

Wisconsin Farm Bureau COVID-19 Talking Points

About COVID-19: According to the World Health Organization, the disease causes respiratory illness with symptoms such as a cough, fever, and in more severe cases, difficulty breathing. You can protect yourself by washing your hands frequently, avoiding touching your face, and avoiding close contact with people who are unwell.

Impacts on Agriculture:

- American Farm Bureau recently released its first assessment for the impact COVID-19 will have on agriculture. You can view it [here](#).
- AFBF released an updated [impact evaluation](#) on April 3.

Talking Points:

- Wisconsin Farm Bureau is dedicated to continuing to be a voice for farmers and rural communities during these challenging times. WFBF has compiled a web page with COVID-19 resources and updates related to agriculture that can be accessed at [wfbf.com](#).
- Remember to talk with your farm workers about how they can stay safe during these times and how to handle situations if he/she or a family member would become sick.
- It is important to maintain normalcy during these unprecedented times. Buying large, or unusual amounts of any product can send shockwaves through the supply chain and cause others to not have access to the products or supplies needed.
 - This applies to agricultural products like seed, fertilizer, etc. as well.
- You should not assume that businesses are facilitating face-to-face meetings. If you have a meeting set up or need to set up a meeting, it is important to call ahead and make sure your appointment can still be accommodated or to learn of any changes that need to be made.
- Maintaining open lines of communication is essential. Don't assume anything. Call vendors, stakeholders or others you do business with to ask questions and find out if there is additional information you need to know.
- Don't forget to use virtual means to check on your friends, family and neighbors. Challenging times like these require us to band together like we've never had to before. While we can't visit face-to-face, we must still make sure those around us are being checked on and have a support system.
 - We can still show that #FarmNeighborsCare by making a phone call, setting up a video call or using other means to support our friends, neighbors and family members.

Emergency Order #28 (Updated 'Safer at Home Order'):

- The order is in effect from 8:00 a.m. April 24, 2020 through 8:00 a.m. May 26.
- Wisconsin residents working in non-essential industries are to remain at home or their place of residence unless seeking medical care, getting groceries or picking up medication.
- The extension does allow some businesses to reopen with certain limitations.
- There continues to be no requirement for farmers and farm workers to carry documentation while traveling for work.
- Farmers understand the importance and need to limit the spread of disease throughout a population and are grateful for the exemptions allowed to continue conducting business.

Milk Disposal:

- Some processors are asking dairy farmers to dispose of milk because there is excess product resulting from schools, restaurants and other food service channels not purchasing their normal quantities.
- This is good quality milk that would otherwise turn into bottled milk and other dairy products. We need to correct the backlog in the supply chain in order to get nutritious dairy products into the hands of those who need and want it.
 - If your local grocer is putting limits on dairy products, voice your concern and create awareness for dairy's demand. Any dairy product shortage in Wisconsin will only be temporary.
- Dairy cows can't be 'turned off'. They continue to make milk and farmers will continue to work hard to provide quality food products for families at the grocery store.
- Dairy farmers are good stewards of their land. If they are asked to dispose of milk, they are working with the DNR to ensure that milk is disposed of properly.

Meat Processing Plant Closures:

- Wisconsin Farm Bureau is working with other industry partners to monitor this situation and will be working with members to share the latest updates and resources.
- As the livestock industry copes with the spread of COVID-19, meat processing plants are slowing speeds to allow for the distancing of workers and the use of additional protective equipment to keep employees healthy.
 - Although food processing facilities are essential infrastructure, the spread of COVID-19 has caused some facilities to close for a period of time in order to minimize the spread of the virus.
- It is important for the food supply chain to remain operational throughout the pandemic for both consumers and farmers.
 - Consumers depend on high-quality meat products to feed their families.
 - Farmers depend on meat processing facilities to remain open so that they can continue to produce pork, beef and chicken.

Euthanasia:

- If livestock cannot go to market, they can become overcrowded, and it is unethical to allow any animal to suffer.
- Farmers are focused on doing the right thing for their animals and employees. Euthanasia is always a devastating last resort for any farmer. However, when farmers cannot send livestock to market, barns can become overcrowded which limits access to food and water and presents a significant animal welfare challenge. As farmers, we believe it is unethical to allow any animal to suffer.
- We do not know to what extent euthanasia is happening, but we do know is that this is a last resort for any farmer, and they will take every step they can before they resort to euthanasia.
- A farmer's relationship with his or her veterinarian is important during normal circumstances, but more now than ever, they will be working with them to ensure animal welfare standards are met.

- Farmers care deeply for the livestock they raise and take pride in supplying top quality protein to consumers. Being required to euthanize otherwise healthy animals is mentally and emotionally challenging. These trying times are presenting a number of challenges many of us have never dealt with before.

Mental Health:

- Any farmer who is feeling overwhelmed and needs mental health support should reach out to the Wisconsin Farm Center at 800-942-2474.
- This is a very challenging time and farmers across the state and nation are facing this together. Now is not the time to ignore feelings of hopelessness or helplessness. Reach out to the Wisconsin Farm Center or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline if you need assistance.
- Remember to check in on your neighbors and family members via phone call or video chat during these times when they may be feeling isolated.

General impact points:

- The COVID-19 pandemic is dealing a serious blow to businesses across our country, and farmers and ranchers are not immune, facing enormous volatility as markets and supply chains rapidly react to changes.
- While the food supply chain remains strong today, there are serious challenges we're working to overcome.
- These include the lost food service market that translates to lost farm income, packing and processing plant closures and the disparity between the low price paid to farmers and the high retail price, raising concern about potential market manipulation.
- In particular, the closing of dairy, beef and pork processing plants due to worker illness and low demand is putting some farmers in very difficult situations.
- The deep drop in ethanol production is having a ripple effect on corn crop prices and the availability of animal feed.

American Farm Bureau Efforts:

- Farm Bureau remains vigilant in identifying and helping to address issues with the Administration and Congress to protect our food supply and ensure continued access to it.
- We are sharing important information with farmers across the country about precautions needed to protect their families, workers and communities.
- We are partnering with food banks to find a solution that delivers the extra produce and dairy that farmers are plowing under and dumping due to lost demand to food banks that are struggling to keep up with demand.
- We are working closely with rural health hospitals and other care providers to assure that they get the material and support they need during this crisis.