



DACF Recommendations for Physical Distancing at Agricultural Essential Services

The Governor's [Executive Order](#) of April 1, 2020, requires all non-essential businesses and their employees to stay home but for certain activities. *The Order continued to exempt essential businesses and their employees, including agriculture, from such restrictions.* DACF's COVID-19 [website](#) provides further guidance about essential businesses.

Essential businesses are responsible for providing a safe workplace and to practice physical distancing to protect employee health. Every agricultural operation is different, but there are some basic and important steps that can be taken on-site.

DACF's COVID-19 [website](#) has many resources available that provide further details and specifics relating to hygiene, food safety, and other best practices. Please utilize the website in tandem with this document.

What's in this Document:

- Hygiene Fundamentals – basics for businesses relating to employee health, as well as tips for businesses dealing with customers (pick up, grab and go, or on-site).
- Physical Distancing Considerations – Non-Consumer Facing (including milking parlor tips)
- Physical Distancing Considerations – Consumer Facing

Hygiene Fundamentals

1. Essential businesses should take all best efforts to ensure proper sanitation.
 - a. Regularly clean and disinfect commonly used surfaces and equipment. UVM Extension has an overview of cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting for farms [here](#).
 - b. Review this [list](#) of Maine-registered disinfectants for use against COVID-19.
 - c. Employees should take care to wash their hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds and avoid touching their faces. If available, also provide sanitizer and/or disinfecting wipes.
2. Suggestions for operations that are public-facing:
 - a. Offer hand sanitizer and/or handwashing stations for customers and vendors.
 - b. Pre-package foods whenever possible ("grab and go" bags).
 - c. No samples.
 - d. Ensure that staff handling money, vouchers, and credit cards wear gloves, and consider keeping separate staff for payments and product handling/packaging.

- i. Consider rounding prices for limited use of coins or running a “tab” for customers to minimize cash transactions.
 - e. Disinfect commonly touched surfaces regularly.
- 3. The US Centers for Disease Control is advising “the use of simple cloth face coverings to slow the spread of the virus and help people who may have the virus and do not know it from transmitting it to others. Cloth face coverings fashioned from household items or made at home from common materials at low cost can be used as an additional, voluntary public health measure.”
 - a. University of Maine Cooperative Extension Mask Information is available [here](#).
- 4. Emphasize good hygiene: Employees should be reminded to cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or the corner of their elbow.
- 5. Employees who have symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, or shortness of breath) should notify their supervisor and stay home.
 - a. Information regarding unemployment, employee sick time and leave is available [here](#).

Physical Distancing Considerations – Non-Consumer Facing

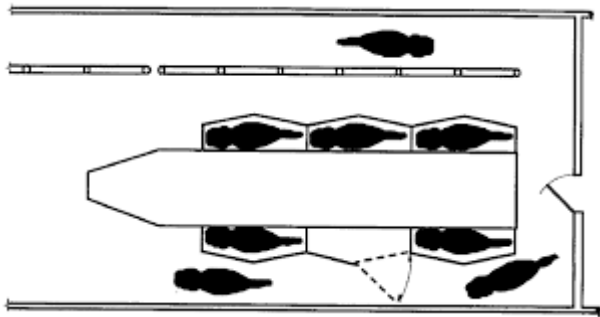
- 1. Every operation will be different and should assess physical distancing needs for staff/operations on a case by case basis. This should include:
 - a. Limiting farm/business access to essential employees.
 - b. Communicating with employees via text/cell phone if and where possible to avoid face to face meetings.
 - c. Creating/rearranging workspaces to be 6 feet apart. Place tape on the floor marking 6 feet to display the space needed between certain areas.
 - d. Adjusting shifts in order to reduce the number of employees in an enclosed space, including break rooms.
 - e. Coordinating traffic patterns (i.e., how employees should move within work areas) to avoid crossing paths with other staff.
 - i. Tape/arrows on floor to direct movement in a particular direction.
 - ii. Have staff verbally communicate when they are moving through certain sections of a building or processing line so that others can move out of the way, such as in hallways or narrow spaces.
 - f. Consider requesting employees keep personal belongings and food in their personal vehicles or in designated areas away from others to avoid close interactions with others.
 - g. Placing clearly visible signage reminding employees to practice physical distancing and good hygiene.

2. Set physical distancing expectations with service providers who may be visiting your business. Ask providers of feed, seed, fertilizer, or pesticides, or veterinarians to call ahead and provide instructions on where they should or should not go on the premises.
3. Consider creating task lists that can help employees understand and follow appropriate procedures on the farm/facility to help reduce the risk of COVID-19. An example template from University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension is available [here](#).

