

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS



Department of Agricultural Resources

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BULLETIN 2020-01

To: Massachusetts Farmers, Agricultural Businesses, Organizations and Valued Stakeholders

From: John Lebeaux, Commissioner

Date: March 13, 2020

Re: Addressing COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Impacts and Guidance

To our farming community,

On March 10, the Baker-Polito Administration announced new guidance for Executive Branch employees in order to prevent and mitigate the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19), including canceling or virtually holding conferences, seminars, and other discretionary gatherings hosted by Executive Branch agencies involving external parties. Out of an abundance of caution, the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) and our sister agencies have postponed, cancelled or moved to a remote format over the next thirty (30) days. Decisions about future events will be made in a timely fashion and will be based on the best information we have at the time. Our commitment lies with serving our constituents and stakeholders in any capacity we can to be helpful and supportive during this unprecedented time. We appreciate your understanding and patience as we navigate this rapidly evolving situation alongside you.

We recognize the immediate and potential long-term impacts to your farms and businesses as well and want to ensure that you are provided with the necessary resources and informed communications to continue to conduct your normal business operations. It is important to continue to reinforce standard health and hygiene protocols, both on-farm and in a retail setting. Please practice the commonsense recommendations public health professionals are making. Wash your hands often and thoroughly. Sneeze or cough into a tissue or your elbow. Please do not attend an event, meeting, or engage in a retail atmosphere such as a farmers' market or farm stand if you are sick and may have direct interactions with customers. Please advise your farm and retail staff to follow the same protocols.

On-farm biosecurity should remain of utmost importance at this time. The recommendations below apply to **general precautions against introducing or spreading disease on the farm**, which are excellent practices to follow at all times.¹

1. Be sure your farm and family biosecurity is strong. Keep all visitors to your farm, wildlife and new livestock out of direct contact with your animals, as well as their feed and water.

¹ *Lichtenwalner, Anne Dr.*. "The Farmer's Response to Disease Outbreaks: Biosecurity, Simple Cleaning, and Disinfection Can Slow or Stop the Spread of COVID-19." University of Maine Cooperative Extension Diagnostic and Research Laboratory. 06 March 2020.

2. Use good management to keep your family's and your animals' innate immunity strong. Good nutrition, housing, ventilation, water and general hygiene will strengthen immune defenses and reduce the chance of serious disease of any kind.
3. Be a good observer. Report serious illnesses to your veterinarian, processor representative or medical professional as appropriate. While no one needs to panic, it's always good to discuss how to best address illnesses on the farm. No matter what, usual occurrences of disease and losses will occur on farms but shouldn't be confused with more serious disease.
4. Keep enough resources on hand to be able to manage if backups are needed. You should have replacements for essential items at the farm, as well as at least two weeks' worth of supplies.

With food safety on consumer's minds, it is important to emphasize the rigorous food safety audits and standards that our farms must comply with, both on a state and federal level. Our Produce Safety Team stands ready to assist farmers with market access challenges and encourage farmers to evaluate their current marketing and sales strategies to best meet consumers' changing purchasing needs. For example, with some farmers' markets closing for the immediate future, farmers are offering home delivery services and centralized pick-up locations for their products. It's also important to emphasize the notion of social distancing and that interactions with farm and retail staff should be limited with customers. Staff and volunteers should be extra vigilant about washing hands, sanitizing surfaces frequently, and not working at the farm stand or market when sick. With consumers wanting to shop, eat, drink, and buy local during these evolving circumstances, we want to help keep fresh, local food accessible.

We continue to monitor and assess the impacts to farmers and stakeholders across the industry. Please stay in touch regarding the personal anecdotes your businesses and organizations are facing so we can best assist you. Thank you for your cooperation and support as the Commonwealth works to address this public health issue.

Sincerely,



John Lebeaux, Commissioner
Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources

If you have any questions about this Bulletin, please contact Ashley Randle, Deputy Commissioner for the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, at (617)-626-1715 or Ashley.Randle@mass.gov.