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Department of Agriculture Outlines Updated Farm Labor Requirements, Advocates for Skilled Labor to Ensure Food Supply

Harrisburg, PA – Today, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture provided farmers who provide housing to their workforce – be it domestic, migrant, or guest H-2A workers – with enhanced requirements for seasonal farm labor to maintain a healthy agriculture workforce to ensure necessary farm labor can continue during COVID-19 mitigation in Pennsylvania. The Wolf Administration continues to advocate for a safe, skilled agriculture workforce to perform essential duties to keep Pennsylvania’s food supply chain strong.

“Each year, Pennsylvania’s agriculture industry relies on guest and seasonal workers to complete essential agriculture jobs; leaving crops in the ground or on trees is just as bad, if not worse, than having no crops at all,” said Redding. “We’ve issued modifications to our farm labor camp requirements to all agricultural employers with farm labor camps to keep agriculture moving in Pennsylvania, with a healthy and protected workforce.”

Pennsylvania is home to more than 360 permitted Seasonal Farm Labor Camps with nearly 4,300 workers. The workers in these camps are primarily migrant workers – sourced by their company – or H-2A workers – sourced federally. Even before COVID-19 hit Pennsylvania, the Department of Agriculture’s Bureau of Food safety oversaw the [Seasonal Farm Labor Camps](#) where these guest workers reside. The [Seasonal Farm Labor Act](#) and regulation sets standards for conditions of work, living quarters, occupancy, camp sanitation, food facilities, fire protection, and safety of farm workers. In addition to these required standards, the department has issued additional requirements for employers to follow to mitigate against COVID-19 for their workforce.

The following are some examples of necessary provisions to maintain the health and safety of seasonal farm workers:

- Per CDC recommendations, there should be a minimum of six feet between beds;
- Beds should be positioned so that workers sleep head-to-toe to limit exposure to respiratory droplets;
- Provide workers with cloth face masks to wear while in housing;

- Ensure bathrooms and other sinks are consistently stocked with soap and drying materials for adequate handwashing;
- Provide hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available;
- Ensure high contact surfaces are cleaned and sanitized on a routine basis with [EPA-registered disinfectants](#);
- Ensure essential supplies for cleaning and sanitizing are available in all living quarters and worksites;
- Designate an individual responsible for maintaining routine cleaning.

In addition to these additional requirements to keep workers from getting sick with COVID-19, the [Modified Seasonal Farm Labor Camp Requirements](#) include steps to take if an employee is diagnosed with COVID-19.

Last week, Governor Tom Wolf [sent a letter](#) to U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue outlining recommendations to support and sustain Pennsylvania agriculture. In addition to requests for funding stimulus, which was [announced](#) by the USDA last week, Wolf outlined Pennsylvania's need for a supported, well-paid H-2A workforce:

In addition to support through funding, we need your support in the way of our workforce. Now more than ever, the labor demands of Pennsylvania agriculture are high. The H2A program provides skilled workers that sustain Pennsylvania's agriculture sector and perform essential duties that keep our supply chain strong. I strongly urge you not to cut adverse effect wage rates for these workers. Now more than ever, it's important to maintain living wages for all workers in agriculture. In addition, at a time of unprecedented unemployment, lowering wages in agriculture will only serve to disadvantage this industry as it looks to hire additional workers and compete with other industries. I am proud of those agriculture and food processing employers in Pennsylvania that have been paying far above the federal minimum wage for years, and many of these are employers who participate in the H2A program. It is unconscionable to consider breaking from a contracted wage rate for workers who are risking their lives to grow and harvest the food every American relies on for survival.

"Taking steps to protect our workforce and pay them well are steps to ensuring a safe, secure food supply," added Redding. "These steps also ensure that farmers' harvests aren't going to waste, during a time when so many are experiencing food insecurity as they stay home to save lives."

For a complete list of guidance documents and information as it relates to agriculture during COVID-19 mitigation in Pennsylvania visit agriculture.pa.gov/COVID. For the most accurate, timely information related to Health in Pennsylvania, visit on.pa.gov/coronavirus.