Minnesota Farm Bureau Federation
Weekly News Update
March 30, 2020

Minnesota Farm Bureau #StayHomeMN

The health and safety of our members, staff and families is our number one priority. We are following the guidance issued from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH). Those include, but are not limited to, practicing social distancing which is maintaining a minimum of six feet of separation from other persons.

The following policies for the MFBF staff have been put in place since March 16:

- We are instituting a work from home policy for all staff.
- APDs are not physically attending county Farm Bureau board meetings or other county Farm Bureau events. Face to face meetings with members are discouraged.
- We do have a conference call line available if your county would like to use that option for a meeting. Zoom meetings are also an option. Please contact your APD for further information and scheduling assistance.

These policies will be in place for the foreseeable future.

We strongly encourage county Farm Bureaus and county Farm Bureau members to follow the CDC and MDH guidelines. The main message we are hearing is that we all need to do all we can to limit the spread of COVID-19 and following these guidelines is the best course of action.

All MFBF staff will be answering their phones and responding to emails and texts during this time.

We urge all of you to follow the best health practices to keep you, your families, neighbors and communities safe.
CARES Act

President Trump has signed into law the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) which provides the financial resources immediately necessary to ensure that children and low-income families continue to have access to healthy and affordable food.

Additionally, the aid to farmers in this package, including funding for the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) and the Office of the Secretary, will allow USDA to begin crafting an appropriate relief program for agriculture, including but not limited to support for specialty crop farmers, farmers supplying farmers’ markets, dairy farmers and ranchers raising feeder and fed cattle. Given the sharp downturn in ethanol markets and downstream impact on corn prices across the Midwest, an aid package for these agribusinesses may also be warranted.

Read more on this AFBF Market Intel report.

H-2A

The U.S. State Department revised its restrictions on the processing of visa applications submitted by farm workers in Mexico after hearing concerns that the restrictions would lead to a farm worker shortage in the U.S. Consular officers can now waive the visa interview requirement for eligible first-time and returning H-2A and H-2B applicants, making more workers in the H-2 program available while prioritizing public health.

For more information on the H-2A program, especially for impacts of COVID-19, visit here or email aglabor@usda.gov.

State Update

The State Legislature met in a one-day session last week to pass nearly $330 million in funding for small businesses, child care, healthcare facilities and other items related to COVID-19. The bill passed the House 99-4 and the Senate 67-0, and Governor Walz has signed it into law.

For more details on the bill, click here.

The Legislature could return as early as April 14, but with the implications of the pandemic, there is no definitive return date. The 2020 legislative session ends on May 18 as mandated in Minnesota’s constitution. Only the Governor has the ability to call for a special session.

**Due to COVID-19, the March 31 Day on the Hill event is cancelled.**

Livestock Hauling Executive Order

Governor Tim Walz’s Executive Order 20-24 (E.O.) provides emergency relief for transportation of livestock from regulations of motor carriers and drivers operating in Minnesota. The E.O. temporarily suspends provisions regarding spring weight restrictions and special permits or restrictions to the overweight movement of live animals.

Drivers License and CDL Updates
Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) issued an Emergency Declaration, initially on March 13 and then updated on March 18, which provides "hours-of-service regulatory relief to commercial vehicle drivers transporting emergency relief in response to the nationwide coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak." The March 18 update offered new guidance on which operations are covered under the declaration, clarifying fuel haulers are included. It also provided new guidance on "mixed load" operations. For more information on trucking click here.

In the bill signed into law by Governor Walz, many issues pertaining to drivers licenses were addressed. This legislation extends the expiration date for any valid driver's license, instruction permit, provisional license, operator’s permit, limited license and farm work license that would expire during the peacetime emergency. The expiration dates for these licenses will be extended for two months after the month the peacetime emergency ends.

In addition, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security is extending the REAL ID full enforcement deadline to October 1, 2021. The deadline was originally set for October 1, 2020 but is being delayed by one year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This gives Minnesotans more time to apply for a REAL ID or enhanced driver's license or ID card.

Minnesotans will still be able to renew vehicle registrations online and by mail during the peacetime emergency. As such, there are no extensions for expired or expiring vehicle registrations.

Find more information here.

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**Employee Transit Information**

In accordance with Governor Walz’s Executive Order 20-20, many Farm Bureau members would like to have documentation for themselves and/or their employees in their vehicles to carry as they travel to and from work. While the Governor has been clear that their priority is education over enforcement, Minnesota Farm Bureau has drafted a template that you can customize for you or your employees that have been classified as critical services under the Executive Order.

The form is designed to help the agriculture workforce verify the purpose of travel in the event law enforcement or other officials question their reasoning for being on the road rather than at home. It is intended to be used for general use only and is not intended to be considered specific legal advice. If you or your employees that are considered critical have been stopped to review paperwork on their way to work please contact MFBF President Kevin Paap at 507-327-4555.

