



NEWS RELEASE

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During Covid-19 Emergency Response, Food Workers and Inspectors Continue Critical Work

LANSING, MICH. Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Director Gary McDowell today reminded Michiganders that most components of the food and agriculture sector are part of the nation's critical infrastructure and remain open and operating under Governor Gretchen Whitmer's "Stay Home, Stay Safe" executive order that took effect at 12:01 a.m., Tuesday, March 24, 2020.

"All food, dairy and agriculture-related activities are considered by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to be part of the nation's critical infrastructure, and all aspects of food and agriculture production and distribution must continue to keep the supply chain moving," said McDowell. "This means food processors, truckers, grocery stores, restaurants and convenience stores will still be open and running to serve their customers, although many have modified their operations and hours of business to protect the health and well-being of their staff and communities. It also means farmers will continue preparing for the 2020 growing season, readying farm fields for planting, and ramping up to harvest early crops like asparagus and strawberries."

While operating during the COVID-19 emergency response, businesses should be extra diligent in following guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as well as local, state and federal government officials to limit disease spread. These strategies include social distancing, frequent handwashing and sanitizing of surfaces.

Workers should be encouraged to work remotely when possible and focus on core business activities. In person, non-mandatory activities should be delayed until the resumption of normal operations. When continuous remote work is not possible, businesses should enlist strategies to reduce the likelihood of spreading the virus. This includes, but is not necessarily limited to, enhanced cleaning protocols, separating staff by off-setting shift hours or days, and social distancing. These steps can preserve the workforce and allow operations to continue.

"No two businesses are alike, so each and every business needs to establish their own protocols for protecting their customers and workers," said McDowell. "It's been amazing to watch the industry step up and face this public health threat head-on. Together, we can get through this pandemic and move toward recovery."

In accordance with Executive Order 2020-21, and to protect the public health, the following components of the Michigan food and agriculture sector are deemed critical:

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- Workers supporting groceries, pharmacies, and other retail that sells food and beverage products.
- Workers supporting and operating gasoline stations.
- Workers supporting restaurant carry-out and delivery food operations.
- Food manufacturer employees and their supplier employees including those employed in food processing facilities (packers, meat processing, cheese plants, milk plants, produce, etc.); 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 including 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.
- Workers who care for animals at veterinary clinics, animal shelters and research facilities. Veterinary clinics should only be performing essential life-saving procedures; all other non-essential procedures should be delayed.
- Farm workers and support service workers including those who plant, grow, and harvest agricultural commodities; commodity inspections; fuel ethanol facilities; storage facilities; and other agricultural inputs.
- 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, specifically in-plant cafeterias, used to feed employees only.
- 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 including those employed in veterinary health; manufacturing and distribution of animal medical materials, animal vaccines, animal drugs, feed ingredients, feed, bedding, etc.; transportation of live animals, animal medical materials; deceased animals for disposal; raising of animals for food; animal production operations; slaughter and packing plants; and associated regulatory and government workforce.
- 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.

“MDARD food and dairy inspectors, laboratory and other regulatory staff, and those who support them continue their inspection, sampling and testing efforts, modified to protect the safety of staff and the businesses they inspect,” added McDowell. “I’m so proud of our team. They have trained and exercised for emergencies so they would be well-prepared to respond. The COVID-19 response has brought challenges unlike any other emergency staff has dealt with to date, but they have risen to the challenge and continue to do work that is critical for helping Michiganders get through this event and recover when it is over.”

Information around this outbreak is changing rapidly. The latest information is available at [Michigan.gov/Coronavirus](https://michigan.gov/Coronavirus) and [CDC.gov/Coronavirus](https://cdc.gov/Coronavirus).

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