***POSSIBLE Impacts of COVID-19 on Farming***

*(Note: Please pay attention to current updates, as conditions are changing rapidly)*

The World Health Organization now considers the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) to be a pandemic. This situation is rapidly raising questions throughout the U.S. The stock market has taken a recent hit creating volatility and there are growing concerns about the virus and our reaction to it causing a significant downturn in the general economy.

Some may ask, what about agriculture? The following are specific things that farmers, farming families, ag employers, and employees need to be aware of and plan for.

1. Markets and farm prices: With the recommendation for “social distancing”, reduced travel, avoiding crowds, and closures to slow the spread of COVID-19, consumers will be making tough choices about food, eating away from home, and overall spending. This will likely have an impact on markets and prices. If the U.S. were to head into an economic slowdown and cause a worldwide recession, like the one in 2008-09, it would push the previously expected milk price recovery off for at least another year.
2. Supply chains slowdowns and shortages: Multiple connected industry sectors are already being impacted. “Panic buying” is creating concerns. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) suggest the potential for animal pharmaceutical products to be in short supply. If this virus spreads in an agriculture area like Wisconsin, we could see issues with farm product delivery and pick up as workers stay home due to illness. Slowdowns could also impact fertilizer, fuel and other input movement and availability as we move into spring.
3. Farmers’ health: Throughout the Midwest, farmers are relatively older population, as compared to the general worker population. The average age of farm operators is 58 years old and a good portion are 65 and older. COVID-19 has a much higher level of severity for those in their 60s and older, meaning that preventive and protective recommendations from the CDC and state public health experts are critical for our farming population.
4. The farm workforce: Even if the general populations rate remains relatively low for the infections, some will end up sick. It is more likely that workers will have to stay home to care for sick or elderly family members or children due to school closures.
5. Worker safety and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): There are shortages of PPE and other protective equipment vital for operating a farm safely and keeping workers and animals healthy. There are reported concerns for protective gloves which are used in dairy operations to improve milk quality and protect the health of animals and people.

Hoarding of farm supplies is not recommended and could cause even greater problems for the sector, but prudent purchases of necessary inputs might minimize disruptions to your business. Please keep informed, listen to the experts, and follow the recommendations of federal, state and local agencies and authorities.

*Conservation Corner,*



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