



# PREVENTIVE MEASURES IN THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR to Guarantee a Continuous Food Supply for the Population During Covid-19\*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As part of their efforts to address the 2019 coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), most countries have had to adopt containment or quarantine measures to stop the spread of the disease, such as the shutdown of all non-essential services, as recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Consequently, only essential services, on which countries depend for their basic functions, have continued to operate. These include services provided by workers involved in the food chain (agricultural production, packaging, processing, transportation, distribution and marketing), who play an important role in food and nutritional security.

To guarantee a continuous food supply during the pandemic, countries have adopted various measures, some stricter than others, depending on the specific characteristics of their production sectors and marketing channels.

Within this context, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) prepared this

technical document, which recommends a series of preventive measures that can be applied by farm owners and managers, food establishments, as well as collection centers and markets. Its purpose is to bolster and complement national efforts to efficiently manage prevention measures during the COVID-19 pandemic, and, in turn, protecting the health of employees, preventing the spread of the disease, and guaranteeing a continuous food supply for the population.

To successfully implement preventive measures during COVID-19, it is crucial that government institutions commit to their fulfillment, by providing adequate guidelines and the necessary resources. This, in turn, will create a positive preventive-driven culture that goes beyond food safety and considers workers' health and well-being, especially in rural areas.

The content included herein will be continuously reviewed and updated, based on technical and scientific information as it becomes available.

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## 2. OBJECTIVE

To guarantee a continuous food supply for the population by issuing recommendations aimed at protecting the health of agricultural workers and preventing the spread of COVID-19.

## 3. THE COVID-19 DISEASE

COVID-19 is the disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, a novel member of the coronavirus family. Both the virus and the disease were discovered in December 2019. At present, there is no cure for COVID-19, but intensive research is currently underway around the world to find one. WHO is continuously updating its scientific information and providing recommendations to overcome COVID-19.

The disease can be transmitted from person to person through droplets that an infected person expels from his or her mouth or nose when coughing, sneezing or exhaling. These droplets can also contaminate objects and surfaces that may be touched by other people, who can contract COVID-19 by touching their eyes, nose or mouth with contaminated fingers.

The COVID-19 virus can survive anywhere from a few hours to several days. However, there is no

conclusive data regarding how long it can survive on different surfaces. Therefore, cleaning and disinfecting surfaces are crucial.

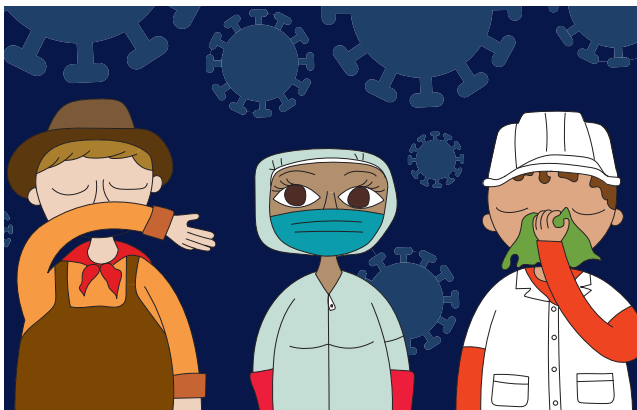
According to WHO, COVID-19 symptoms, which may be mild and appear gradually, vary in type of symptoms exhibited. The most common symptoms are fever, tiredness and dry cough. Some patients may experience pain (in the throat, for instance), congestion and a runny nose or diarrhea while others may have no symptoms at all.

WHO advises against self-medicating to prevent or cure COVID-19. If you experience any of the abovementioned symptoms or have been in contact with a person with similar symptoms or who has tested positive, seek medical attention.

Only official or authorized laboratories in each country can test for and diagnose COVID-19. Similarly, preventive measures that must be followed by the population with respect to COVID-19 are defined by the national authorities of each country and published in official media.

### COVID-19 and food safety

It is unlikely that the virus that causes COVID-19 can be spread through food. However, good hygiene practices on farms, in food establishments, as well as in collection and marketing centers must be emphasized.



