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### Introduction:

The purpose of this best practice is to give wild blueberry producers the resources to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Use this best practice and the Farm Safety Nova Scotia [COVID-19 Health and Safety Prevention Guide](#) to build your own COVID-19 plan. Keep up to date on current [public health](#) recommendations and make changes where needed.

These practices aim to minimize the spread of COVID-19 person to person by maintaining physical distancing and cleaning & disinfecting practices between workers, shippers/receivers, plant workers, and all involved along the value chain.

### Hazard Assessment & Control:

COVID-19 is a health hazard that poses a risk to everyone who works on the farm. It is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. The virus can be spread by breathing in droplets from the air when a person coughs or sneezes, droplets that land on another person, and through droplets that rest on surfaces that are commonly touched by all workers on the farm.

Conduct a [hazard assessment](#) for your wild blueberry operation. This will determine the risk associated with the operation and the controls required to be implemented to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Consider possibilities for the potential spread of COVID-19 for the following to include but not limited to hand raking; using mechanical harvesters, single operator machines such as grasshoppers, and walk behind machines; forklift operation; boxes and totes; processing and receiving stations; transportation; pallets and wrapping material; and all tasks the workers perform.

### Health and Safety Responsibilities:

Determine the roles and responsibilities of the farm owner, managers, supervisors, workers, and contractors. More workers may be needed this season in order to effectively implement hazard controls to prevent the spread of COVID-19 as well as to enforce the hazard controls with the workers and contractors.

### Training Workers:

Farmers are required to communicate and train workers on the risk associated with COVID-19 and how to stop the spread of the virus while working on the farm. A sample orientation checklist as well as a COVID-19 Communication Checklist are available on the [Farm Safety Nova Scotia](#) website.

### Communication:

#### Posters and Signs:

Let workers and contractors know if they are experiencing any of the following symptoms, they will not be permitted to work in any part of the wild blueberry harvest to include, transport, shipping/receiving, harvester operator, hand raker, sorter, etc.....

Signs & Symptoms may include:

- fever (i.e. chills, sweats)
- cough or worsening of a previous cough
- sore throat
- headache
- shortness of breath
- muscle aches
- sneezing
- nasal congestion/runny nose
- hoarse voice
- unusual fatigue

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Prepare workers and contractors before coming to work by communicating the health requirements as well as put up [signs](#) at the entrance and in parking areas to prepare them before coming on the property.

Let workers and contractors know that pre-screening measures are required before coming on the property as well as the procedures for preventing the spread of COVID-19. Consider posting signs for hand washing, physical distancing, use of hand sanitizer, taking off gloves, wearing masks and face shields, stopping the spread, and what to do if a worker or contractor is sick.

### Transportation:

Most Wild Blueberries will be in large 300 lb totes which will be moved on and off trailers with a forklift which limits the manual handling of the product. Drivers must ensure a regular schedule is kept for cleaning and disinfecting the cabs of the trucks and frequently touched surfaces on trailers as well as maintain 6 feet or 2 meters of physical distance while the trailer is being loaded and unloaded. A [Contact Tracking Log](#) may be helpful to document where the drivers are going on farm business to have a point of reference if there is an COVID-19 outbreak on or off the farm.

Most fields will be a distance from the farm access point, and transportation to the field to harvest the berries may be required. Follow the best practice below in transporting workers to the field.

1. Have workers use their own vehicle. Use directional signs to ensure they know where to go.
2. Load the transport vehicle from back to front maintaining 2 meters or 6 feet apart from each other.
3. If using a closed vehicle, avoid having anyone sit up front with the driver. Keep space between passengers.
  - a. Roll the window down to increase ventilation.
  - b. Recommend passengers to wear a mask or cloth face covering.
  - c. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or the sleeve of your elbow when you cough or sneeze.
4. Unload the vehicle from front to back maintaining 2 meters or 6 feet apart from each other.
5. Ensure the transport vehicle is stocked with tissues and a hands-free waste container to dispose of tissues. Driver to remove waste after each trip.
6. Driver to wipe down all surfaces of the transport vehicle touched with disinfectant after passengers are offloaded.
  - a. Surfaces may include windows, window controls, door handles, arm rests, head rests, steering wheel, shifter, cargo boxes, tissue box, hand grips, railings, etc.

