

Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics

INFORMATION TO PROTECT FARMWORKERS AND THEIR EMPLOYERS IN THE MIDST OF COVID-19

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In this publication, we list some recommendations to prevent exposure to COVID-19 and protect the health of farmworkers. Farmworkers are considered a vulnerable population due to barriers to health care access, language barriers, lack of insurance and independent transportation, as well as unfamiliarity with local resources and systems.

A complete list of recommendations can be found at <https://bit.ly/3aDNDCM>. These recommendations are taken from the interim COVID-19 guidance for migrant farmworkers, their employees and housing providers released on March 26 by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. As explained in this document, the most critical components of a COVID-19 preventive plan for farmworkers include 1) minimizing the risk of exposure; 2) mitigating spread through early detection of farmworkers with symptoms of COVID-19; and 3) caring for farmworkers with COVID-19, while ensuring they will not infect other workers on the farm.

If you have questions regarding adjustments on housing arrangements for migrant farmworkers due to COVID-19, please contact Randy Warren, Career Specialist, Workforce Services, H-2A Housing Inspector, Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development, at Randy.Warren@tn.gov.

Since a comprehensive list of recommendations to protect farmworkers and take care of those workers that may have been exposed to COVID-19 can be found at <https://bit.ly/3aDNDCM>, below, we focus on general recommendations and information that are specifically relevant for farmers in Tennessee and other information you may not find in the document released by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.

Promote Healthy Habits

Provide information and training to farmworkers on COVID-19.

- ✓ Post and provide signs and fact sheets in English and Spanish with information about how to properly wash your hands and other tips on how to protect themselves and others from germs. You can find printed information in English and Spanish about various topics, including how to wash your hands, COVID-19 symptoms, what to do if you get sick from COVID-19, and other information at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/factsheets.html>. One piece of information that is not listed on this website is recommendations regarding physical distancing. You can find information in Spanish regarding physical distancing recommendations at <http://www.imss.gob.mx/prensa/archivo/202003/142>.
- ✓ Conduct training on preventing and recognizing symptoms of COVID-19.
- ✓ Make sure you post contact information for your local health department, as well as the address of where the workers are staying, in a central location where all workers can find it.

Require and promote frequent handwashing.

- ✓ Require the workers to wash their hands frequently — before and after work, at meal or snack time, after blowing their nose, smoking breaks, bathroom breaks, before putting on and after removing gloves, if worn, or any other time hands may become contaminated — or in Spanish tell them that “DEBEN LAVARSE SUS MANOS ANTES Y DESPUES DE EMPEZAR A TRABAJAR, ANTES Y DESPUES DE IR AL LAVADO/BAÑO, Y ANTES Y DESPUES DE COMER, FUMAR, SONARSE LA NARIZ O HACER OTRA ACTIVIDAD DONDE LAS MANOS SE PUEDAN CONTAMINAR.”
- ✓ Provide supplies to farmworkers that help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and promote good hygiene, such as hand sanitizer containing at least 60 percent alcohol, water, soap and single-use paper towels.
- ✓ Proper handwashing (for instructions in Spanish go to <http://salud.edomex.gob.mx/salud/covid>; the instructions are at the end of this webpage):
 1. **Wet hands** with water.
 2. **Apply soap and lather.** Be sure to wash the front and backs of hands as well as in between the fingers. Rub hands together for AT LEAST 20 seconds.
 3. **Rinse** hands thoroughly with clean water.
 4. **Dry** with a paper towel (turn off faucet with used towel).
 5. **Throw** the paper towel in a trash can.
 - **NOTE: Antibacterial hand sanitizers CANNOT replace handwashing. In Spanish, “El líquido antibacterial NO reemplaza la necesidad de lavarse las manos.”**

Explain and encourage social distancing.

- ✓ In general, encourage your workers to maintain physical distancing, staying at least 6 feet apart from coworkers, or in Spanish tell them, “La distancia entre usted y otros trabajadores debe ser de al menos 2 metros.” Laurel Dunn, food safety specialist at the University of Georgia, gives some useful tips on strategies to maintain social distancing among farmworkers in a YouTube video you can find at <https://bit.ly/34g0HvP>. She suggests practices that promote social distancing among workers, such as extending your workday and dividing your workers into groups and having them work in shifts to prevent 100 percent of your workforce being in the same place all the time. If possible, divide your workers into two or three groups that will never overlap when performing activities on the farm. Have each group come to work, clean workstations and tools before they finish their shift and leave 30 minutes to one hour in between shifts to ensure groups are not overlapping or meeting at any time during the day. Keep workers that live together and/or from the same family in the same workgroup/shift, when possible, so that their roommates or other family members will not be unnecessarily exposed.
- ✓ Try to set beds in the housing facilities in a “head-to-toe” orientation and at least 6 feet apart, if possible. Also, when possible, transport farmworkers in a way that there is a distance of at least 6 feet between them.

Disinfect frequently used items and surfaces as much as possible.

- ✓ It is essential to frequently clean and disinfect farmworker housing, bathrooms, vehicles, tools and common areas such as kitchens or breakrooms. Make sure the steering wheel and door handles of vehicles are wiped down with a disinfectant between drivers or passengers. If possible, create a cleaning schedule that workers can follow in order to incorporate cleaning activities as part of their everyday schedule. A list of disinfectants that can be used against COVID-19 can be found at <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>. Be sure to observe the product’s contact time required for the disinfectant to effectively disinfect the surface.