## 4. PREVENTION MEASURES ON FARMS AND IN FOOD ESTABLISHMENTS



### 4.1 Organization of production processes

- a) Review and re-organize production and the flow of processes on farms as well as in packing facilities and processing plants, to ensure that persons maintain the recommended distance from each other. WHO recommends that people maintain a 1-meter distance between each other, while other entities recommend an even greater distance.
- b) Implement changes without disregarding good practices and safety systems that were already in place.
- c) Incorporate new practices that are specifically geared towards preventing COVID-19, and
- d) strengthen existing practices related to health and hygiene, to reduce the risk of infection as well as the spread of COVID-19.
- e) Implement work from home, insofar as possible. This option should be made available to staff members who are not directly involved in production, older adults or persons with underlying health conditions.
- f) If it is not possible to maintain the recommended social distancing in the facilities, schedule different work shifts.
- g) Based on the characteristics of the production processes, establish small crews or groups of people to carry



out activities separately and in an organized manner. Avoid switching people from one group to another.

- g) Establish schedules for the use of common areas (cafeterias, rest areas, etc.).
- h) Avoid crowds in small spaces (processing rooms, warehouses, etc.).
- i) Renew the air in all work areas as often as possible, either naturally or artificially, and clean air filters more often.
- j) Stagger the arrival and departure times of staff, by organizing them into shifts.
- k) Restrict staff members' access to areas in which they do not carry out their work.
- l) Emphasize personal hygiene practices (such as the use of masks and gloves, as applicable) among staff members who must move through various areas, such as supervisors, quality control and maintenance staff, etc.
- m) Ensure that transporters or vehicle drivers (suppliers, product dispatchers, raw material handlers, etc.) follow the hygiene protocol for farms and food establishments.
- n) Suspend all non-essential group activities, such as celebrations and sports activities.
- o) Put up posters in key areas of the farm and food establishment, to provide information on proper handwashing and behaviors to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- p) Keep staff on farms or in food establishments informed of measures issued by health authorities with respect to COVID-19.
- q) Develop a contingency plan to respond to suspected cases or the spread of the disease among staff members, to protect their health as well as the business.

## 4.2 Staff health

- a) Establish a mechanism to monitor the health condition of staff members entering the farm or food establishment. Staff may include field workers, milkers, fumigators, harvesters, food handlers, warehouse keepers, packers, transporters, maintenance staff, administrative staff, etc. Consider implementing the following measures:
  - Temperature monitoring. Keep in mind that temperature monitoring alone will not alert to asymptomatic COVID-19 carriers.
  - Use the following questions to check for symptoms and assess staff exposure to the disease:
    - Have you been in contact with someone who was diagnosed with COVID-19?
    - Do you have a cough, fever or shortness of breath?
    - Have you tested positive for COVID-19 or are you awaiting test results for the disease?

*If the staff member's temperature is higher than 37°C or if he or she responds affirmatively to any of the previous questions, he or she should be sent home to comply with the measures established in the country. Take note of this situation.*



- b) Ensure that staff members, particularly supervisors, are able to recognize the most common symptoms of COVID-19 and take appropriate action.
- c) Ask staff to report to their supervisors or the person responsible if they experience any of these symptoms or if they notice them in a coworker.
- d) Draft a simple protocol so that staff know what to do when they experience or notice any of these symptoms. Place the protocol in areas where it will be visible.
- e) Follow up on a daily basis with staff members who were sent home: by phone, through WhatsApp messages, via email, etc.
  - Reassess the degree or amount of contact that the infected staff member had with his or her coworkers.
  - Send anyone who was in close contact with the staff member home.
  - Proceed with established guidelines from the health authorities in your country.
  - Reassess production processes, given that it may be necessary to hire additional staff to keep production processes running.

#### **What to do if a staff member is tested for COVID-19**

- Take advantage of the time that it takes to get the test results back, by planning measures to be implemented should the results come back positive. Keep in mind that other staff members may need to be tested, which could affect production.
- Inform staff members of the situation to prevent the spread of fear or rumors due to a lack of information.
- Assess the degree or amount of contact that the infected staff member had with coworkers.
- Bolster cleaning and disinfection procedures, especially in work areas and lockers used by staff members.