### COVID-19 Outbreak:

#### [If One of Your Workers or Contractor Tests Positive for COVID-19](#)

When a worker or contractor tests positive for COVID-19, Public Health will contact the worker or the contractor and they will work together to identify all close contacts and determine if they need to self-isolate. Sign in and sign out sheet for workers will help identify those individuals that the worker or contractor were in close contact with.

If Public Health doesn't contact the farm, then it was determined the risk was low and workers can continue working. You don't need to shut down farm operations if one worker or customer tests positive for COVID-19.

Follow the [If You are Sick](#) resource to identify the correct measures for worker isolation on or off farm, gaining medical help if needed, and cleaning and disinfecting protocols. Call 8-1-1 to report the case to the health authority.

## Personal Hygiene:

### Hand Washing Stations:

Water of any temperature can be used with ample amount of soap, and single use towels to dry hands which should be disposed of in a lined container.

Typical hand washing stations may become a challenge for work in the field environment so creating hand washing stations in remote areas may need some creativity. Review these ideas on [Building Your Own Hand Washing Stations](#).



Strategically place hand washing stations in the parking lots, in shipping/receiving areas, and strategically throughout the field or use as mobile units that move with the workers. Remember to wash your hands before you eat when working in the field and while operating the harvesting equipment.

Generate a hand washing schedule, protocol for each task, or set timelines to ensure hygienic practices are met to prevent the spread of COVID-19 along the value chain. Ill practice in this preventative measure can cause a chain reaction of infection in which can significantly delay production in such a short harvest season.

### Hand Sanitizer:



Washing hands with soap and water is recommended whenever possible because handwashing reduces the number of germs and chemicals on hands. If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Review hints and tips on [hand sanitizer](#), the [dangers of hand sanitizer](#), and a list of [local suppliers](#). Position the hand sanitizer, where it is safe to do so in the same locations as the hand washing stations and in particular, areas where hand washing stations are not possible.

### Wearing a mask:

When to use a [mask](#):

- Masks are not necessary and are not protective to healthy people but can prevent the spread of the virus from sick people. If you are healthy, you only need to wear a mask if you are taking care of a person with COVID-19.
- Wear a mask if you are coughing or sneezing.
- Masks are effective only when used in combination with frequent hand washing and the use of hand sanitizer.
- If you wear a mask, then you must know how to use it and dispose of it properly.
- Masks are not recommended as a substitute for physical distancing.

### Face Shields:

Face Shields can act as a barrier when it is not possible to mount or hang other physical barriers where 6 feet or 2 meters of physical distancing cannot be maintained based on the work task.

A face shield should extend to below the chin. It should also cover the ears with no exposed gaps between the forehead and the shield's headpiece. It is recommended by Public Health Canada that a non-medical or cloth face covering still be worn when wearing a face shield.

Face shields have a few advantages over just wearing masks alone as they are reusable as long as they are cleaned regularly with soap and water and disinfected. They cover the eyes, nose and mouth. Face shields are

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generally comfortable to wear and they form a barrier that keeps people from easily touching their own faces. If the worker coughs or sneezes it does not go beyond the face shield.

When speaking, workers and contractors sometimes pull down a mask to be heard, but that is much harder to do while wearing a face shield.

When a non-medical mask or cloth face covering is worn correctly, air will not be able to escape around the outside of the mask. If there is air leakage around the mask, this can cause prescription eye glasses, safety glasses, and face shields to fog up. Adjust the mask so it fits close to the face to prevent air leakage.

### Heat Stress:

Heat stress occurs when the body has to work too hard to cool off. The body's core temperature gets too high for the body to cool off quickly enough. Other than environmental temperatures and humidity, wearing extra personal protective equipment such as gloves, masks and face shields may take longer for the body to cool down. More frequent breaks may be required under these conditions.

