

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS



Department of Agricultural Resources

251 Causeway Street, Suite 500, Boston, MA 02114
617-626-1700 fax: 617-626-1850 www.mass.gov/agr



CHARLES D. BAKER
Governor

KARYN E. POLITO
Lt. Governor

KATHLEEN A. THEOHARIDES
Secretary

JOHN LEBEAUX
Commissioner

NOTICE TO INDUSTRY

COVID-19 - FOOD INSPECTIONS AND STAFF BEST PRACTICES for Agricultural Sector

On March 23, 2020, Governor Charlie Baker issued an emergency order, *Exhibit A of the Order of the Governor Assuring Continued Operation of Essential Services in the Commonwealth, Closing Certain Workplaces and Prohibiting Gatherings of More Than 10 People*, requiring all businesses and organizations that do not provide “COVID-19 Essential Services” to close their physical workplaces and facilities to workers, customers and the public as of Tuesday, March 24th at Noon until Tuesday, April 7th at Noon.

Regarding **food and agriculture**, the following remain listed as “Essential Services”:

- Workers supporting groceries, pharmacies and other retail, including farmers markets and farm stands, that sell food and beverage products, including liquor stores.
- Restaurant carry-out and quick serve food operations - Carry-out and delivery food employees.
- Food manufacturer employees and their supplier employees—to include those employed in food processing (packers, meat processing, cheese plants, milk plants, produce, etc.) facilities; livestock, poultry, seafood slaughter facilities; pet and animal feed processing facilities; human food facilities producing by-products for animal food; beverage production facilities; and the production of food packaging.
- Farm workers to include those employed in animal food, feed, and ingredient production, packaging, and distribution; manufacturing, packaging, and distribution of veterinary drugs; truck delivery and transport; farm and fishery labor needed to produce our food supply domestically.
- Farm workers and support service workers to include those who field crops; commodity inspection; fuel ethanol facilities; storage facilities; and other agricultural inputs.
- Workers supporting the seafood and fishing industry.
- Employees and firms supporting food, feed, and beverage distribution, including warehouse workers, vendor-managed inventory controllers and blockchain managers.
- Workers supporting the sanitation of all food manufacturing processes and operations from wholesale to retail
- Company cafeterias - in-plant cafeterias used to feed employees; food service workers in residential schools with students who are unable to leave campus.
- Workers in food testing labs in private industries and in institutions of higher education.
- Workers essential for assistance programs and government payments.
- Employees of companies engaged in the production of chemicals, medicines, vaccines, and other substances used by the food and agriculture industry, including pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, minerals, enrichments, and other agricultural production aids.
- Animal agriculture workers to include those employed in veterinary health; manufacturing and distribution of animal medical materials, animal vaccines, animal drugs, feed ingredients, feed, and bedding, etc.; transportation of live animals, animal medical materials; transportation of deceased animals for disposal; raising of animals for food; animal production operations; slaughter and packing plants and associated regulatory and government workforce.
- Organizations and workers responsible for the care and custody of animals, pets and livestock

- Workers who support the manufacture and distribution of forest products, including, but not limited to timber, paper, and other wood products.
- Employees engaged in the manufacture and maintenance of equipment and other infrastructure necessary to agricultural production and distribution.

Food Inspections/Audits and MDAR Staff Best Practices

The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) will continue to serve agricultural operations and serve public health during the COVID-19 pandemic by maintaining its produce safety work to ensure a safe, healthy and abundant food supply. The continued work of MDAR inspection personnel is vital to providing consumers, as well as national and international markets, ongoing assurance that Massachusetts' food and agricultural commodities continue to be held to the highest standards of safety and quality during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

MDAR recognizes the important efforts by industry to enhance biosecurity measures at food production and handling operations in response to the COVID-19 outbreak and the ongoing guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and state and local public health authorities. In keeping with the heightened awareness and added measures being taken across government and industry, the following best practices are in place for all MDAR staff conducting food safety work:

- Respect and observe biosecurity practices implemented by food production and handling operations, including proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE) as warranted.
- Avoid close contact with people and practice social distancing as recommended by the public health authorities.
- Practice frequent handwashing and use of hand sanitizers, and avoid touching hands to the eyes, nose and mouth.
- Sick employees are to stay home, especially if experiencing respiratory symptoms, a fever, or cough.
- Pre-announcement of an inspection no less than 5 calendar days in advance of the inspection for most circumstances.

In addition to observing the hygienic practices above, an employee that experiences any of the following circumstances will not be assigned food operation inspection work:

- Has had someone living in their household or in their care diagnosed with COVID-19 within the last 14 days.
- Has had close social contact, as defined by the CDC, with a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the last 14 days.
- Has returned from or made connection through an international country with official travel restrictions due to COVID-19 in the last 14 days, or has a member of the household who has done so.
- Has, or has had within the last 24 hours, any cold or flu symptoms and a fever greater than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit.

The food safety activities of MDAR are essential for facilitating a food production and distribution system critical to the health and nutrition of Massachusetts' citizens. Through implementation of the measures above, MDAR will both protect the health of its employees and continue vital services to the industry and the public. MDAR will continue to monitor the ongoing guidance from CDC and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (HHS-DPH) on COVID-19, and will update personnel practices as warranted to ensure the health and well-being of our personnel and the protection of the industry based on the very latest public health recommendations.

Thank you for your ongoing cooperation and efforts to maintain the integrity of the food supply chain in Massachusetts during this public health emergency. Additional information and updates on the food supply chain and COVID-19 may be found on MDAR and DPH web pages.

<https://www.mass.gov/guides/covid-19-resources-for-agriculture>