#### **What to do if the COVID-19 test results come back negative**

- Inform staff of the results.
- Assist the staff member in resuming his or her work.

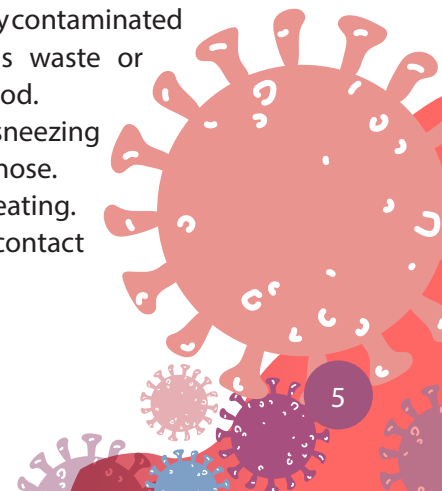
#### **What to do if the COVID-19 test results come back positive**

- Consult with local health authorities to determine whether other staff members should be tested.

- f) Reduce visits to the farm or food establishment as much as possible, limiting entry to only the most essential workers, such as field technicians, animal health professionals, and sanitary and phytosanitary authorities.
- g) Control the entry of any external visitors by applying a protocol that is similar to that which is used for staff on your farm or in your food establishment.
- h) Inform visitors of the procedures that are in place during the COVID-19 pandemic, and ensure that they fully understand the measures. Provide visitors with any necessary attire.

### **4.3 Personal hygiene**

- a) Emphasize proper handwashing, both on farms and in food establishments.
- b) Require staff to wash their hands regularly, even if they wear gloves, and especially:
  - When they start working.
  - Upon resuming work after taking a break.
  - Immediately after using the restroom.
  - After handling any contaminated material, such as waste or raw, uncooked food.
  - After coughing, sneezing or blowing their nose.
  - Before and after eating.
  - After being in contact with animals.



# When should you wash your hands



- Before and after being in close contact with a person to provide assistance.
- c) Ensure that workers wash their hands properly with soap for at least 20 seconds, using water responsibly, and that they dry their hands with a paper towel.
- d) Inform workers that, after washing their hands, they can also use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 70% alcohol, rubbing their hands together for 10 seconds.
- e) Emphasize the fact that hand sanitizers do not replace proper handwashing with soap and water, and that it should only be used after proper handwashing.
- f) Ask staff to avoid certain behaviors that can facilitate the spread of COVID-19, such as:
  - Greeting others with a handshake, hug or kiss.
  - Smoking or vaping.
  - Spitting.
  - Chewing, eating or drinking while working.
  - Touching your eyes, mouth or nose.
  - Sneezing or coughing into your hands.
  - Sharing food, glasses, plates and other eating utensils.
- g) Encourage staff members to wear their own work clothes and shoes, depending on the conditions of the specific production process they carry out.

- h) Provide all staff with gloves and masks, as required in each production process, and ensure that masks are worn correctly.
- i) Inform staff that they must not reuse single-use masks; staff must discard these masks in a closed bin and then wash their hands with soap and water. If you are providing washable masks, be sure to provide adequate means for collecting and washing them.
- j) Discard used masks adequately.

#### 4.4 Personal hygiene facilities and restrooms

- a) Provide adequate personal hygiene facilities (these may be portable).
- b) These facilities should be adequately located and include:
  - Handwashing stations with water, liquid soap and paper towels. These stations must

not be used for other purposes (such as for washing food or utensils).

- Sinks that are specifically designed for adequate hygiene, such as hands-free electronic faucets. If this is not possible, measures aimed at minimizing contamination from faucets should be implemented.
  - Restrooms with toilet paper and lidded wastebaskets.
  - Adequate changing rooms, as applicable.
- c) Be sure to provide disinfection stations in areas where people or goods arrive (loading and unloading areas, warehouses, etc.), which must be equipped with disinfectants.

