

State Announces Delivery of Personal Protection Equipment for Agricultural Workers: *State Partnership Delivering 900,000 Masks and Infection Control Supplies to Protect Health and Safety of Farmers and Agriculture Worker*

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The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) is taking further action to prevent and respond to COVID-19 outbreaks among the agricultural workforce, delivering critical personal protection equipment for use by agricultural workers across the state.

“Agriculture is vital to our economy and food supply and it is critical that we protect farmworkers and their families from this virus,” said Governor Cooper.

Farmworkers are deemed an essential workforce and it is imperative that people who cultivate and harvest North Carolina’s wide variety of crops are protected. To support prevention efforts that are proven to help reduce the spread of COVID-19, NCDHHS is implementing its plan this week to deliver over 900,000 masks and other infection control supplies to North Carolina Cooperative Extension county centers across the state for distribution to farms and agricultural operations. In addition to masks, the deliveries included hand sanitizer and cloth face coverings for workers to take home.

Thirty-one counties have been selected to receive the first delivery, including: Alamance, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Bladen, Columbus, Cumberland, Duplin, Durham, Edgecombe, Forsyth, Franklin, Granville, Greene, Guilford, Harnett, Henderson, Johnston, Lee, Lenoir, Lincoln, Martin, Mecklenburg, Nash, Pender, Pitt, Robeson, Sampson, Wake, Wayne, Wilson.

“Many of our farmworkers live in group housing, putting them at higher risk of exposure to COVID-19. Providing masks is one way we are helping to protect workers,” said NCDHHS Secretary Mandy Cohen.

NCDHHS is partnering with N.C. Cooperative Extension, the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS), the N.C. Department of Labor (NCDOL) and the N.C. Agromedicine Institute to expedite a delivery plan and raise awareness about this resource among the farming community.

“Some of these supplies have been difficult for farmers to source as demand has exceeded supply. I am grateful that farmworkers and farmers have been prioritized for these much-needed

materials,” said Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler. “The health of our farmers and farmworkers is very important because we all rely on them every day.”

This initiative builds on earlier measures North Carolina has taken with state and local partners to protect the agricultural workforce. Previous and ongoing actions include:

- Released the [Interim Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Guidance](#) for Migrant Farmworkers, their Employers, and Housing Providers.
- Providing targeted funding to farmworker health programs to purchase protective equipment and infection control supplies and support additional staff needed to support COVID-19 response efforts.
- Providing [virtual trainings and webinars](#) for farmworker health programs and other health agencies regarding COVID-19 prevention and outbreak response.
- Providing virtual webinars for farmers to prepare and respond to COVID-19 outbreaks
- Developed a toolkit of [COVID-19 educational materials](#) targeting farmworkers and other essential workers.
- Migrant outbreak response team supporting collaboration between health departments, federally qualified health centers and farmworker health programs to respond to outbreaks and provide patient support and health care.
- Launched an internet connectivity project to support internet access at migrant housing to facilitate access to health information, screenings and virtual medical visits.
- NCDOL issued “[Farmworkers and the 2019 Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Temporary Worker COVID-19 Guidance](#)”. NCDOL also implemented procedures to approve temporary, emergency isolation and quarantine housing for migrant farmworkers.
- NCDA&CS released “The Necessity of PPE for Agricultural Operations” and “Notice of Temporary Agricultural Worker Bulk Purchase Authorization for groceries for farms housing workers,
- NC State Extension launched a COVID-19 Resources and Information website, including [educational materials for farmers and farmworkers](#), to support N.C. agribusinesses throughout the pandemic.

A list of [congregate living settings with outbreaks](#) is available on the NCDHHS website