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**USDA Adds Flexibilities for Crop Insurance**

USDA’s Risk Management Agency (RMA) is authorizing additional flexibilities due to coronavirus while continuing to support producers, working through Approved Insurance Providers (AIPs) to deliver services, including processing policies, claims and agreements. These flexibilities include: enabling farmers to send notifications and reports electronically, extending the date for production reports and providing additional time and deferring interest on premium and other payments.

For more information, click here.
The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) is continuing inspection services during Governor Walz’ two-week Stay-at-Home Executive Order and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes inspections of dairy, meat and food manufacturing facilities; retail food outlets; pesticide and fertilizer operations; and seed, grain, and nursery companies.

Some minor modifications to inspection services for both the protection of farm and MDA employees have been made, enabling everyone to practice social distancing when possible. These modifications impact food and feed inspection; dairy processing facilities; pesticide licensing; and seed, grain and nursery dealers.

For additional information, visit their [website](#).

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**MNsure Special Enrollment**

Governor Walz and MNsure announced a 30-day special enrollment period (SEP) for qualified individuals who are currently without insurance. The SEP opened on March 23 and runs through April 21. It will allow uninsured individuals 30 days to enroll in health insurance coverage through [MNsure.org](#).

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**Unemployment Insurance**

Deadline extensions – Minnesotans filing their annual Minnesota Individual Income Tax return for 2019 have until Wednesday, July 15, 2020, to file and make payments without any penalties or interest. The deadline to apply for the REAL ID has also been pushed back by one year.

Small business assistance – Governor Walz has established a Small Business Emergency Loan Program for businesses affected by COVID-19. The program administered by the Department of Employment and Economic Development will help Minnesota small business owners who need immediate assistance during COVID-19 closures.

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**Child Care Grants**

In collaboration with the Governor's Children's Cabinet, six Minnesota foundations this week launched an Emergency Child Care Grant Program to provide financial support to licensed child care providers, which will provide invaluable education and services to our state's emergency response.

For more information about the Minnesota Initiative Foundations or this grant program, visit [greaterminnesota.net/childcare](http://greaterminnesota.net/childcare).

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**Your Input Needed! Communications Survey**

Share your input on communications preferences by taking the communications survey at [fbmn.org/survey](http://fbmn.org/survey) and be entered to win one of six $25 gift cards.

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**TransFARMation**
Prompted by the many sources of stress currently impacting farmers and ranchers, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and the Red River Farm Network have joined forces to create a new radio and podcast series called TransFARMation.

TransFARMation: Talking Helps

TransFARMation: Farm Leader Says Healing Can Begin by Talking

TransFARMation: The Proper Attitude Can Help Take on the Challenges

TransFARMation: Let People Help You

TransFARMation: Farm Stress in Farm Children

TransFARMation: Faith and Farming

If you have a story idea for TransFARMation, contact Riley Maanum – MFBF area program, who serves on the TransFARMation advisory team. Riley can be reached at riley.maanum@fbmn.org.

Cultivating Resiliency for Women in Agriculture

Sessions to Help Weather Stress

Raising awareness of farm stress is important, but offering some tools to help weather the stress is critical. This interactive online series sets out to help women in agriculture cultivate resiliency by focusing on what they can control in these challenging times and connect them with resources and information that can help them weather stress.

- UMASH has archived sessions - listen here.

Farm Resiliency Resources

Please ask for help. Click the underlined phrases for more information.

Resources for difficult times

Find help, counseling, advocacy, legal and referral resources.

Farm financial counseling

Experiencing financial stress? Call 1-800-232-9077 for free, confidential financial counseling.

Farmer-Lender mediation

Need help with farm debt? Learn how mediation can help.

Source: University of Minnesota Extension
The following links are meant to keep you aware of what's in the news. They do not necessarily represent the views of the Minnesota Farm Bureau Federation.

**USDA Deputy Secretary Steve Censky on COVID-19**
- Agri-Pulse

**Ag Day Thanks for our Food Chain Partners**
- AFBF The Zipline

**Black Swan Event Shakes Up Dairy Margin Coverage Payment Forecast**
- AFBF Market Intel

**Ethanol Plants Pushed Toward Unprofitability**
- AFBF Market Intel

**MFBF Update**
- RRFN

**Minnesota FFA Postpones State Convention**
- The Farmer

**How COVID-19 may affect ag lending**
- Farm Progress

**USDA Rural Development Launches COVID-19 Resource Webpage**
- USDA
March 31 - CANCELLED
Day on the Hill
North, Southeast

June 4
Minnesota Farm Bureau Foundation
Sporting Clays Tournament
Viking Valley Hunt Club, Ashby

June 23
Minnesota Farm Bureau Foundation
Golf Outing
River Oaks Golf Course, Cottage Grove

August 4-6
Farmfest
Gilfillan Estate, Redwood Falls

August 27-September 7
Minnesota State Fair

September 15-18
Farmers to Washington, D.C. Trip

November 19-21
Minnesota Farm Bureau Federation
102nd Annual Meeting
DoubleTree Hotel, Bloomington