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BARNYARDS & BACKYARDS

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COVID-19 SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS DURING AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES

All of us prioritize the safety of agriculture families and the sustainability of the industry as part of our mission and clientele. With that in mind we share these items for farm and ranch safety.

Considerations

- Interactions with sources of infection are imminent due to the interface of agriculture and communities,
- Consider rescheduling interactions that can be delayed or breaking them into smaller efforts,
- Agriculture functions must be completed to provide food and fiber to our nation,
- Many rural communities are dependent on the agriculture industry,
- Rural America values are largely based on agriculture functions,
- Agriculture production families are such a small segment of the population that avoiding compromise of this essential group is essential to the world,
- Always have a safety monitor to watch for someone with symptoms and sideline them.

Recommendations

For daily operations

- Recognize the signs of infection and address them promptly,
- Practice good handwashing technique and other cleaning and hygiene practices,
- Practice 14-20 days of isolation for any new entries into your location,
- Reach out to elder and challenged neighbors to help them during a pandemic,
- If family or employees are ill, immune compromised or infected, have them avoid all interactions with others,
- Discourage visitors and unnecessary deliveries until infection levels drop.

For group work

- Schedule events with the minimum number of workers possible,
- Ask all help to wear personal protection (facemasks and gear that will not hold or transfer moisture) and maintain as much social distance as possible,
- Clean all equipment before and after work events and anytime a different user operates equipment by establishing cleaning and disinfection stations at the worksite,
- Form work teams from family or those who are regularly interacting, avoid mixing teams with other operations,
- If risk and workers can be reduced by doing repeated smaller events – consider it,
- Evaluate if changes in equipment can reduce manpower needs and cross-exposure,
- Do not trade jobs or roles during group work efforts,
- If food or water is provided, make sure exterior moisture surfaces are minimized, and package meals in dry containers separately and avoid open container use,
- Limit social interaction before, during and after functions.
- Monitor all participants for 15 days and encourage medical evaluation promptly.

For large audience events (sales, auctions, other)

- Arrange seating to allow wider than normal separation,
- Provide enough space for audiences to examine livestock without crowding,
- Clean the site before and after the event,

- Double the amount of properly cleaned restrooms,
- Include requests that all attendees wear PPE and send only one representative per agricultural operation if possible,
- Ask catering to provide individually packaged food and drinks with lids,
- Arrange coverage by video or internet, if possible, for off-site viewing,
- Limit social interaction before, during and after functions,
- Encourage reporting and sharing of illness reports before, during and for 15 days after events.

For more information, contact the author (information below).

These resiliency and safety tips for agriculture producers amid the COVID-19 pandemic and springtime agricultural work were recently shared by the University of Wyoming Extension's state lead for the Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN).

Scott Cotton made the recommendations based on a combination of agricultural functions, epidemiological principles and disaster resilience.

The University of Wyoming Extension has also created a one-stop shop for resources to help the public at bit.ly/uwyo-extension-covid.

Scott Cotton is serving on the Wyoming Unified Command COVID Response Team. He is from a legacy Wyoming ranch family and served for over 30 years as a rural Emergency Medical Technician, firefighter, state certified blood-borne pathogen trainer, and is the senior area extension educator based in Natrona County and also serving Converse and Niobrara counties. He can be reached at (307) 235-9400 or at scotton1@uwyo.edu.

AMENDMENTS INVIGORATE GARDEN SOILS

Wyoming soil can present some challenges in soil type, pH, fertility levels, electrical conductivity (salt in the soil) and moisture.

There are some easy and inexpensive ways to amend soil for a successful vegetable garden. Start with a soil test and know exactly what is needed. A soil test kit can be picked up at your county extension office or from the Colorado State University soils lab. The CSU address is Colorado State University Soil, Water and Plant Testing Laboratory, Room A320, Natural and Environmental Sciences Building, Colorado State University, Fort Collins CO 80523. Its web address is www.soiltestinglab.colostate.edu.

Wyoming native soils tend toward the alkaline side of the scale with pH around 7.5 and higher. This higher pH tends to tie up plant nutrients, which may reduce crop yields. Vegetables like soil more acidic with a pH of 6.5 to 6.0, which is difficult to achieve without a lot of amendments like peat moss or sulfur. Peat moss has a pH around 5.5 to 4.5 and is a great vegetable garden amendment.

Leaves, grass clippings, coffee grounds (filter, too), kitchen vegetable scrapes, pulp from juicing - all make great soil amendments. They help increase soil organic matter, add fertility, help loosen hard soils, and give sandy soils more structure. They are a form of all-season, slow release fertilizer, which is best for growing vegetables. You can direct bury the scraps for cold composting and feed the worms, or you can do regular composting.

Adding manures to the garden soil can cause short-term and long-term soil problems. The references of being too "hot" is caused by the salt content, not the nitrogen content, of manure. Manure will also have weed seeds along with the risk to plant and people pathogens like E. coli, even if it's been composted for a year. I don't recommend using manures in western soil vegetable gardens.

Soil should only be worked when dry. Working soil when wet risks compaction and a net loss of organic matter. Soil compaction is very difficult to overcome and will take a lot of non-manure compost to undo. Add organic matter every time you work the soil, and only work the soil a couple times to make it ready to plant. Excessive tilling just breaks down the soil.

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Transforming decrepit ground into dynamic soil

Want to know more about soils for successful gardening in Wyoming?

University of Wyoming Extension educators and specialists answer questions from the public and discuss the many ingredients that help turn wimpy ground into robust soil.

This recorded Facebook Live presentation is by the Barnyards and Backyard small acreage project. Go to https://bit.ly/soil-vegetable-garden.