Be Prepared; Have a Plan.

- **It is important to have an emergency plan for how you will isolate and care for farmworkers infected with COVID-19.**
 - ✓ You can find general guidance for preventing COVID-19 in congregate living spaces at <https://bit.ly/3bE1dGk> (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services) and general guidance for caring for individuals with COVID-19 disease that do not require hospitalization at <https://bit.ly/2WYGKYL> (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Also, the Tennessee Department of Health has two publications available on their website that, although not focused on farmworkers, provide general guidelines that could be useful to mitigate the spread of

COVID-19 in group settings. You can find these publications at <https://bit.ly/39Ik4yF> and <https://bit.ly/2Rhs17D>. Keep in mind that these guidelines are interim or temporary, as information about COVID-19 is changing rapidly. Some essential elements that you will find in the documents listed above include:

- ✓ **Separation of sick workers or suspected sick workers from healthy or seemingly healthy workers is critical.** Sick workers or those who are suspected of being sick should be in separate rooms with a separate bathroom and should not share cooking or eating facilities. Contact Randy Warren, Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development, at Randy.Warren@tn.gov, if you have questions about emergency living arrangements and its compliance with the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act. You can find information about the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act at <https://bit.ly/2UUa7J9>.
- ✓ It is essential to identify 1) an individual or individuals who will be designated for transporting ill workers, in case they need hospitalization; 2) who will pay and provide food, water and medical supplies for workers who may be isolated because they are ill or have symptoms; and 3) workers who may be isolated because they came in contact with an individual with COVID-19. For more information on how to identify and educate caregivers of farmworkers go to the following websites: <https://bit.ly/3aDNDCM>; <https://bit.ly/2WYGKYL>.
- ✓ It is crucial to have a plan for when multiple workers are sick at the same time. What would you do if 50 percent of your employees become ill and unable to work? Who will manage for a few weeks if you or another key manager are unable to leave your house or are hospitalized?
- **It is important to identify the nearest health care facility you can take your farmworkers in case they get sick.**
 - ✓ If you have trouble finding a health care facility where you can take your worker, contact your local health department for assistance. You can find a list of the local and regional Tennessee health departments at <https://www.tn.gov/health/health-program-areas/localdepartments.html>.
 - ✓ There are a few websites that provide information about health care centers in Tennessee that receive federal funding to take care of migrant farmworkers and their families. The National Center for Farmworker Health has a tool to search for health centers in the U.S. that offer services to migrant farmworkers at <http://www.ncfh.org/migrant-health-centers.html>. If you have difficulty finding a health facility for your farmworkers, contact your local health department for assistance.

Other considerations to avoid the spread of COVID-19 among farmworkers include:

- ✓ Make sure your workers understand they will not be punished if they become sick and cannot come to work. Give them incentives to report if they feel sick. As an employer, make sure you are familiar with any requirements concerning sick leave under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA). More information on the FFCRA can be found here: <https://dol.gov/agencies/whd/pandemic>.
- ✓ If possible, have a designated worker or workers that will be in charge of buying groceries for all workers. It is common for all workers to go to the grocery store, but in the midst of COVID-19, it may be better to have a designated worker(s) in charge of going to the grocery store. Some grocery stores are limiting the number of people who can enter the store. Additionally, there are some stores that are limiting the number of items one person can buy. Therefore, when possible, explore the option of placing orders for food at grocery stores online or clarify with the store the ability for one person to buy groceries for multiple people.
- ✓ Not all migrant farmworkers have a bank account in Mexico, but if they do, find a way to transfer payments directly to their bank accounts, and urge them to avoid going to the local store to make money transfers or to go no more frequently than is absolutely necessary.
- ✓ Urge farmworkers not to share work or leisure-time gear such as tools, gloves and boots, as well as portable electronic devices, playing cards, etc.

Make sure you document all procedures and policies you put in place to avoid the spread of COVID-19 among farmworkers and to care for potentially ill farmworkers, in case you get audited or questioned by an agency in the future. For a comprehensive list of all recommendations to protect migrant farmworkers and deal with potentially ill farmworkers, go to <https://bit.ly/3aDNDCM>. You can find additional resources on how to protect you farmworkers at <https://www.gapconnections.com/resources/covid-19-resources> and other tips on how to protect your workers at <https://bit.ly/34g0HvP>.

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DISCLAIMER: This document offers guidance on best practices for slowing the spread of COVID-19 among farmworkers and for planning for potentially infected workers. The guidance and recommendations provided are for informational and educational purposes only. Adherence to these recommendations will not ensure successful outcomes in every situation. Furthermore, these recommendations should not be interpreted as setting a standard for all farms or including all methods for slowing the spread of COVID-19 or addressing potentially infected workers. The recommendations presented in this publication reflect the best available information at the time of publication. Scientific understanding of COVID-19 is evolving rapidly, and recommendations for slowing the spread of COVID-19 or responding to potentially infected workers may change quickly. Readers should rely on the most up-to-date information.

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