

B.C. Ministry of Agriculture

Questions and Answers

Essential Services in the COVID-19 Pandemic: What does it mean for B.C.'s agriculture and seafood industry?

What is the definition of essential services as determined by the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) and Emergency Management BC?

Answer: Emergency Management BC has defined essential services as, “those daily services essential to preserving life, health, public safety and basic societal functioning. They are the services British Columbians come to rely on in their daily lives.”

A list of essential services has been published on BC government website: [List of COVID 19 Essential Services](#)

How does the definition of essential services apply to the agricultural and seafood sector?

Answer: In the agriculture and seafood sector, many businesses have been deemed essential services. In general, agricultural and seafood businesses that have been deemed essential services centre around food production and businesses that support food production (e.g. processing, packaging, storage, transportation etc.) and animal health and welfare.

At this time, the only difference between businesses that have been deemed essential services and those who have not, is that businesses that are deemed essential are encouraged to remain open.

In consultation with the PHO, essential services should and are encouraged to remain open. They must, however, follow the orders and guidance provided by the PHO to ensure safe operations and reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

The Ministry of Agriculture is working to provide guidance and business continuity as needed to assist agricultural and seafood industries to adhere to PHO orders and guidelines with the goal to enable businesses to continue to operate.

If a business that has been deemed an essential service is not able to or struggling to follow the orders and guidance as provided by the PHO, but wishes to continue operating, that business should notify the Ministry of Agriculture to gain additional support for business continuity.

If a business is not able to put in place measures to reduce transmission of COVID-19 that business should close in order to protect their employees and the public. Agricultural and seafood operations must follow the PHO Order for Industrial Camps.

What does it mean for businesses not listed as an essential service?

Answer: The PHO has ordered some types of businesses to close. Any business or service that has not been ordered to close and is also not identified on the essential service list may stay open if they can adapt their services and workplace to the orders and recommendations of the PHO.

If your business is not deemed an essential service, you can still operate so long as you can adapt your business to follow PHO guidance (unless there is an order expressly prohibiting your type of business). This differs from the approach in some other jurisdictions such as Ontario, where a business must be listed as an essential workplace in order to remain open unless all its employees can work remotely. In BC, unless a business has been ordered closed by the PHO it can remain open so long as it abides by PHO guidance for operating.

At some point in the future if deemed necessary, the PHO may issue an order that all businesses not deemed essential services must close.

How can agriculture and seafood businesses continue to operate during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Answer: The PHO has stated that all businesses choosing to continue to operate, whether deemed essential services or not, must adhere to the public health orders and recommendations for physical distancing, hygiene, increased cleaning protocols, and ensuring employee safety through monitoring and reporting illness.

The Ministry of Agriculture is working closely with industry partners to provide guidance for business owners about how to implement the recommended safety precautions to enable businesses to continue to operate within the orders, advice and recommendations made by public health officials.

The following link provides PHO orders, notices and guidance:

[COVID-19 \(Novel Coronavirus\) - Province of British Columbia Orders, Notices and Guidance](#)

The following link(s) provide information on implementing safety precautions in the workplace:

[Guidance for farms and farm workers: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19-pho-guidance-farms-farm-workers.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19-pho-guidance-farms-farm-workers.pdf)

Silviculture Sector: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19-pho-guidance-work-camps-silviculture.pdf>

FAQ Good Agricultural Practice and Food Safety:

<https://www2.qa.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriculture-seafood/food-safety/good-agricultural-practices>

How should agricultural and seafood businesses deal with the challenges in maintaining normal operations during COVID-19?

Answer: Across all sectors most businesses will be impacted by COVID-19. Some businesses have already been ordered to close, others are unable to maintain operations while adhering to PHO Guidelines, some are facing staff shortages or supply shortages, and for some demand for product has dropped considerably.

The Ministry of Agriculture is working closely with industry partners and cross levels of government and government agencies to address issues as they arise. Some of these issues are anticipated and others are not. Check government and industry websites regularly for updates and guidance to help you manage the challenges you are experiencing in your business.

As an owner or operator, you will have frontline knowledge of the impacts being felt daily and may be able to anticipate future issues before they arise. You may also have discovered unique strategies to solve some of the issues you have encountered. The Ministry of Agriculture encourages you to share your insights with the Province through [AgriServiceBC](#) so that concerns can be investigated, and solutions can be disseminated more broadly to the farming and seafood community.

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