Food Safety on Farms in Time of COVID-19

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SARS-CoV-2 is not a foodborne virus but has created a disruption across the whole food system

There are on-farm risks that need to be managed
- Some differently than foodborne risks, some the same

Prioritize most impactful actions

Be aware changes to markets and labor may require growers to make changes to their operations

Something new almost everyday...for everyone!
- We are all learning!

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Priority #1: Social Distancing

• Social Distancing is Most Important!
  – SARS-CoV-2 is predominantly spread person to person
• Think about the entire farm and how to implement at least 6 ft of distance between people
• Review planting, harvest, packing
• May need to rethink work schedules
• May need to slow down belt speeds
• Other considerations and solutions
Social Distancing Challenges and Risk Reduction Options

- Sometimes social distancing is not always possible
  - Planting, packing, checking out customers (e.g., u-pick)
- Use barriers and practices to reduce risks
  - Require cloth face coverings for everyone
  - Plexiglass
  - Provide hand sanitizer, handwashing options
- Divide crews by family or housing
  - Group people who are socially together
  - Minimize risks of losing all labor groups
Updating Training

• Social distancing and cloth face coverings
  – At work and in the community

• Handwashing and hand sanitizer use
  – Reduce risks from fomites
  – Also good for food safety!

• Don’t touch your face!
  – Very, very difficult for most people
  – Makes handwashing and hand sanitizer use that much more important!
Labor Impacts

• Hiring
  – Recruiting and keeping employees
  – Training with social distancing

• Housing
  – Managing farm provided housing
  – Educating employees about reducing risks while in the community and at their own homes

• Transportation
  – Managing on-farm transportation
  – Thinking about employee transportation to the farm
Cleaning, Sanitizing, Disinfecting
Oh My!

- Pre-COVID-19 still a need to help growers understand difference between cleaning and sanitizing
- COVID-19 created many questions about how and when to disinfect
  - EPA N-List of disinfectants: https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2
- Stick with current cleaning and sanitizing SOPs unless reason to believe COVID-19 on the farm
- Increase C/S of commonly touched surfaces
  - May use disinfecting for these areas
Cleaning, Sanitizing, Disinfecting Resources

- Many new resources but still lots of questions
- Always Be Cleaning & Sanitizing + Understanding Disinfection Webinar – L Johnston, C Simmons, E Rogers, C Gunter, NCSU
- A Guide to Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting for Produce Farms – C Callahan, UVM
  - https://blog.uvm.edu/cwcallah/2020/03/30/clean-sanitize-disinfect/
- Setting the Record Straight on Cleaning, Sanitizing and Disinfecting in the COVID-19 Era and Beyond – R Petran, Ecolab
  - https://producesafetyalliance.cornell.edu/resources/educators-group/
Commodity Movement Impacts

• Disruptions
  – Distribution issues, market channel issues
  – Too much shopping, not enough shopping, not the right size containers (institutional vs individual)
  – Need for crop destruction

• Modifications
  – Moving from wholesale to direct market
  – Exploring new collaborations; Joint CSA
  – Giving it away

Changes may mean modification of prevention practices
Foodborne Concerns Still Exist

- Foodborne pathogens still exist and pose risks
- Important to keep food safety practices in place
- Need to keep and perhaps expand market access
  - Meet buyer requirements; Develop new markets
- Audit extensions
  - USDA extended expiration dates
    (60 days from 5/31/20)
Actions for Growers to Consider

• Communication
  – Always important; Critical Now!
  – Lots of misinformation, need to convey risks, policies, and plans to employees, customers, and consumers

• Update farm food safety plan
  – COVID-19 is not foodborne, but since food safety plan has relevant policies and SOPS, easiest to add/modify

• Training, Training, Training
  – New policies and plans require training
  – Changing information requires training
Additional Resources

- **Best Management Practices for U-Pick Farms During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

- **NCSU COVID-19 Food Safety Resources**
  https://foodSafety.ces.ncsu.edu/covid-19-resources/

- **Institute for Food Safety at Cornell University**
  https://instituteforfoodsafety.cornell.edu/coronavirus-covid-19/food-industry-resources/
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