



HOP GROWERS OF AMERICA

CASE STUDY



COVID-19 FARM PREPAREDNESS: Roy Farms



OVERVIEW

Roy Farms, Inc. is a privately held, family owned and operated, diversified grower of organic and conventional apples and hops, and organic blueberries. Roy Farms has on-farm pelleting facilities and offers processing services for outside hop producers. They also have on-farm controlled atmosphere, dry and cold storage, and offer storage services to outside fruit packers and marketers.

As a family-owned farm, Roy Farms works hard to understand regulations and guidelines related to COVID. They have had to adapt to the evolving situation in order to protect their employees' health while continuing day-to-day farm operations. Although it was nearly impossible to predict changes throughout the pandemic, having a plan in place helped Roy Farms follow procedures and find creative solutions to health and safety requirements.

CHALLENGES

Culture Changes

Most people have never lived through or experienced a pandemic and adapting to it has required moving forward with a new way of living and thinking. Roy Farms had to be creative with how they conducted safety trainings, managed harvest with hundreds of employees, and kept everyone safe.

Regulations

New and frequently changing regulations required tracking information from multiple sources and implementing changes in real time. Farms had to stay on top of the latest developments in order to make sure they didn't miss anything.

Equipment and Materials

Personal protective equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies were expensive and difficult to acquire so Roy Farms was proactive in seeking resources and assuring their supply chain met operational needs.

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STRATEGY

Roy Farms identified specific goals and put into place strategies to help their operation hit its targets throughout the year. These goals and strategies included:

Risk Assessments

One of the first things Roy Farms did was create a risk assessment and possible scenarios for risk exposure for all jobs, to better understand how to mitigate those exposures. One strategy implemented was to assign monitors to every crew to remind staff of social distancing requirements and report compliance data directly to Safety or Human Resources.

Training

Before the state government made COVID-19 safety training mandatory for all farming operations, Roy Farms was already conducting employee training. They started "Take 5's" training sessions and held them multiple times throughout the year to keep all employees up-to-date on COVID-19 information. Supervisors and managers were involved in all training, and senior management provided constant support.

Workplace Improvements

To assure supply, safety information, and workspace needs were met, Roy Farms made its own hand sanitizer following WHO guidelines, printed its own safety information posters, and built plexiglass barriers to provide distance for workers throughout facility common areas.

Planning

Roy Farms created an ongoing COVID-19 Plan for all supervisors to follow as a guide for their work tasks. Senior management was actively involved with creating this document and providing support to employees.

OUTCOME

Thanks to its planning and preparedness, Roy Farms was able to comply with state and federal COVID regulations with in-house monitoring and safety program. Throughout the year, they had three reported employee concerns which prompted quick action to investigate. Only 2.4 percent of employees tested positive across all locations in 2020, and harvest was completed on-time with no outbreaks. Overall operations weren't severely impacted, and they kept working through all harvest seasons.



During next year's harvest, Roy Farm plans to:



Reduce gaps in PPE demand by improving their ability to forecast need and assuring orders are in place to meet needs.



Rearrange employee break areas so individuals can stay socially distanced and eat and rest safely.



Create more detailed plans for confined space work.



Improve definitions of health and safety risks and their preventative measures through detailed risk assessments.

