriHR Toolkit](#).
- Download and print [posters on COVID-19 and preventative measures](#).
- Implement a hand-washing regime for all employees.

## ii. Implementing Physical Distancing

- The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person contact. Limit interactions by avoiding non-essential travel and carpooling.
- Consider adjusting schedules to avoid the likelihood of infection of all employees at the same time, by splitting employees into shifts, alternating days, etc.
- Stagger arrivals and break times for employees so they do not congregate in common spaces.
- Keep employees separated in designated areas and functions to limit interactions.
- Try to limit the number of employees using farm equipment. If possible, assign each employee to their own piece of equipment (e.g. tractor, truck, etc.).
- Limit number of face-to-face meetings. Consider alternatives such as conference calls or email.

## iii. Making Risk Management Plans

- Ensure risk management and operational plans include pandemic plans. These plans should include identification of decisionmakers, roles and responsibilities, access to medical care, plans for quarantine and/or transportation to medical facilities. They should also include communications planning, such as: who is the point of contact, medical contacts, internal and external communication plans, staff contact information, suppliers, and community services.
- The risk management plan should also identify what to do if staff are not available to conduct time-sensitive work (e.g. milking, strawberry picking) when not enough employees are available to do the work because of illness. This may include having agreements with surrounding farmers for back-up support.
- Review Public Health of Canada's [Risk-informed decision-making guidelines for workplaces and businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).
- If your business uses essential international seasonal employees, review the Ontario Ministry of Health's [Guidance for employers using the Temporary Foreign Worker Program](#).

## iv. Cleaning and Sanitizing

It is unknown how long the COVID-19 virus can survive, but recent studies found that a viable virus could be detected on plastic and stainless steel for up to three days.

Commonly used cleaners and disinfectants are effective against COVID-19, and you should only use disinfectants that have a Drug Identification Number (DIN). A DIN is an 8-digit number given by Health Canada that confirms the product is approved for use in Canada. Additionally, check the expiry date of products you use and always follow manufacturer's instructions. Visit Health Canada's website to [learn more about disinfectants and COVID-19](#).

- Regularly clean and disinfect:
  - frequently touched surfaces (e.g. workstations, countertops, fridge/freezer doors, light switches, doorknobs, etc.);
  - entry points to farm structures, common spaces, breakrooms, bathrooms and showers, between uses, and at the end of the day;
  - ventilation and fan equipment; and
  - farm equipment, tools, and machinery.
- Wearing gloves, wash and dry shared materials (e.g. towels, kitchen utensils, pens) between uses, and disinfect clothing hampers.
- Increase ventilation in mechanically ventilated buildings or rooms and/or open outside windows to increase air circulation, while following biosecurity protocols.
- Continue to follow biosecurity protocols and food safety standards at all times.

## **v. Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing**

If you are experiencing personal mental distress or someone you know is in immediate danger, please call 9-1-1.

If you or anyone close to you requires support at this time, OFA has also developed a list of [resources to help farmers with managing stress](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

If your employees are feeling anxious about the COVID-19 situation, the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) provides employers with [6 tips for responding to employee anxiety](#) about COVID-19.

## **IV. Resources**

Everyone involved in your farm business has a role to play in reducing risk and improving safety on the farm. There are many resources to assist your business in navigating the challenges of COVID-19, including those listed below and many other government, commodity and industry sources. Continue to monitor public health agencies and government websites for the latest health and safety information.

### **i. General COVID-19 Industry Resources**

[OFA's COVID-19 page](#)

[Canadian Federation of Agriculture \(CFA\) COVID-19 page](#)

[Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council \(CAHRC\)'s COVID-19 page](#)

[Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association \(OFVGA\)'s COVID-19 page](#)

[Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada \(AAFC\) COVID-19 page](#)

[Canadian Food Inspection Agency COVID-19 page](#)

[Health Canada's COVID-19 Symptom Self-Assessment Tool](#)

[Health Canada's COVID-19 page](#)

[Ontario Ministry of Health COVID-19 Guidance for Industry Operators](#)

[Ontario Ministry of Health COVID-19 Guidance for Food Premises](#)

### **ii. Commodity/Industry Specific Guidance for On-Farm Interactions**

[Recommendations for Delivering Cattle During COVID-19](#)

[Ontario Pork Managing the Risk to the Work Environment](#)

[Chicken Farmers of Ontario COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions](#)

[Canadian Produce Marketing Agency Food Safety Information](#)

[Canadian Trucking Alliance Transportation Tips for Carriers](#)

[Ontario Sheep Farmers COVID-19 Update for Producers- On Farm Service Providers](#)

[CFIA Guidance to Meat Slaughter and Processing Establishments Prevention and Response to COVID-19](#)