Measures a worker and contractor can take to prevent heat stress may include the following:

- Even though you are short staffed and have a mountain of work to do on the farm, be sure to incorporate rest breaks throughout the day. Take breaks in a shady area.
- Drink water frequently. Don't wait until you are thirsty to drink. Avoid caffeinated beverages, which deplete the body of fluids.
- Eat regular, light meals throughout the day. Replace salt if you are sweating a lot, you can do this by lightly salting your food. If you are required to limit salt intake in your diet, check with your doctor before adding salt.
- Take your time when moving from a cool area to a hot one, such as leaving an air-conditioned vehicle, equipment, or tractor cab. Your body needs time to get used to the temperature. The same goes for getting into a hot vehicle, equipment or tractor cab as it can be a shock to the system. Cool them down before entering.
- Dress in loose, comfortable light-colored clothing made of light fabrics such as cotton. Cotton cools the body 200 times faster when it is wet than any other fabric.
- Layer your clothing so you can add and take off items of clothing as the temperature changes.
- Wear a hat with a wide brim when working under the sun.
- In humid conditions, take frequent breaks as it takes longer for the sweat to evaporate to cool the body.
- Increase ventilation in buildings by opening windows and doors where air conditioning is not available. Add fans to work areas where they won't compromise the product or violate food safety regulations.
- Workers taking medication should check with a pharmacist to see if they are susceptible to heat illness.
- Train workers on the signs and symptoms of heat stress and how to mitigate the hazard.

Heat Cramps	Heat Exhaustion	Heat Stroke
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Move the worker to a shady area and loosen clothing.</li><li>• Drink lightly salted fluids.</li><li>• See a doctor, if the cramps persist.</li><li>• Allow the worker to rest.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Move the worker to a shady area and loosen clothing.</li><li>• Start cooling the worker very quickly by fanning and pouring cool water over them. Add a cool damp cloth to the back of the neck.</li><li>• Have the worker drink salted water, if available.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A very serious, and life-threatening condition and the workers needs to seek medical help right away.</li><li>• Call 9-1-1, and begin cooling the worker as quickly as possible. Pour cool water or immerse them in water if possible.</li><li>• If unconscious, do not give the worker water.</li></ul>

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### Wearing Disposable or Other Gloves:

Disposable gloves may be worn when hand washing stations are not readily available. It is important to understand how to [remove gloves](#) and dispose of them to prevent contamination and the risk of infection.

Alternate types of gloves may be worn when handling small boxes, hand raking berries, weighing berries, handling the larger boxes or while performing tasks where the disposable gloves may become easily ripped or torn. Cloth/leather or soft material gloves will need to be laundered daily or a new pair worn each day to prevent contamination of surfaces. If gloves become excessively soiled, change them out for a clean pair.

### Physical Distancing:

Physical or social distancing is a method used to keep space between yourself and another person. This is one of the easiest prevention methods to stop the spread of COVID-19. This prevents a person from being within the distance to which droplets can be transmitted through the air in which a person could inhale or absorb those droplets or have the droplets land on them or on a surface.

Follow the tips below to maintain physical distancing:

- Consider having only the forklift or pallet jack operator in the shipping and receiving area while boxes are being loaded and unloaded. Workers can enter and maintain distance once the forklift or pallet jack operator is finished loading or unloading trucks.
- If loading and unloading trucks by hand, maintain physical distance and create traffic flow pattern.
- Stagger the times for workers to take breaks in the shipping/receiving areas and in the field.
- Set up hand washing areas to maintain distance.
- Stay 2 meters or 6 feet apart in parking lots, in lunch rooms, in the fields, and in the shipping and receiving areas, where possible.
- Avoid overlap of people coming and going in shipping/receiving facilities by using directional signs.
- Do not gather in groups of more than 10 people.
- Avoid large gatherings or crowded areas.

### Facility Hygiene:

#### Cleaning & Disinfecting Procedures:

Most common EPA-registered household or retail [disinfectants](#) will sanitize surfaces sufficiently to prevent the spread of germs. Use a disinfectant appropriate for the surface and as recommended by Health Canada. Do not work on or with surfaces that are porous. The more frequently the surface is touched, the more frequently it should be cleaned and disinfected. Set a cleaning and disinfecting schedule based on use. If surfaces are dirty, clean them using soap and water before disinfecting them.

Review the [How Long COVID-19 Lasts on Surfaces](#) document to note the viability of COVID-19 on different work objects and surfaces and adjust your cleaning and disinfecting protocol and schedules accordingly.

Rather than relying on memory, it may be helpful to maintain a [cleaning and disinfecting log](#) to document all cleaning procedures. Adapt the Farm Safety sample cleaning and disinfecting log to suit your individual operation.

