The COVID-19 impact quickly revealed the often unconsidered and unseen essential services that agriculture plays in our daily lives. Cultivating, processing, driving, stocking, inspecting and delivering food to our tables requires a critical workforce that we want to keep healthy and working. The food supply chain has been designated as a critical infrastructure industry that should maintain a normal work schedule while employers and workers follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) guidance to protect their health at work. See: Agriculture Workers and Employers, Interim Guidance from CDC and the U.S. Department of Labor. See also, Food Safety and the Coronavirus Disease (COVID 19) from FDA.

How do I maintain physical distancing in my food production/processing facility and food retail establishment where employees typically work within close distances?

To prevent spread of COVID-19, CDC is recommending individuals use physical distancing or maintaining approximately 6 feet from others, when possible. In food production/processing facilities and retail food establishments, an evaluation should be made to identify and implement operational changes that increase employee separation. However, physical distancing to the full 6 feet will not be possible in some food facilities.

Workers in the food and agriculture sector fill critical and essential roles within communities. Promoting the ability of our workers within the food and agriculture industry to continue to work during periods of community restrictions, physical distances, and closure orders, among others, is crucial to community continuity and community resilience. This was reinforced by the Department of Homeland Security in its Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce: Ensuring Community and National Resilience in COVID-19.

IMPORTANT: Maintaining physical distancing in the absence of effective hygiene practices may not prevent the spread of this virus. Food facilities should assure workers are using face masks and be vigilant in their hygiene practices, including frequent and proper hand-washing and routine cleaning of all surfaces. Hand sanitizers are not intended to replace handwashing in food production and retail settings.
The risk of an employee transmitting COVID-19 to another is dependent on distance between employees, the duration of the exposure, and the effectiveness of mask and employee hygiene practices and sanitation. When it’s impractical for employees in these settings to maintain physical distancing, effective mask and hygiene practices should be maintained to reduce the chance of spreading the virus.

Because the intensity of the COVID-19 outbreak may differ according to geographic location, coordination with state and local officials is strongly encouraged for all businesses so that timely and accurate information can guide appropriate responses in each location where their operations reside.

Sick employees should follow the CDC’s What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

Should employees in retail food and food production settings wear face coverings to prevent exposure to COVID-19?

On April 3, the CDC released an updated recommendation regarding the use of cloth face coverings to help slow the spread of COVID-19. CDC recommends the use of face coverings as a public health measure in public settings.

**CDC recommends** everyday preventive actions for everyone, including service industry workers and customers:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Wear a mask in public.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
  - If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.

A worker in my food production/processing facility/farm has tested positive for COVID-19. What do I need to do to continue operations while protecting my other employees?

All components of the food industry are considered critical infrastructure and it is therefore vital that they continue to operate.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19 that includes information on how a COVID-19 outbreak could affect workplaces and steps all employers can take to reduce workers’ risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19).

Food production/processing facilities/farms need to follow protocols, including cleaning protocols, set by local and state health departments, which may vary depending on the amount of community spread of COVID-19 in a given area. These decisions will be based on public health risk of person-to-person transmission – not based on food safety.

If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19, employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality about individual employees’ identities. Sick employees should follow the CDC’s What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

**FDA, CDC, and USDA have all stated that there are no reports at this time of human illnesses that suggests COVID-19 can be transmitted by food or food packaging. The Florida food supply remains strong, and keeping our workers safe and healthy will keep it that way.**