

[Andy] Welcome. This is the "Ag Engineering Podcast," where we talk tools, tips, and techniques to improve the sustainability of your farm. I am your host, Andy Chamberlain, from the University of Vermont Extension. And this podcast is supported by Northeast SARE, providing grants and education to advance innovation in sustainable agriculture. We're trying to improve the industry by chatting with farmers, and getting their input on tools, tips, or techniques that have changed the way they farm for good. Many of these practices affect multiple areas of the farm, whether it be environmentally, emotionally, physically, or financially, we share the knowledge to promote sustainable agriculture, lifestyle, and business. Thanks for having a listen. Now, let's get started. Hey there, this is Andy, and we are going to do another solo episode for you. This one is a bonus episode due to the concerns that are going on in our country right now. We thought it'd be timely to get this out there, and answer some of the questions that you growers may be having. So, I'm gonna read to you an excerpt titled, "Considerations for Fruit and Vegetable Growers Related to Coronavirus and COVID-19." The following that I'm gonna read was put together by my colleague, Chris Callahan, with input from the Vermont State Agency of Agriculture, UVM Extension Vermont Vegetable Grower Team, as well as input from the Produce Safety Alliance out of Cornell University. So, let's get started. The current COVID-19 pandemic is a common concern, and many are wondering what they can do, and what they should do. The information here is intended to help guide the fruit and vegetable farming community. If you have concerns or additional suggestions, please contact the UVM Extension Produce Safety Team, which can be reached at producesafety@uvm.edu. Or the Vermont Agency of Agriculture Produce Program for additional guidance. agr.fsma@vermont.gov. Let's start off with some background information. COVID-19 is the disease caused by the SARS COV-2 virus, the Novel Coronavirus. Symptoms include fever, cough, and shortness of breath, and may appear 2 to 14 days after exposure. While the majority of COVID-19 illnesses are mild, it can result in severe and fatal illness, particularly in the elderly, and among those with severe underlying health conditions. Federal and state agencies are working hard to better understand the virus, how to control its spread, and how to treat those infected. One of the key things we all can do is to limit and slow the spread of COVID-19 to provide time for this understanding to develop, and not overwhelm the medical system. Much more information is available at the CDC's Situation Summary page. So, what should growers do? One, stay away from produce if sick. If someone is sick, they should be nowhere near fruit or vegetables that others are going to eat. This is likely already part of your farm's food safety plan and policies, but it's a good reminder to emphasize, and enforce this policy. Make sure employees stay home if they feel sick, and send them home if they develop symptoms at work. Consider posting signs, and asking customers not to shop at your farmstand if they have symptoms. Two, practice social distancing. By putting a bit more space between you and others, you can reduce your chances of getting ill. This might mean limiting or prohibiting farm visitors, reducing the number of off-farm meetings you attend in person, avoid shaking hands and other physical contact. This also reduces the risk of your produce coming into contact with someone who is ill before it heads to market. Three, wash your hands. Reinforce the importance of washing hands well when arriving at work. When changing tasks, an example, moving from office work to wash/pack. Before and after eating, after using the bathroom, before putting on gloves, and working with produce, and after contact with animals. Soap, water, 20 seconds or more are needed to scrub all surfaces of your hands, and fingers thoroughly. Then, dispose of the paper towel in a covered, lined trash container. Step number four, cleaning, sanitizing, and drying. Viruses, in general, can be relatively long-lasting in the environment, and have but the potential to be transferred via food, or food contact surfaces. In the early stage, there is no indication that this virus has spread via food of any type. However, there's no better time than the

present to review, improve, and reinforce your standard operating procedures for cleaning, sanitizing, and drying any food contact surfaces, food handling equipment, bins, and tools. Remember, cleaning means using soap and water. Sanitizing is using a product labeled for sanitizing, and drying means to allow the surface to dry completely before use. Step five, plan for change. Many produce farms are lean operations run by one or two managers, and a minimal crew. Do you have a plan if you become severely ill? How do things change if half your workforce is out sick? More business and labor planning guidance is available at the Cornell Agriculture Workforce and Development site. So, what should markets and farmers' markets do? Number one, everything I just stated. Growers, retail, food market owners, and farmers market managers should do all the things above. Does the market have a hand washing station? More guidance for food and lodging businesses is available from the Vermont Department of Health. Two, communicate with your customers. Consider reaching out to your customers, and recommend that they stay home if they are ill. Have you informed your customers about any changes in your hours or policies? And number three, consider alternative delivery. Some markets are taking this opportunity to launch pre-ordering, or electronic payment options, to enable social distancing at market. Some markets are moving to a drive-thru pickup option. Number four, reinforce the health benefits of fruits and vegetables. We're fortunate to have so many growers who do a great job with storage crops and winter production. This means that our community has access to fresh fruits and vegetables, that are important to their immune systems at this time of need. Be sure to promote the nutritional value of your products. But, keep in mind that promotion of your products should be within reason. Avoid making overly broad, or unsupported health claims. Produce contains many minerals and nutrients important for immune health, which may reduce the severity and duration of any illness. And I'll end on a fun fact, pound for pound, that storage cabbage in your cooler has nearly as much vitamin C as oranges. Thanks for listening to this special update, stay tuned as this develops, and I hope you'll enjoy this next episode, that is queued up to launch on Monday, where we'll talk with Evan and Heidi of Small Ax Farm, and we learn about how they use cat tunnels on their no-till hillside farm. So, tune in next week. This episode was recorded on Friday, March 13th, 2020. So thanks for tuning into this special update. I hope you stay safe, stay calm, and have a great weekend. If you would like to read this article that I just read to you, it can be found at go.uvm.edu/covid19produce. That's go.uvm.edu/C-O-V-I-D-1-9produce. Thank you for listening to today's episode. I hope you go ahead and subscribe, share this with a friend, or leave us a comment. And if you want more information, check out the show notes on our website, at agengpodcast.com. That's A-G-E-N-G-P-O-D-C-A-S-T.com. Thanks for listening. I hope you have a great day.

[Narrator] The proceeding has been a production of University of Vermont Extension. For more information on Extension, log on to www.uvm.edu/extension.