MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE CONTINUATION OF SERVICES DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

March 30, 2020

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.

We appreciate the cooperation of our regulated industries during this time of change and uncertainty while we continue to ensure a safe food supply for Minnesota residents. MDA Inspection Staff will exercise every option to conduct any field activities in a manner safe for both themselves and the industries we regulate. Our inspectors are following the general hygiene and social distancing recommendations of the Minnesota Department of Health.

We have made some minor modifications to our inspection services for the protection of your employees and ours, enabling all of us to practice social distancing when possible.

These inspection modifications include:

Food and Feed Inspection

Retail Food Inspectors continue field services at operations including grocery stores and other retail food stores. Some inspection activities will be abbreviated and focus on the significant food safety activities which are occurring. We will increase our outreach by phone and email to efficiently meet information needs about food safety and COVID-19.

The Manufactured Food Inspection Program and the Commercial Feed Program continue to perform regulatory oversight and inspection activities while prioritizing response to adverse incidents, high risk complaints, and illness investigations.

The Produce Safety Program does not have inspection activities scheduled at this time but remains available for response to a natural disaster or other major adverse event. Program staff are maintaining operations to provide technical support, education, and other outreach for growers.

Contact: Katherine Simon, Director, Food & Feed Safety Division, 651-201-6596 / Katherine.simon@state.mn.us (mailto:Katherine.simon@state.mn.us)

Dairy Processing Facilities

Our Dairy Inspection Staff are expected to follow all biosecurity and health precautions instituted by dairy manufacturers during in-person visits, and our primary inspection approach will continue to be in-person inspection work. However, we understand some facilities may be concerned about allowing inspectors to visit their facilities. During the COVID-19 situation, MDA Dairy Inspectors will, upon request, conduct virtual or video-based routine inspections at dairy processing facilities in lieu of conducting in-person inspections.

Because of the importance of pasteurizer testing in ensuring pasteurizers are functioning properly, in-person work will still be expected. However, if concerns exist, alternatives may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Requests for virtual inspections or other accommodations should be made directly to the Inspector.

We also recognize the key role milk haulers have in our food supply chain. An online testing format has been made available to help expedite the testing process and to allow options for better social distancing during evaluation and licensing procedures.

Contact: Nicole Neeser, Director, Dairy & Meat Inspection Division, 651-201-6225 / Nicole.neeser@state.mn.us (mailto:Nicole.neeser@state.mn.us)

Pesticide Licensing

With the passage of legislation last week, we will now exempt individuals from testing and other licensing requirements to allow them to apply general use antimicrobials for hire to disinfect buildings and control the spread of COVID-19. This exemption will expire on April 1, 2021. There are several specific measures tied to this exemption:

- The exemption applies ONLY to commercial application of general use pesticide products for the sanitizing or disinfecting treatment for COVID-19.
- This exemption DOES NOT include those who commercially apply pesticides in HVAC systems or cooling towers in industrial, commercial and institutional buildings, residence, and other buildings to prevent, destroy, repel, or mitigate indoor mold, bacteria, or other microbes beyond COVID-19.

Contact: Roger Mackedanz, Assistant Director, Pesticide & Fertilizer Management Division, 651-201-6400 / Roger.mackedanz@state.mn.us (mailto:Roger.mackedanz@state.mn.us)

Seed, Grain, and Nursery Dealers

We will continue to provide services, including inspections, that are mandatory for plants or plant products to be sold or moved. This includes phytosanitary certification and shipping point inspection, as well as hemp THC analysis and nursery grower inspections, and fruit and vegetable grading under our agreement with the USDA Agricultural

Marketing Service. For our other inspections that do not have a mandated timeline, such as seed, grain, and nursery dealers, we are pausing those inspections and will resume them when the Governor's Stay-at-Home Order is lifted. We will continue to respond to complaints or other incidents.

Contact: Mark Abrahamson, Director, Plant Protection Division, 651-201-6505 / mark.abrahamson@state.mn.us (mailto:mark.abrahamson@state.mn.us)
You may also contact the MDA through mdaresponds@state.mn.us (mailto:mdaresponds@state.mn.us) with any questions you have about our operations, and visit the MDA website for additional COVID-19 information and factsheets (/covid).

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