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Steps You Can Take to Prevent the Introduction and Spread of COVID-19 on Your Dairy

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The recent COVID-19 events and realities are unprecedented. We are truly seeing history being made which will have an effect on the dairy industry and society as a whole. The objectives of this article are threefold: 1) provide a simple explanation of the COVID-19 virus, 2) provide simple operational practices that can be considered to minimize or even prevent a disruption of milk production and shipment, and 3) provide measures that workers can take to protect themselves and mitigate the spread of COVID-19. With a little contingency planning and preparation, the industry can survive the potential hardships and challenges related to this virus.

COVID-19: What is it?

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a new type of coronavirus that was first detected among citizens of Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in December 2019. In the United States (US), our first case was confirmed on January 20, 2020 in the state of Washington. As of early this week, all states and territories have active cases totaling over 11,200 and 162 deaths. COVID-19 is transmitted easily from person-to-person via air or sweat droplets and can survive on surfaces for 24-48 hours. The most common symptoms of infection include fever, dry cough, and shortness of breath. Depending on age and chronic medical conditions, illness caused by COVID-19 can be very mild (almost no symptoms) to severe, including possible death. COVID-19 is now a pandemic—a global outbreak of the disease. The situation in the US is quickly changing day-by-day and affecting the daily lives of many, including dairy farmers. We hope that today we can put you at ease by presenting a contingency plan for your farm as well as some hygiene practices for your workers to prevent COVID-19.

Farm Management

There are many online resources on how to prevent or mitigate the spread of COVID-19. OSHA has published guidance on preparing the workplace for COVID-19 (found here: https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf). Additional resources have been made available by the National Milk Producers Federation which can be found at https://www.nmpf.org/coronavirus/.

Here are some additional farm management considerations specific to dairy farm operations:

1. Basic hygiene practices should be practiced at work. Workers should be washing hands frequently using soap and hand sanitizer. Management should communicate the importance of good hygiene practices through signage at various locations throughout the farm.

2. Soap and hand sanitizer should be made available round the farm. This should include locations where there are essential off-farm visitors such as the front office and scale office.

3. Limit close interactions between coworkers. The milking parlor, maternity and hospital operations are areas that often necessitate close interaction among workers. Workers who show or report symptoms of COVID-19 should not be allowed to work or be on the farm. One strategy is to check worker body temeperatures before workshifts using inexpensive , no-contact infrared scanners that can be purchased online, or at a local pharmacy or other retailer.

4. Encourage workers to stay 6-10 feet apart and communicate via radios or cellphones. Work meetings should be limited when possible. Meetings should be held in a well-ventilated area or outside space. When group meetings do take place workers should be adequately spaced apart a minimum of six feet to mitigate possible virus transmission.

5. Workers should avoid handshaking and resort to other greeting methods like elbow and foot taps or distance waves. Food and beverage sharing between workers should be discouraged.

Adopted from Hoard's Dairyman online at: https://hoards.com/article-27444-what-dairy-farmers-must-know-about-covid-19.html?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=200323-344&utm_content=200323-344+CID_432037e9570e6ed09bbcb858e24f860e&utm_source=Intel&utm_term=Read%20More

6. All hard surfaces should be disinfected regularly. Recent studies have reported that active COVID-19 can remain airborne from 30 minutes up to three hours; on cardboard materials up to 24 hours, on stainless steel up to two days, and on plastic up to three days. A critical analysis of all work and product surfaces should be undertaken to identify which materials should undergo some form of a sanitization or cleansing. This includes two-way radios, cell phones, machinery cabs, office areas and desks, restrooms, break room surfaces, lockers, door handles, switches, time clocks, and any other surface that might provide an opportunity for virus transmission. Items should be disinfected at least twice a day using Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registered antimicrobial products for use against COVID-19 found here. Workers or teams on each shift should be assigned the responsibility to disinfect regularly used areas and surfaces. Communicate to these workers the importance of this task and the success of the farm depends on their effort and diligence.

7. Workers should wear appropriate Personal Protective Equipment or PPE (e.g., gloves, goggles, aprons, masks—when necessary) and replace as needed.

8. All worker uniforms should be cleaned or laundered daily.

9. Workers should be cross-trained to allow them to perform different job tasks on the farm. The same workers who have been trained to operate big machinery should not be working on the same work shift to avoid a limited essential machinery operation in the event of virus transmission among workers.

10. Non-essential off-farm visitors should not be allowed on the farm.

11. Inquire if there are family or friends of workers that would be interested in filling roles in case of a shortage due to COVID. Students on extended break or completing online courses the balance of the school year may be an option in this situation.

12. Consider talking with neighboring dairies about sharing workers if one dairy finds themselves in a worker shortage crisis.

13. Critical supply contingency planning should be undertaken to identify alternative suppliers of essential products.

Worker Hygiene Practices

To keep your dairy safe from COVID-19, encourage your employees to do the following:

1. Encourage workers to wash their hands regularly both at work and at home. COVID-19 can be prevented from entering the cells on the skin by washing hands with soap for 20 seconds or more—the equivalent of the 'Alphabet' song once or the 'Happy Birthday' song twice. When hand washing is not feasible, provide hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. This information is readily available on the back of all hand sanitizer bottles. Workers should avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth. Urge workers to practice covering their mouths and noses when coughing or sneezing, and to dispose of any used tissues.

2. Remind your workers that COVID-19 prevention does not stop at home. Encourage workers to continue practicing good hand washing hygiene at home and cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces. Other suggestions include: increasing ventilation by opening windows and doors, creating an emergency contact list, assigning a room in the house to be used to separate sick household members, stocking up on nonperishable food items and hygiene products enough for 14-days; and, if they have children dismissed from school or daycare, learning about their plan for continued education. One important practice to encourage is social distancing. Urge workers to cancel nonessential travel, events, or social gatherings—this includes crowds with 10 or more people. In case of large households consisting of related and nonrelated dairy farm coworkers, encourage them to agree on a consistent COVID-19 prevention plan for the household. Remind them that the actions of one person can have consequences for the rest of the household, including the elderly and those with compromised immune systems and chronic medical conditions.

3. Workers should know COVID-19 symptoms. Encourage workers to avoid close contact with sick people. Symptoms appear 2-14 days after exposure. Here are the most prevalent symptoms your workers should be aware of: *fever (above 99.5°F or 37.5°C), dry cough, shortness of breath.* Advise your workers to seek medical care immedialtely for evaluation if they believe they are sick. Workers should be advised to report any symptoms to management as sonn as possible. Prevention of transmission of COVID-19 among dairy farm workers is vital. Supervisors should interact with each worker daily to assess any signs or symptoms of COVID-19. This practice will reinforce a proactive prevention culture on the farm.

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