

Feed mill management after COVID-19

By EMILY MELANDER*

As the last few months of uncertainty look to start leveling out, the swine industry must stay vigilant and aware of the implications COVID-19 has for feed mills and the industry.

In the heat of the COVID-19 pandemic, feed mills and other manufacturing and processing facilities were struggling to understand what social distancing looked like in the typical worker's day, but due to task forces that were created from the government, industry advocacy groups and individual companies, guidance has reached just about everyone.

These task forces are very important for the industry, because they provide guidance, recommended policies and procedures and current information on an ever-changing situation.

Unfortunately, it does not appear that there is an end in sight for this new way of doing things, so having well-rounded and feasible policies and procedures in place is pertinent.

When reviewing the guidance documents and recommendations set forth by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, industry advocacy groups, organizations and/or local governing authorities, it is important to be open minded and implement these guidelines in a way that will benefit a facility and its employees.

What works for one feed mill might not work for another. Some feed mills have fewer than 10 employees and only one shift and may not implement the same control measures as a feed mill with 50 people and multiple shifts. It is important for each facility to take measures to help slow the spread of the novel coronavirus.

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It is recommended to address the following areas in a feed facility:

- Engineering controls, including increased airflow, high-efficiency air filters and physical barriers (e.g., sneeze guards);

- Administrative controls, such as minimizing contact among workers; scheduling shifts to be alternating days or extra shifts so the total number of employees is reduced but a full shift is still on site; providing training and updates for employees on what recommendations are being given and implemented, and monitoring employees for fever and signs of sickness;

- Safe work practices, including providing training on proper personal hygiene, providing soap, hand sanitizer and disinfectant and requiring regular hand washing or alcohol-based hand rubs, and

- Personal protective equipment, including face coverings (e.g., bandanas or handmade masks), which is recommended for employees who are at a high risk of exposure, when applicable or within 6 ft. of others.

Many of these recommendations can be implemented in different ways and will look different depending on an individual facility's setup. It is crucial to make sure that management is communicating with employees on what the company is doing and that there is a way for employees to express any concerns or ask questions.

The feed industry has a unique perspective, since COVID-19 has not been found to be transmitted through or on animal food; the main concern is transmission by person-to-person contact as well as via some contact surfaces.

Some of the solutions feed mills have implemented include:

- **Visitors.** Do not allow visitors, including internal guests and truck drivers,

inside the building(s) unless utilizing a visitor screening form that will indicate if the individual is a risk. Also, limit tours or audits unless critical to business functions, and opt for virtual meetings rather than in-person meetings.

- **Cleaning.** Increase sanitation protocols between and during shifts, including cleaning and sanitizing frequently touched surfaces or objects. Consider allowing staff to carry their own writing utensil and knife rather than sharing these items.

- **Employee contact.** Limit contact between areas of a plant (for example, receiving operators do not come into contact with controllers or machinery operators). Have a designated person from the mill go to the office to drop off and pick up paperwork, samples, etc.

Utilize individual water bottles, and prevent access to community water fountains or coolers. Maintain strategic break schedules to keep employees separated according to relevant social distancing recommendations.

- **Monitoring.** Taking the temperature of all employees before they enter the facility. If an employee has a fever, send them home immediately. Also send home employees showing any signs of sickness.

The Bottom Line

The COVID-19 situation continues to progress and fluctuate, meaning that some of these recommendations may change. It is important that each facility makes certain to follow local and state recommendations to the best of its ability. Facilities should contact local health departments with additional questions, as they are fielding a lot of local and regional questions. ■