



RE: Latest AG Related Regulations On Covid-19

Date: June 9, 2020

Dear Governor Inslee,

This correspondence is from the Yakima County Farm Bureau (YCFB). YCFB is a grass roots organization with 3,100 members consisting of farmers and ranchers with operations both large and small as well as other folks with interest in agriculture affairs in Yakima and Klickitat Counties.

I am writing to you about the continued miscarriage of rule-making that your administration has foisted upon our honest, hard-working and caring Farmers and Ranchers. At the risk of repeating ourselves, it comes at an unprecedented time when our agricultural sector is already under great stress due to Covid-19. Crop and Commodity prices are still in peril and we do not know what tomorrow will bring as to when things get back to normal. But another greater concern is that of the emotional and physical wellness of our growers due to stress. Covid-19 certainly created the initial stress, but these unreasonable and illogical rules that are impossible for them to adhere to compounds the problem.

Though your administration has relieved some of the onerous and unprecedented regulations, the balance of the egregious rules are still in force and are unfounded.

This is what one of our growers emailed me yesterday. I am including it verbatim:

Good Morning Mark,

As I am in the trenches of Harvest right now here is what I am seeing with my new regulations.

We are CONSTANTLY asking guys to put on their masks after posting signs, and extensive training at hiring to wear one and why. As well as we have to CONSTANTLY remind them to wash their hands, yet again after posting signs and extensive training...Something our fabulous state has not done is remember we are working with the human element that does not listen to or care to follow the rules and regulations required. We have had to modify the way we check to show the opportunity of social distancing and yet we have to stop pickers and remind them CONSTANTLY they are not doing as needed for safety. The majority don't seem to care. We have had people lie at hiring that they are fine (prior to the regulation of taking temps) when they have a whole house hold of symptomatic people. Then when caught they say they thought we wouldn't hire them. We have also had people coming out to the fields because the warehouse

*they were at asked them to get tested and follow certain steps and they just decided to quit and get a job in the field because they didn't want to be tested
Taking temperatures of all employees each day is fine if you have the manpower to do so. I have upwards of 150 people each day and it takes time that these pickers don't want to waste so they are trying to sneak in early so they can just do the job...*

Then at the end of the day I am cleaning and sanitizing everything adding extra time to my already typical 12+ hour day.

The frustrating part is that we as employers can be fined if we aren't doing what the state is requiring but the human factor of our employees is the continuous problem. You can lead a horse to water but you can't make them drink.

At least that is what the first 5 days have given me. Training isn't the problem, it is the employee taking responsibility for their actions and adhering to the training...

Sincerely, xxxxxx

This may shock the Governor, but our agricultural workers are not respecting the training our growers are administering to them. Look at the above grower account of how the trained workers are ducking, dodging and diving around the rules!! How can anyone require by force of law that employers are responsible for workers who refuse to act responsibly? Moreover, how can an employer carry the blame when these workers are certainly not playing by the rules when they are away from the work site?

The YCFB asks the Governor, “Are you now the leading health care expert in Washington State”? If not, “Why does the Washington State Health Department recognize the use of hand sanitizer for being sufficient with lightly soiled hands yet your Administration rejects that and insists upon washing stations that by necessity would be inside and upon harvestable crops due the unprecedented spacing requirement under the new rule”? If there was a concern that some workers hands are more than lightly soiled then disposable hand wipes could be offered pre-hand sanitizer use. Alarmingly, having to situate washing stations inside of harvestable crops violates standing food safety regulations. Again, “Has the Governor also become the leading and ultimate Food Safety authority in our State as well”?

The YCFB believes that the time is fast approaching that consumers learn just what is at stake with their food supply at this critical time and where and why their food chain is continuing to be un-necessarily stressed! Food safety and food availability matters to consumers. If they are to take to the streets, will they also get a pass on social distancing requirements since they are **protesters**?

Sincerely,

Mark Herke, President Yakima County Farm Bureau

