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Wolf Administration Offers Guidance to Food Processing Facilities to Ensure Safety of Workforce, Food Supply

Harrisburg, PA – Health Secretary Rachel Levine, Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding, and PEMA Director Randy Padfield today hosted a webinar with food processing facilities across the commonwealth to provide recommendations for reducing COVID-19 outbreaks among employees and maintaining continuity of operations for a secure food supply.

“We are thankful for our essential workers, including Pennsylvanians working in food processing facilities, who are keeping food on our tables,” Dr. Levine said. “We must keep them safe while they are at work and at home. These precautions are designed to do both.”

The webinar was an effort to provide a comprehensive approach to addressing company and employee health and safety concerns amid COVID-19 mitigation in Pennsylvania, while also providing market stability for farmers and continued access to food.

“We cannot afford for our food supply workforce to go down because of COVID-19, or for them to feel unsafe and not show up to work; families across the commonwealth are relying on them for a secure supply of food,” said Redding. “In addition to complying with Dr. Levine’s worker safety order, we hope that processing facilities will strictly adhere to the guidance we provided them with today. Their employees working on the frontlines deserve it, and Pennsylvanians rely on it.”

The guidance included separate recommendations for processing facilities in areas with widespread transmission and limited transmission, as well as steps all facilities should immediately implement, for both management and employees, including:

- Daily temperature and symptom screening,
- Paid sick leave without penalty,
- Encourage frequent self-monitoring,
- Provide face coverings (not medical-grade masks),
- Provide gloves where appropriate,
- Increase frequency of routine cleaning,
- Enforce 6-foot social distancing for entire workforce or provide plexiglass partitions where social distancing is not possible,

- Enhance cleaning of common areas and break rooms,
- Stagger breaks and shifts to decrease number of employees working at same time,
- Structure break rooms so that seats are fixed to points that are six feet apart,
- Provide additional handwashing/sanitation stations and mandate hand hygiene,
- Make clustering of workforce a violation,
- Prohibit visitors and vendors from having close contact with workforce,
- Wherever possible, adhere to contactless delivery of goods and product,
- Translate all appropriate materials into appropriate languages.

The recommendations provided today followed a worker protection [order](#) signed by Secretary Levine on Wednesday, April 15, directing protections for critical workers.

“Ensuring food security and availability during emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic is critical to supporting the most basic needs of the citizens of the Commonwealth,” said PEMA Director Randy Padfield. “Taking this opportunity to discuss the unique needs of the meat processors during this unprecedented time is key to making sure they have the information needed to protect the safety of their workers.”

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.