



SESSION 2: BRIDGING OVER TROUBLED WATERS: AG INNOVATION IN A PANDEMIC

SPEAKERS:

- Robert Gobeil, Canadian Agricultural Safety Association, Agricultural Safety and Health Specialist
- Peter Lundqvist, Professor, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
- Carolyn Sheridan, Ag Health & Safety Alliance, Executive Director

BREAKOUT SESSIONS HOSTS:

- Wendy Bennett, AgSafeBC – Temporary Foreign Workers / Labour Shortages
- Dean Anderson, Workplace Safety & Prevention Services – Greenhouses / U-Picks
- Lori Brookhouse, Farm Safety Nova Scotia – PPE Supply and Resources

BRIEF SUMMARY:

This session's aim was to highlight some of resources available, including the latest ag-specific protocols and emergency planning resources. The breakout sessions will discuss some of the challenges and what producers are doing to remain resilient and plan for the future

The Provincial Partner COVID:

As the pandemic hit, CASA saw a need to gather and share accurate and ag-specific information. It led the development of the Provincial Partner COVID-19 Panel comprised of provincial partners from across the country. The group came together to develop a living document that outlines information and resources pertinent to each province. This document can be found here: <https://www.casa-acsa.ca/en/resources/covid-19/>. Some of the challenges noted by the group and tools to help alleviate some of the issues were highlighted in the breakout rooms of this session. With the creation of this group, CASA saw heightened awareness of COVID-19 information specific to the ag sector and more-efficient, cost-effective way of disseminating information.

Pandemic Response in IOWA:

Carolyn drew a picture of the key challenges facing farmers and rural communities in Iowa, namely the supply and usage of PPE. Supply is crucial. Despite the shortage, farmers still require respiratory protection for COVID-19, but also for ongoing agricultural tasks. There was also some concern that there would be a misunderstanding that cloth masks could pass as adequate protection for agricultural tasks. CDC/WHO guidelines for use of cloth face coverings, surgical masks, and filtering facepiece respirators generated confusion about the appropriate agricultural use of protective

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coverings and certified respirators. The Ag Health and Safety Alliance developed resources that would help farmers identify best practices for each of the numerous PPEs used by the agricultural community. This resource and several more can be found here: <https://aghealthandsafety.com/covid-19-resources/>. Going forward, she noted that farmers should continue to prepare for PPE shortages and for trainers not to assume people know their options for PPE. In response to the pandemic, ASHA began adapting its programming to offer online courses and training.

The Swedish Approach:

The Swedish approach, as Peter explained, was less invasive with no lock-downs. The COVID response was formed by various agencies, like the Public Health Agency and the National Board of Health – the national government does not have decision making power in these issues. His opinion was that this approach worked well for the country, with the exception of care facilities. Currently, Sweden has reported 162,240 cases and 6,057 deaths. The Federation of Swedish Farmers’ tone is that farmers are used to dealing with crises like drought or the spread of infection and disease and can quickly solve problems like lack of seasonal labour. The Federation suggestions, include keeping in touch with neighbors and maintaining a support network in the event of an illness, reviewing insurance policies, and using risk management assessments. When Peter asked farmers about their experiences with COVID-19, they noted the following: loneliness, problems finding PPE, an overall low-level of cases among farmers/workers. Currently, several Nordic countries are facing a culling of millions of mink after a mutated form of coronavirus was found.

Breakout Groups:

- **Temporary Foreign Workers/Labour Shortages:** Wendy explained the current Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) application process, which now includes a ‘Risk Assessment and Infection Prevention and Control Protocol’ section. She also explained that less than 70% of the usual amount of TFW’s were brought in to work in British Columbia (BC) this year, which created labour shortages and unique challenges for Employers. She detailed the quarantine process in BC and noted that other provinces had different processes in place with varying degrees of success. Wendy shared some of the checklists and documents that Employers and TFW’s must follow to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- **Greenhouses/U-Picks:** This particular sector was considered an essential service, so business continued initially. However, various workers weren’t considered essential and some interactions proved problematic for COVID considerations – grouped settings like bunk houses for the temporary foreign workers, break rooms. One of the first responses of the sector was to reference the resources developed by Workplace Safety & Prevention Services

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during the SARS outbreak. A number of resources and information were sent to farm businesses, including training materials for on-farm workers.

- **PPE:** Lori led the group through lessons learned and the struggle to get supplies in Nova Scotia. Farm Safety Nova Scotia put together an impressive, user-friendly resources for farmers, including a regularly updated page that allows farmers to see when and how they could obtain PPE and cleaning and disinfecting supplies. She also highlighted the mental health aspects brought on during the pandemic and pointed to a mental fitness plan she described as extremely useful. As resources developed and sourced by NSFA could be found here: <https://farmsafetyns.ca/covid-19/>

RELEVANT RESOURCES (in addition to those listed above):

- Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council's 'Emerging AgriForce Issues' tips page - <https://cahrc-ccrha.ca/programs/emerging-agriworkforce-issues/information-and-updates-coronavirus-covid-19>
- Workplace guidance for sector employers and employees - <https://www.agr.gc.ca/eng/covid-19-information-for-the-agriculture-and-agri-food-industry/workplace-guidance/?id=1588862952557>
- FCC's 'Update Your HR Plan for COVID-19' - <https://www.fcc-fac.ca/en/knowledge/update-your-hr-plan-for-covid-19.html>

MEETING LINKS:

- Watch the session recording here <https://youtu.be/PeV8Er4rvHo>