

COVID-19 and Your Dairy Farm

The US is confronting a global pandemic caused by a novel coronavirus that results in the disease called COVID-19. We are fortunate that as dairy farmers and industry members biosecurity and prevention of disease transmission are not new conversations. We're just more used to discussing cow health than human health. If you have questions about transmission of viruses like coronavirus from animals to humans, check out this [article](#) from Dr. Geof Smith at the NCSU – College of Veterinary Medicine.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has deemed agriculture a “critical infrastructure industry,” recognizing the important work of farmers and farm employees. Maintaining public access to milk will continue to be essential. However, this does not mean that there may not be a disruption to your dairy farm as we proceed through this situation.

Below are some resources to help you mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on your dairy, including information you can use to designate employees as “essential” when a shelter-in-place order is in effect.

Protect your employees

- Provide training and information about COVID-19. Don't assume that they have seen the news and know what to do. CDC factsheets can be found here in both English and Spanish: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/factsheets.html> Print posters and display them on your farm where employees will see them. Make it clear that you care about your employees' health and wellbeing.
- Clean and disinfect workplaces. Focus on breakrooms, bathrooms and other gathering places. Encourage social distancing so that when possible employees stay 6-10 feet apart. Clean surfaces such as doorknobs, light switches, keyboards, refrigerator handles, and other commonly touched items at least daily if not more often.
- Set up cleaning schedules. Post SOP's for cleaning and whose responsibility it is to make sure everything gets done.
- Provide cleaning supplies for workplace cleaning and if available send supplies home with employees as well. Helping them effectively clean their households will help keep them working. Here's a link to EPA-approved cleaning supplies for controlling the cause of COVID-19: https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-03/documents/sars-cov-2-list_03-03-2020.pdf
- Make sure that sick people stay home. Consider offering paid sick leave as an incentive and make it clear that they will not be penalized for staying home.
- Help with childcare. NC K-12 schools are closed at least through May 15th. If you can, help employees coordinate small group childcare and connect them to childcare

resources in your community to help them get through this tough time. Bonuses to help cover these additional costs would be an incentive to keep coming to work.

Protect your farm

- Anticipate supply chain disruptions. It's very likely that some routine products used on dairies will be slow to get or even unavailable. If appropriate, have a 2-3 month supply on hand. This isn't the time to get behind on placing orders.
- Even the best biosecurity plan is a reduction, not an elimination, of risk. This is a great time to sharpen up on routine practices like handwashing and boot sanitizing.
- Have a contingency plan. What will you do if you're short-handed or worse? What tasks can be reassigned or adjusted to compensate? Think it through and write it down. Be prepared.
- Keep yourself healthy. Farming is a family business and we are all connected to individuals who are at higher risk of serious or even fatal consequences from COVID-19. The dairy community is not used to taking sick days, if you get sick, set a good example and take time off or work remotely. Follow all of the protocols that you recommend for your employees yourself. This is going to be a challenging time and it's going to be best to be proactive rather than reactive.

Whenever a shelter-in-place order is in effect, employees should carry a permit signed by their employer that requests relevant authorities to allow them to report to work. National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF) has a template for this permit at:

<https://www.nmpf.org/coronavirus/>. If you have more questions in regards to employees' rights and employer responsibility, this information from the National Law Review may be helpful: <https://www.natlawreview.com/article/be-prepared-what-should-employers-do-about-coronavirus>.

We are facing a situation that most of us probably couldn't imagine in modern times. Let's make sure we work together to take as good of care of our people right now as we do of our cows.

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Coronavirus and COVID-19 Safety Tips



WASH YOUR HANDS

Wash your hands often **with soap** and water for **at least 20 seconds**. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.



STAY HOME IF SICK

Stay home when you are sick. And **avoid close contact** with other people who are sick.



COVER YOUR COUGH

Avoid sneezing or coughing on your **hands**. Use a **tissue** or cover with your **elbow**. **Don't touch your face**.



CLEAN OFTEN

Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects or surfaces. Including equipment and common eating/break areas.