



# Best Practices for Conducting Produce Farm Inspections During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Conducting produce inspections during the COVID-19 pandemic requires personnel to modify their normal routine and increase their level of safety to protect themselves and the employees of the operation they are inspecting. Inspectors should consider these tips when preparing for and conducting an inspection.

## Pre-Inspection

- Review Local Area's Current COVID-19 Status. Ensure that the state or region where the farm is located has had their stay at home orders lifted or modified by the Governor and local authorities.
- Schedule a Produce Farm Inspection. Produce inspections are scheduled in advance of the inspection date which gives inspection staff the opportunity to discuss and obtain inspection information prior to arrival.
  - Utilize the [Scheduling a Produce Farm Inspection](#) checklist to obtain information needed regarding the farm and farm operation prior to the inspection visit.
  - Utilize the opportunity to discuss the farm's COVID-19 employee health practices.
  - Ask if employees are screened for COVID-19 symptoms prior to work and if positive and symptomatic employees are excluded from work.
- Personal Safety. Recognize farm owners, managers and staff are under an unusually high levels of stress in this is an unprecedented time. If this inspection is not a "for cause" inspection, and the operator appears under extreme pressure or agitated and you are concerned for personal safety consider delaying the inspection.
- Discuss Safety Precautions. Advise the farm contact of the safety precautions that you will be taking to limit the potential spread of the virus and protect their employees and yourself during the inspection. This might include:
  - Monitoring your health and rescheduling if you feel ill or have an elevated temperature;
  - Utilizing regular hand washing prior to and during the inspection as necessary;
  - Wearing a cloth face covering<sup>1</sup>, at minimum, during the inspection;
  - Maintaining social distancing (6 feet) to the extent possible during the inspection;
  - Calling upon arrival to meet outside the office or at a designated location near the field;
  - Traveling throughout the farm in your own vehicle without additional passengers;
  - Sanitizing inspection equipment prior to conducting the inspection.
- Verify Safety Practices. Verify the employee safety practices the farm has instituted and make every effort to conform to or exceed those requirements during the inspection. Ask if the farm has any specific protective equipment that employees and visitors are required to wear.



- Discuss the Inspection Plan. Discuss the inspection plan with the farm contact. Recommend limiting the number of farm employees that accompany you during the inspection to allow for proper social distancing.
- Cancel if Any Employees Become Ill. Ask the farm contact to call and cancel the inspection if any employees become ill with COVID-19 symptoms (cough, fever, or difficulty breathing, muscle ache, loss of taste or smell, etc.) or test positive for COVID-19.
- Sanitize All Inspection Equipment. Sanitize all pens, clip boards, laptops, cameras, and inspectional equipment prior to the inspection. Use an EPA approved sanitizer or sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol concentration.
- Waste. Carry a small unused trash bag for each inspection to dispose of all trash, cleaning materials, and disposable safety equipment after each inspection. Waste generated by the inspector during the inspection should not be disposed of in farm waste receptacles.

## **Inspection**

- Limit Inspection Personnel and Use Separate Transportation. Limit the number of inspection personnel participating. If multiple personnel will be conducting the inspection, plan to arrive in separate vehicles to the location. When traveling throughout the farm take your own vehicle and do not allow any additional passengers.
- Call Point of Contact upon Arrival. Call your farm contact upon arrival and have them meet you outside the office or at a designated location near the field. This will allow you to have any preliminary discussions in an open-air environment and make it easier to maintain social distancing, rather than meeting in a small office or meeting room. If you need to meet with management, arrange to do so in a conference room that will allow for social distancing (6 feet) between participants.
- Introductions. Introduce yourself and show your credentials. Avoid shaking hands or exchanging business cards.
- Personal Safety Equipment. Put on any personal safety equipment such as eye protection and cloth face coverings before exiting your vehicle. At minimum, a cloth face-mask should be worn. Change/laundry clothing after completing an inspection. If your program has mandated the use of any personal protective equipment (PPE), you should come prepared and be ready to utilize the PPE during the inspection. Make sure any PPE that is used during the inspection is properly disposed of or sanitized at the conclusion of the inspection. Always wash or sanitize your hands after removing PPE.
- Health Screening. Allow the farm to verify your temperature or ask questions about any illness symptoms you might have (in keeping with their employee health practices) prior to initiating the inspection. Only sign health statements or attestations in accordance with your agency's procedures.
- Verify Employee Health. Verify with the farm contact that none of the farm's employees recently tested positive for COVID-19 or are currently experiencing symptoms of COVID-19.