Limiting the number of operators and drivers may be helpful in reducing the amount of cleaning and disinfecting between users. If possible, have only one operator and driver per piece of equipment or truck per day. Each operator and driver to be trained in the cleaning and disinfecting protocol as well as in completing a log for the truck and equipment.



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Common surfaces and things to clean and disinfect may include:

- Electronics (phone, debit/credit machines, tablets, computers...)
- Large and small totes and boxes
- Truck, harvester & forklift cabs (Steering wheel, controls, shifter, buttons, window, grip handles, and door handles)
- Frequently touch buttons, knobs, and surfaces of sorting machine
- Washrooms
- Scales
- Hand Tools
- Door/Drawer Handles
- Dispensers
- Railings/guards
- Counters and tables

### Shipping & Receiving Stations:

At shipping and receiving stations, designate specific areas for intake of product and for sending out product. Try to prevent the flow of traffic from overlapping by placing directional arrows and directional signs to mark laneways and traffic patterns clearly.

Have drivers call ahead before making the pick up or delivery to be sure physical distancing and traffic flow patterns can be maintained. Ensure to give the driver clear instructions on the requirements and expectations when arriving at the farm or facility. Include the following information in your instructions:

- Specific wild blueberry drop-off and pick-up location.
- Signs to look for when navigating to wild blueberry drop-off and pick-up location.
- The contact person and their contact information.
- Expectation of social distancing and disinfecting protocols, if persons present.
  - If possible, coordinate drop-off or delivery with no person present.

Keep a log at the station to for pick up and deliveries. Items to note in the log may include:

- Date and time of the drop-off and pick-up.
- Name of person doing the drop-off and pick-up.
- Company or farm name of the drop-off and pick-up driver.
- Source of the items that were dropped off or delivered.
- Any in-person contact during the drop-off or pick-up.
- Disinfection procedures followed.

Preparing for materials to be picked up or delivered:

- Wear gloves, and exercise thorough hand washing technique.
- Limit the number of people in the drop-off or pick-up location and maintain social distancing of 6 feet or 2 meters.
- If possible, have no workers in the area until after the drop-off or delivery is complete.

Operators should periodically clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as the controls on forklift and pallet jack throughout the shift. See cleaning and disinfecting guidelines above.



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## Fresh Pack Considerations:

Maintain the best practices listed above for Fresh Pack facilities but note the following specific considerations for this work group.



### Personal Hygiene:

- Where 6 feet or 2 meters of distance cannot be maintained, wear a mask appropriate for the task and face shield.
- If wearing gloves while handling berries, change gloves frequently.
- If not wearing gloves while handling berries, wash hands more frequently.
- Do not touch your face, mask, or face shield while working. If they are touched, notify other workers, step away from the line to wash hands/replace gloves, replace mask, and to disinfect face shield.
- Wear fresh clean clothes each day coming to the plant.
- Do not eat or drink while on the line or when handling berries.

### Facility Hygiene:

- Stagger the times for workers to take breaks. Ensure 6 feet or 2 meters
- Set up washing areas to maintain physical distance. Closing wash stations and rotating workers through wash stations may be helpful.
  - Ensure to clean and disinfect washrooms and hand washing stations more frequently and document on the cleaning and disinfecting log.
- Stay 2 meters or 6 feet apart in parking lots, in lunch/break rooms, throughout the plant and in the shipping and receiving areas, where possible.
- Avoid overlap of people coming and going by using directional signs. Mark the 6 feet separation between workers.
- Ensure adequate ventilation by either opening doors and windows where possible without compromising food safety regulations.
- Service building ventilation systems regularly and increase air exchanges per hour. Clean and change filters more frequently than outlined in the system operator's manual.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as line operation buttons, emergency stop buttons and rails regularly throughout the shift. Document the cleaning on the Cleaning and Disinfecting Log referenced above.
  - May want to keep the same schedule as for cleaning the belts and when cleaning the line at the end of the shift.
- Clean and disinfect boxes coming in from the field where possible. Be sure not to compromise food safety regulations during this process. Avoid handling boxes where possible.
- Clean and disinfect floors at the end of each shift.

For additional help with your farm health and safety guideline during the COVID-19 pandemic and to address specific concerns based on your operations, contact the Farm Safety Advisor by calling 902-957-2785 or e-mailing [lbrookhouse@nsfa-fane.ca](mailto:lbrookhouse@nsfa-fane.ca).