

Instructions and activities for COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic in agriculture – Sacurima COST Action inquiry results

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Introduction

In Sacurima COST Action network we made an inquiry about Corona crisis management instructions on farms in different countries. Sacurima EU COST Action is an International expert network working for promoting better safety culture and risk management in agriculture. While the COST Action is mainly a European network it can have also international partner countries involved in the network activities. The corona infection pandemic spread all over the world in Spring 2020. On April 2020 Sacurima network members from nine countries sent information about their country Corona crises instructions for farms. Farms are essential units for food primary production and many farmers are finding instructions, how corona crisis is managed in farm activities and what kind of content the management instructions are included. In this small study several national instructions and risk management tools were analyzed and collected qualitatively by using thematic categorization and content analysis method.

Corona instructions for farms

The countries involved to this preliminary inquiry about corona crisis management instructions on farms were Finland, Germany, Netherlands, USA, Australia, England, Northern Macedonia, Greece and Turkey. As a result of this inquiry we analyzed the instructions content from various websites and documents sent by the experts from the participating countries. The categories used in the content analysis were farm safety or security groups, content of risk management and types of instructions identified from the corona instructions for farms.



FIGURE 1. Collection of different corona crisis instructions for farms.

In the figure 1 we have illustrated the founded farm safety or security category groups included some detailed instructions to manage risks during the corona pandemic crisis. Instructions divided to focus on farm security, farm worker safety, farm family safety, farm visitor safety, food safety/consumer safety, farm animal safety, farm production security and other farm management issues to be considered in farm operative planning.

To ensure production in pandemic situation on a farm, the availability of production machinery, sufficient amounts of substances and workforce should be organized. Protection activities for the farmer and farm family and safety of farm workers is checked carefully. Regular hand washing, keeping distance to others during operations, using respirators if have close contact with other people and staying home in case of illness are the most essential instructions. It is also essential to avoid injuries on farms. On animal farms must follow veterinary instructions and take care of sufficient biosecurity and hygiene rules. After all, corona is originally a zoonosis type of disease and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) advise all animal farmers to be careful with hygiene also with farm animals, if farm workers or farm family have corona symptoms.

Special care is needed in hygiene handling of fresh food products and vegetables. The instructions include rules for using gloves and hand washing always returning to food handling after other activities. Information for the farm and information from the farm to the food chain stakeholders is essential to food safety and quality. Farm manager should also take care of safety on farm visitors and give them instructions for safety on their farm. The possible visitors are veterinaries, suppliers, contractors and relatives. Other farm management points considered in the corona pandemic crisis are to take care of the farm finance and profitability and taking care of farm resilience in case of accidents. An important point is also taking care of farmer and farm family own wellbeing and mental health. Do kind things to others is a good tip for everybody during the times of corona crisis.

In this study we found many practical management tools and tips for farms. Practical tips are to collect contact information for help and support, farm calendar and task planning, scheduling, simplifying or reducing the work during the crisis, adapt the respirator and hygiene instructions on a farm and guidelines to distinguish corona disease from influenza. Taking care of mental load should be noticed too. Avoiding social contacts might be difficult and stressful also for some farm people. There are already available safety checklists and key points to take care for corona situation for farms. There were for example practical tips like Farm 5 Point Plan (NCFH), SVLFG farm checklist, posters in different languages (Stigas), Fill your boots tool (FSF) to manage your mental load and to handle corona crisis on farms. And this is how it should be. Every country must be responsible and support its farmers and primary food production to ensure the food security in the current corona crisis and in the future crises.



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