- **Limit Inspection Equipment.** Limit the equipment that is carried during the inspection, and only bring equipment that is necessary. Since you will be outside for much of the inspection, you may wish to carry a small container of hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) that can be easily transported.
- **Wash Hands.** Wash your hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds upon arrival at the farm. If there is not a convenient location for handwashing, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol).
- **Avoid Touching Frequently Touched Services.** Whenever possible, avoid touching frequently touched surfaces on the farm, in the farm office, or in out-buildings and allow the operator to open doors or turn on lights if needed.
- **Encountering Ill Employees.** If you encounter somebody that appears to be ill, you should take the necessary precautions to avoid that person and their work area. You may wish to ask the operator additional questions about that employee's apparent symptoms to ensure your safety. If the employee's symptoms are consistent with COVID-19, you should consider stopping the inspection and coming back at a later date to complete.
- **Avoid Enclosed Areas with Others.** Avoid entering small enclosed areas with other people. Ask the farm contact to wait for you outside small enclosed areas while you inspect the area.
- **Modify Inspection to Reduce Potential for Disease Transmission.** Consider modifying your routine inspectional practices with safety and disease transmission prevention in mind.
- **Exchange of Paper or Equipment.** Do not exchange paperwork, clipboards, pens, or other materials during the visit. Consider sending your paperwork to the farm electronically and collecting any documentation from the farm electronically (such as via e-mail). If you need to collect records from the farm, have a dedicated file folder that paperwork can be dropped into without you having to handle it.
- **Signature Collection.** Programs may wish to suspend the collection of signatures on official documents during the COVID-19 pandemic. Alternatively, staff can document the date, time, and person that the record was provided to, and indicate signature was not collected due to COVID-19.
- **Personal Safety.** If at any time during the inspection, you feel your personal safety is at risk, immediately discontinue the inspection, leave the farm and contact your supervisor.

### **Post-Inspection**

- **Wash Hands.** Wash your hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds prior to leaving the farm whenever possible or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol).
- **Sanitize Inspection Equipment.** Sanitize all equipment and electronics such as cameras, cell phones, and laptops that were touched or utilized during the inspection upon arriving at your vehicle.



- Remove Protection Clothing. Remove any protective clothing covering that was worn during the inspection and place it in a bag for proper laundering or disposal as appropriate. Use sanitizing wipes or spray to sanitize shoes.
- Use Alcohol-based Hand Sanitizer. Utilize an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) on your hands after returning to your vehicle and completing equipment sanitation and removal of lab coat or clothing protection.
- Sanitize Frequently Touched Services in Vehicle. Sanitize frequently touched surfaces in the vehicle, such as door handles, steering wheel, keys, etc.

### **General Employee Best Practices**

Throughout all of your daily activities, always follow the CDC guidelines for reducing the spread of the COVID-19 virus:

- Monitor Your Health. Closely monitor your health and stay home when you are not feeling well. Cover your cough or sneeze.
- Avoid Touching. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Wash Your Hands Often. Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom, before eating, and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- Alcohol-based Hand Sanitizer. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Clean and Disinfect Frequently Touched Surfaces. Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects.
- Wear Face Covering and Social Distance. Wear cloth face coverings when in public and maintain social distancing (6 feet apart) from others.
- Notify Supervisor If You Have Symptoms or Were Exposed to COVID-19. Immediately notify your supervisor if you develop symptoms, have been exposed to COVID-19, or test positive for COVID-19.

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<sup>i</sup> Cloth face covering is a minimum requirement, other more protective items are included such as N-95 respirator masks, or disposable masks as required by the agency.

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