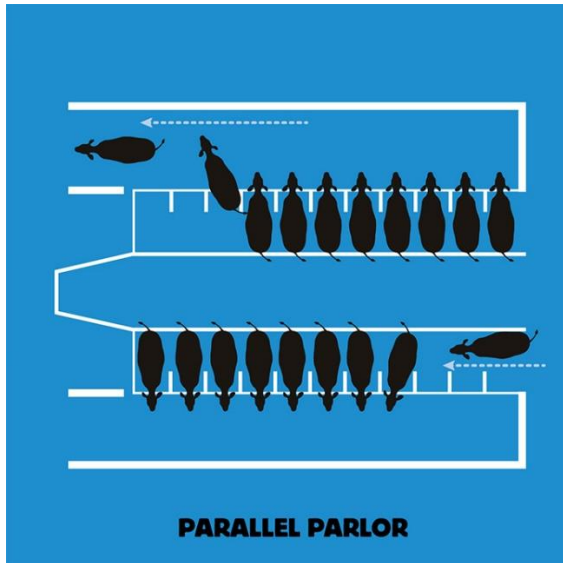
Milking Parlor Guidance (Gary Anderson, UMaine Cooperative Extension):

1. Depending on the size of the parlor, distancing can be an issue. If the parlor is big enough to have two milkers, I would suggest working in zones. Over time the configuration of parlors has been to decrease the udder to udder distance to minimize steps in the parlor. Depending on the parlor configuration, this distance is variable. The closest cow to cow is a parallel parlor and the longest, the side opening parlor - we have both in Maine. The herringbone and its variations would be in the middle.
2. So, if you had a parlor with 8 cows and two people milking, having 1 person on cow 1 and the second on cow 5 and moving to the back would keep the distance at the maximum for that space. This example would have 2 zones and milkers would work within their zone. When they switched to milking on the other side, they would maintain that same distance. This example uses a small parlor that would have the greatest stress on maintaining that distance.

Visual Graphic for Side Opening and Parallel Milking Parlor Arrangements:



Side Opening



Physical Distancing Considerations – Consumer Facing:

Many of the above-listed recommendations are likely applicable to retail facing agricultural enterprises. The following suggestions are for those aspects of a farm/producer that also interacts with the public.

As a reminder, On March 31, 2020, Governor Mills signed Executive Order 28 FY 19/20 that restricts the number of people allowed at essential businesses at any one time. The number of people who may enter the retail space of essential businesses is as follows:

- Less than 7,500 square feet limit the number of customers in the store at one time to 5.
- More than 7,500 and less than 25,000 square feet limit the number of customers in the store at one time to 15.
- More than 25,000 and less than 50,000 square feet limit the number of customers in the store at one time to 50.
- More than 50,000 and less than 75,000 square feet limit the number of customers in the store at one time to 75.
- More than 75,000 square feet limit the number of customers in the store at one time to 100 and install protective shields between customers and checkout clerks as soon as practicable.

Given the above parameters, businesses are encouraged to consider the following when handling interactions with the public:

1. Businesses should examine a map or diagram of their farm/business that illustrates customer movement through their facility.

- a. Where do you want customers to go? How do you keep them moving in one direction without backtracking?
2. With the flow established, channel customers through the environment:
 - a. If your retail space has aisles, make them one way, and put direction signs on the floor. Use one store door for entrance and one for exit if available.
 - b. In a greenhouse, it may mean blocking the ends of aisles so a line will form. It will be long, and it may snake, but it prevents backtracking.
 - c. In a farmyard, it may mean using stakes and string to create paths where otherwise it would be field or lawn.
 - d. At a farmers' markets, rearrange the market layout to maximize traffic flow and facilitate social distancing at checkout areas (see also DACF's [guidance document](#) on farmers' markets; note that retail square footage restrictions do not apply to outdoor farmers' markets).
3. In order to manage traffic, assign staff to manage the line outside, as well as entrances and exits. Use tape/string for inside lines.
4. Enforce physical distancing by prominently posting signs at entrances and on the floor (if possible) to notify customers to stay six feet apart. Those signs can also be placed at every register, on front doors, and in many places throughout the business environment.
5. Clearly communicate the following to your customers, whether online, over the phone, or with visible signage:
 - a. Hours of operation.
 - b. Available services (e.g., curbside, delivery, online, or order ahead services) and how to access them.
 - c. Any changes to terms/policies.
 - d. Physical distancing requirements on site.
 - e. Reminders to stay home if feeling ill.