

## Managing an Essential Business in Today's World

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Owning and managing a business can take a lot of work. Adding on extra demands like restrictions from COVID-19 makes this job even more stressful. Agriculture businesses are certainly an essential part to our economy. That doesn't mean you are exempt from contracting the virus that has taken hold of our entire world. There are several things you can do to help keep you and your employees safe during this critical time.

Agriculture businesses include food production, agronomic product sales, Boarding facilities, livestock auctions, farms, food sales and more. Southern Indiana has a great diversity of these essential businesses, making it hard for people to shelter in place. This is a great time to update your biosecurity plans and implement training for everyone who visits your business. Adding personal protection equipment (PPE) is great if used properly. Gloves and masks have been popular items recently and are effective if changed out after each task, moving to a new location, getting into a vehicle, touching your face, answering your phone eating, drinking, or using the restroom. Wearing them constantly throughout your day just increases the movement of the virus through your business. Also think about take temperatures daily or asking employees to take their temperature before leaving their house.

If your staff is assigned specific duties, now is the time to cross-train. Let's take for example a hog farm. There is usually staff that is in charge of feeding all pigs in the barn. Think about splitting teams and stagger so that if someone does become infected in one group, you still have another team able to do the job and feed the pigs every day. Think about how your operation works in order to keep safe distances between employees and prepare for a worst case scenario.

When you return home, think about what you might be bringing to your family. A suggestion we have is to create a dirty/clean line. If you enter your house through your garage, set everything you are bring home on the dirty side of the line. This could be a literal line of tape. Have clean shoes, clothes, and totes to change into and transfer groceries or other items from bags that could be transferring the virus. Wipe off packages before bringing them inside. The virus can live for several days on hard surfaces. Softer items like cardboard, the virus is not as easily supported.

Think outside the box when it comes to selling your products. If you have a store on site, use online options for customers to order and pay then schedule pick up times. If you usually sell through a Farmers Market, ask if your market will continue as planned this year and make a backup plan to open a roadside stand at home. Changing location or processes can deter some customers, so marketing of your product is extremely important. The lack of an actual market shouldn't keep you from doing your best to promote your products. Utilizing social media for advertising and sales could give you the boost you need to bridge the consumer gap.