

## COVID-19 & the New Agrarian Program

[Quivira Coalition](#)

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This document is intended to provide [NAP](#) participants with general recommendations for safety during COVID-19, as well as an update on how the pandemic is affecting NAP's programmatic offerings. The suggestions in here are meant to be used as a starting point—it is up to you to decide which precautions to take based on your situation. We recognize that the situation is different in every state, as well as in each household. As a community, we expect everyone to be willing to discuss safe practices, to respect the health and safety requests of those around them, and to do your part to ensure that those who you live and work with stay safe.

### DISCUSS EXPECTATIONS & ESTABLISH CLEAR PROTOCOLS

If you haven't already, we recommend that you have a conversation with your apprentice and other employees to ensure that everyone is on the same page about which precautions should be taken. The most important step of creating a plan that everyone can follow is fostering clear, honest communication about everyone's level of concern and needs. Because the situation is fluid, we recommend coming back to these discussion topics every few weeks. Topics to discuss:

- Leaving and returning to the ranch or farm (e.g. for days-off, trips into town)
  - What practices will you use when going into town, grocery shopping, etc.? Do you expect apprentices to wear a mask? Should they wear gloves?
  - Are any types of activities or visits to particular locations not allowable?
- Visitors
  - Are overnight guests allowed? If so, under which circumstances?
  - Are daytime guests allowed? If so, under which circumstances?
  - Do apprentices need to ask permission before allowing or inviting any guests on site?
- Immune-compromised individuals
  - Do you have high-risk or immune-compromised individuals in your household or immediate community? How will you protect higher-risk or immune-compromised individuals that you come into contact with?
- Clear communication if someone begins to feel ill
  - Recognize that as employees, apprentices may feel pressure to shrug it off or show up and get the job done even if they're not feeling well. Building trust and having clear lines of communications is important to keeping everyone safe. Make sure that they feel comfortable letting you know at the first signs of illness.

### MAKE A PLAN

Mentors should create a plan for the event that either they themselves or the apprentice becomes sick.

This plan should include:

- how quarantine or self-isolation practices would be implemented (plan for minimum 14 days),
- how to access health services if needed,

- [California](#) - locate a community health center
- [Colorado](#) - free telehealth advice lines
- [Montana](#) - find a local health clinic or contact your county public health department
- [New Mexico](#) - free screening and testing sites
- how operation of the business might continue if one or both parties become ill.

### **COVID-19 RELATED PAID SICK LEAVE**

The [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) (the "FFCRA") provides small and midsize employers [refundable tax credits](#) that reimburse them, dollar-for-dollar, for the cost of providing paid sick and family leave wages to their employees for leave related to COVID-19. It **requires** eligible employers to provide employees with paid sick leave (up to two weeks or 80 hours) if the employee is unable to work due to any of the following:

- the employee is under a Federal, State, or local quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19;
- the employee has been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine due to concerns related to COVID-19;
- the employee is experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 and seeking a medical diagnosis;
- the employee is caring for an individual who is subject to a Federal, State, or local quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19, or has been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine due to concerns related to COVID-19;
- the employee is caring for the child of such employee if the school or place of care of the child has been closed, or the child care provider of such child is unavailable, due to COVID-19 precautions;
- the employee is experiencing any other substantially similar condition specified by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Employers pay the paid leave and can take an immediate tax credit by retaining the amount of payroll taxes equal to the amount of qualifying sick that they paid, rather than deposit them with the IRS. The payroll taxes that are available for retention include withheld federal income taxes, the employee share of Social Security and Medicare taxes, and the employer share of Social Security and Medicare taxes with respect to all employees. If the leave paid is greater than the amount of payroll taxes owed, employers can file a request for a refund from the IRS, which they expect to process in two weeks or less.

**Please note:** there is language in the act that says “employees taking leave shall be paid at either their regular rate or the applicable minimum wage, whichever is higher.” We are currently working on getting more details on how this would apply to agricultural workers. Until we have more information, if you have an employee who needs to take medical leave due to covid-19 we recommend reaching out to a lawyer or an accountant to determine next steps for this.

### **UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

We hope that no one will need to use this, but we want everyone to know that unemployment insurance is available to groups who were not eligible previously. The [CARES Act](#)—a \$2 trillion relief

package aimed at alleviating the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic—loosened the eligibility criteria for unemployment insurance to include part-time workers, freelancers, independent contractors, and the self-employed who are unemployed because of the pandemic. It also extends the duration of unemployment benefits by 13 weeks (the maximum duration previously was 26 weeks), and increases payments by \$600 per week through July 31st. Unemployment insurance can be applied for through the state that you live in. Visit the links below for more details.

California - [guide to applying for benefits](#)

Colorado - [eligibility guide](#) and [application page](#)

Montana - [FAQ](#) and [application page](#)

New Mexico - [FAQ and application page](#)

## **NAP ACTIVITIES**

### *Annual Site Visits*

In order to limit travel and in-person gatherings, annual site visits by program coordinators are not being required this year. NAP staff may conduct site visits on a case by case basis. Prior to conducting a site visit, NAP staff will work with mentors to ensure that it is safe and feasible to do so. In the event that a mentor requests a site visit and NAP staff are unable to do so, every effort will be made to find a reasonable substitute for an in-person visit.

