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Department of Agriculture Reassures Pennsylvanians: COVID-19 Not Transmissible through Food, Supply Chain is Secure

Harrisburg, PA – Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding and Department of Agriculture Food Safety Director Jeff Warner today assured Pennsylvanians that there is no evidence that human or animal food or food packaging is associated with transmission of COVID-19. Redding also reviewed the department's recommendations to retail food and agriculture operations for continuity of business, inhibiting transmission, and maintaining a healthy workforce to ensure continuous access to food during COVID-19.

"I want to assure Pennsylvanians and ease their fear: food is safe," said Warner. "There is no evidence of COVID-19 being transmissible through food or food packaging."

Grocery stores, food manufacturers, and distributors have been provided guidance to protect their workforce and consumers from COVID-19. This includes the following CDC and FDA recommendations:

- Enforce social distancing in lines, separate customers and employees by six feet whenever possible.
- Implement visual cues, such as tape on the floor every six feet, to help customers keep a six-foot distance from others whenever possible.
- Install floor markings to require customers to stand behind, until it's time to complete the transaction.
- Consider limiting the number of people in the store at one time. Implementing a maximum capacity and assigning staff to manage the number of people entering.
- Consider setting special hours for vulnerable populations, such as the elderly or immuno-compromised. Recommend allowing these populations to enter the store earliest in the day to reduce chances of exposure and ensure access to inventory.

Guidance was also provided for sanitization and employee protection, to further inhibit transmission in manufacturing environments and grocery stores. Some recommendations include:

- Do not allow symptomatic (fever of 100.4° F or greater, signs of a fever, or other symptoms) or ill employees to report for duty.
- Regularly clean and disinfect surfaces to limit employee contact and increase frequency of cleaning and sanitizing of common touch points (door handles, touch-screens, keypads).
- Consider altering store hours to allow for increased cleaning and re-stocking without customers present.
- Cross-train employees and rotate staff between cashier, stocking, and other duties, to limit mental fatigue in adhering to social distancing measures.
- Consider installing sneeze-guards at cashier stations.
- Schedule handwashing breaks every 30-60 minutes. Employees should wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available and

hands are not visibly dirty, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%-95% alcohol may be used. However, if hands are visibly dirty, always wash hands with soap and water.

- Assign a relief person to step in for cashiers so they can wash their hands with soap for a full 20 seconds. Provide hand lotion so workers' hands don't crack.
- Consider providing hand sanitizer at cash registers for staff and customer use in between transactions.
- Consider only operating every other register or check-out lane to create more social distance.

"Pennsylvania's grocery stores, food banks and pantries, food manufacturing and agriculture industry have a heavy responsibility right now: to provide continuous access to food, safely, during the most challenging crisis most have ever experienced," said Secretary Redding. "We've worked hard to impress upon these truly life-sustaining businesses that just because they are essential, this is not business as usual. The guidance we've provided is what they must implement to protect their workforce; it's what they must implement to save Pennsylvanians and provide for them at the same time."

Following a brief pause in support of the national, "15 Days to Slow the Spread" initiative, effective April 1, 2020, the Department of Agriculture re-deployed the state's food safety inspectors to ensure continued protection of Pennsylvanians and prevent foodborne illness.

"It's time to put our boots back to the ground and resume food safety inspections and offering in-person guidance to these essential businesses," added Warner. "We're going to do our best to help Pennsylvania businesses provide the safest food possible to consumers. Pennsylvanians need to know their food is safe, something we can only ensure through proactive inspections."

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.