



The last time a significant virus outbreak occurred that enveloped the earth as rapidly as the Coronavirus, was the Spanish Flu in 1918. The industrial revolution had just starting. As a result, there is no precedent of how the industrialized world must deal with the Coronavirus outbreak. So what do we do when we manage a glasshouse? In this article, I write down my thoughts. Please feel free to post your ideas as we have to work together to get through this crisis.

The Coronavirus and the Glasshouse Industry

What do we do?

In the new world of Covid-19, one thing is for sure, the safety of our employees comes first. Infecting them through fellow employees endangers their health and that of their friends and families. Many glasshouses in the Northern hemisphere, have started harvesting. Due to the longevity of most crops, sending staff home is not an option. Not maintaining a crop for two weeks is a death sentence for a crop and the business. In a world during and past Covid-19, people still have to eat. Like the brave doctors and nurses, who care for the many people affected by Coronavirus, food production must also go on. So what can we do?

Aside from everything we already know about washing hands, protecting your sneezes, and the six-foot rule, let's think specifically about the glasshouse. Most glasshouse operations already have hygiene procedures. We can build on these hygiene procedures, this time focussing on staff health.

If uniforms are not provided at work, ask staff to bring a fresh set of clothes for work use. It limits the possibility of bringing the virus from home to the workplace. Changing back to their home clothes when they go home also limits the possibility of bringing the virus to their homes.

Put a disinfectant spray bottle near the entrance doors to and from the glasshouse. Ask the staff to spray their hands before and after they touch the door handle or pull the rope to open doors. I recommend having two spray bottles, so the trigger of the other spray bottle can also be disinfected.

Designate trolleys, transport devices, and forklifts to staff individual staff. Every time they leave the equipment, ask them to wipe down contact areas. Picking trolleys that are used by everyone need to be wiped down before harvesting starts and before it is sent to the packing shed. Wipe pipe rail trolleys down in between rows.

If a labor registration system is in use, ask the staff to pull on fresh gloves before touching the buttons. Wipe down the buttons multiple times per day. Apply the same rules to the use of mobile phones.

Ask staff to respect the six-foot rule and encourage them not to have lunch in the canteen, but in the glasshouse, in isolation. A supervisor may be tasked with bringing the food out. Cleaning hands before and after eating is vital.

Disinfect toilet seats before and after use, including the door handles (inside and out) and the flush button.

Imagine the panic that breaks out if a team member is found to be positive for Coronavirus. It sends shockwaves through the staff, and they may refuse to come to work. In this light, it is essential to communicate with our employees. As we look for leadership in politicians to lead our countries, so do staff look for leadership in managers and owners. It is imperative that a sick person, says so, and is allowed to go/stay home. Measuring staff temperatures before they enter the facility reassures all employees that care is taken not to let sick staff come to work.

Postpone all visitors to the glasshouse. If their physical presence cannot be avoided, make sure they know they must dress up in full protective gear. Truck drivers should be kept from the premises and should stay in their trucks when they pick up produce. If they need access to the packing shed, they also need to wear protective clothing. Arrange all meetings, even internal ones, to be done through media-communication software.

Let's work together to keep our staff safe. Please forward and share your ideas and suggestions.

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