### *Regional Mid-Season Gatherings*

In keeping with Quivira Coalition's current policy to be in compliance with state guidelines in New Mexico and Colorado, NAP is assessing whether we can host the mid-season gathering for SW apprentices. The host site, San Juan Ranch, is exploring a camping option that will align with current state and national guidelines. If we are able to move forward on this option, we will send out details for how we will put the gathering on safely. Southwest apprentices should continue to hold the dates of July 18-19. If health conditions in July don't allow for us to host a gathering, we may need to cancel, but we are making every effort to come up with an option that allows us to safely gather.

Based on state guidelines and the current situation in Montana, we are currently allowing small gatherings to take place in the Northern Plains. Attendance at all gatherings is optional and must be approved by the mentor. All participants must follow social distancing practices and may not attend if they are ill or were recently potentially exposed to covid-19. We recognize that this is a rapidly changing situation and will continue to monitor things in Montana. Should there be a large increase in cases or local outbreaks in Montana, we will adjust this policy.

### *Graduation and Conference*

The three organizers of the Regenerate conference—Quivira Coalition, Holistic Management International, and the American Grassfed Association—recently made the decision to host the 2020 Regenerate conference entirely online this November. This decision was made based on predictions that there will be an increase in covid-19 cases again this fall, and the expectation that it will continue to be unsafe to host large gatherings. At this point in time, we are not yet ready to make a decision about how and where NAP will celebrate graduation. All NAP apprentices will have access to and are expected to

participate in Regenerate. Our hope is that we will be able to safely convene NAP participants in November in some way. A decision will be made by early September.

### *Workshops & Site Visits to Other Operations*

Apprentices are encouraged to use their travel funds to attend workshops and clinics, or arrange a site visit with another ranch or farm. In regions where workshops and clinics have been cancelled, site visits may be one of the few opportunities for apprentices to enrich their experience outside of your operation. Site visits offer a valuable opportunity for apprentices to build connections with other producers, apprentices, and community members. Before arranging a site visit, err on the side of caution and use good communication. Prior to arranging a site visit, discuss the following with all parties:

- Have all mentors and apprentices involved been asked about their comfort level? What concerns do individuals have? How will you help ensure that those concerns are met?
- What practices are going to be used to stay safe? Consider the following options to reduce risk:
  - Conduct site visits that don't require an overnight
  - Keep group sizes small (less than 5 people)
  - Conduct all activities outside
  - Wear face masks when possible
  - Bring your own food, beverages, and tools so that individuals are not sharing these items
  - Wash or disinfect hands frequently

### *Travel & Education Stipend*

Your apprentice has access to a travel and education stipend through Quivira. The amount varies by region - check your MOU and contract with Quivira for details on the exact amount. This stipend was originally intended to cover travel expenses related to NAP events (orientation, mid-season gathering, and graduation). Apprentices are encouraged to use this fund to cover travel expenses associated with visiting another site during the season. Given the anticipated graduation in travel this year, we are encouraging apprentices to use the funds to cover registration fees for any workshops, trainings, or webinars that contribute to their education. If we end up not being able to gather in person for graduation, we will also extend the deadline to allow apprentices to use these funds to attend workshops or trainings in the months shortly after their apprenticeship ends.

### **HYGIENE BEST PRACTICES**

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds – before you eat and at the end of the workday, during the work-shift whenever possible, and when you get home from work
- Do not shake hands; avoid physical contact
- Do not share food, drinks, cigarettes, personal hand tools
- Do not touch your face, eyes, nose, mouth with unwashed hands
- Cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue or the crease of your elbow when you sneeze or cough
- Regularly clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces and tools
- Consider wearing a non-medical face covering when in public, especially in circumstances that don't readily allow for appropriate social distancing

#### When Wearing Gloves

- Do not touch your face, eyes, or mouth
- Make sure that hands are washed thoroughly or disinfected with hand sanitizer as soon as possible after gloves are removed

#### When Working in Teams:

- If you have a larger work crew, consider splitting it up into shifts. This will minimize the risk of exposure to the whole work force if someone becomes unwell.

#### Offices and Common Areas

- Maintain the physical distance (6 feet)
- Do not touch items unnecessarily
- Routinely disinfect the tables and other commonly handled items. Disinfect commonly touched items like door handles, chairs, tables, etc.
- Do not share keyboard or mouse, pens, clipboards or documents.
- Handrails leading up to offices: Do not slide your hand down them. Routinely disinfect.
- Separate clothing that is hung up in common area to avoid touching
- Avoid passing each other on the stairs. Wait on the landing until person has exited stairs.

#### Tools

- Avoid sharing tools or equipment.
- If you have to share equipment, clean and disinfect points of contact on the equipment. Example: on a shared tractor, wipe down steering, key, controls, seat belt and any other parts touched by hands. Disinfect it when you are done.

#### **Additional resources in each state:**

California - <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/ncov2019.aspx>

Colorado - <https://covid19.colorado.gov>

Montana - <https://dphhs.mt.gov/publichealth/cdepi/diseases/coronavirusmt>

New Mexico - <https://cv.nmhealth.org>

#### **Additional resources for ranchers and farmers:**

[Quivira Coalition Covid-19 resource page](#)

[National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition \(NSAC\) Covid-19 resources](#)

[Farmers' Legal Action Group \(FLAG\) Covid-19 Guide](#)

[National Young Farmers Coalition Covid-19 resource guide](#)

If you or your apprentice need assistance or have questions related to any of this, please ask us! If you have a question, it's likely that someone else has the same question, too. We have a team of folks doing research on these topics and want to make sure that we're doing our part to support everyone through this.