#### 4.5 Sanitation

- a) Review and strengthen plans, procedures and activities for cleaning and disinfecting facilities, equipment, tools and utensils. Keep in mind that disinfection processes lose their effectiveness without prior cleaning.



- b) Increase the frequency with which common areas, such as reception areas and meeting rooms, as well as surfaces that people touch (phones, keyboards, mice, tables and door handles, among others) are cleaned and disinfected.
- c) Clean and disinfect staff members' tools and utensils after each use or work shift, depending on the characteristics of the production process, and keep them in good condition.
- d) Ensure that tools and utensils are clean before each use.
- e) Use only approved disinfection products, depending on the type of surface, and follow the instructions on the label regarding concentration levels, application, contact times, etc.
- f) Provide sufficient cleaning and disinfection equipment, utensils and materials, as well as protective equipment and clothing for staff who carry out these tasks.
- g) Develop a specific cleaning and disinfection procedure for areas, equipment or tools, should a staff member on the farm or food establishment test positive for COVID-19.
- h) Provide closed bins specifically for discarding used masks and gloves.
- i) Review the frequency with which waste is removed from the premises, and increase the frequency if necessary.

## 4.6 Training

- a) Provide all staff working on the farm or in food packaging, transportation or processing with

training on key aspects related to COVID-19. Staff may include supervisors, temporary workers, part-time and full-time workers, administrative and service personnel, etc.

- b) Organize staff into small groups to practice social distancing.
- c) Obtain information only from reliable sources such as WHO, the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), IICA, national authorities, etc.
- d) Utilize adequate learning materials and methods, such as posters, videos, etc.
- e) Deliver training sessions in the native language of staff members.
- f) Keep a record of training sessions carried out.
- g) Be sure to appoint a supervisor or person responsible for verifying staff compliance with new practices during COVID-19.





## 5. PREVENTION MEASURES IN COLLECTION CENTERS AND MARKETS

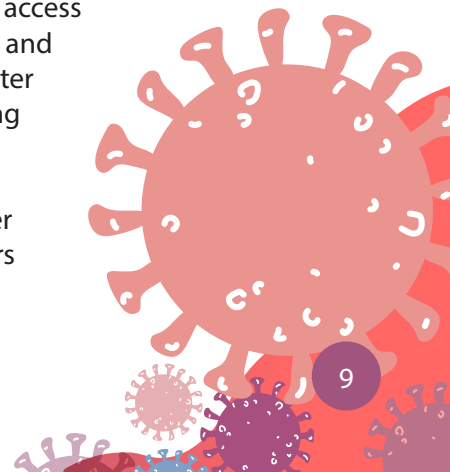


### 5.1 Organization of activities

- Establish measures for controlling the entry of customers, to avoid large crowds of people (schedules, cutting capacity, etc.).
- Keep cleaning and disinfection products permanently available, including hand sanitizer with 70% alcohol.
- Prohibit the entry of pets.
- Appoint supervisors responsible for verifying the compliance of traders and customers with social distancing and hygiene measures.

### 5.2 Personal hygiene facilities and restrooms

- Ensure that restrooms and sinks are equipped with liquid soap, paper towels and lidded wastebaskets.
- Provide permanent access to water, liquid soap and paper towels to foster adequate handwashing (for 20 seconds).
- Place hand sanitizer (70% alcohol) dispensers



in restrooms and other strategic areas, to facilitate its use.

- d) Maintain the order, cleanliness and disinfection of hygiene facilities and restrooms.



### 5.3 Sanitation

- a) Implement procedures to clean and disinfect facilities before, during and after commercial activities.
- b) Apply cleaning and disinfection procedures for vehicles entering these premises.



- c) Review the frequency with which waste is removed from the premises, and increase the frequency if necessary.

### 5.4 Information for customers

- a) Put up posters in key areas of supply centers and markets, to provide information on proper handwashing and behaviors to prevent the risk of infection and the spread of COVID-19.



## 6. REFERENCES

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