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Covid-19 Q&A for poultry members

Background

The spread of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) is a rapidly developing situation. With considerable effects felt socially and economically across the globe, there is a growing awareness that we are all facing considerable challenges. In this rapidly changing situation, an [NFU Covid-19 hub](#) has been set up online to offer up to date guidance and links for cross-sector issues to support members. Members should also stay up to date with government advice which can be [found here](#).

Please click on the highlighted headings throughout the document to find out further information.

Immediate business concerns: From [advice for employers](#) to [access to labour](#), [the use of public rights of way](#) and [government support for rural businesses](#). You can find guidance on general business concerns [here](#).

Long term issues: Will there be problems with energy supplies, planning applications, broadband or mobile coverage? Find guidance on these issues [here](#).

This briefing has been created to specifically offer guidance to members with poultry-related issues and aims to answer some of the most common questions being raised. Due to the rapidly changing nature of this situation this Q&A document will be updated as and when required.

What should I do if I'm worried about looking after my birds if I fall unwell?

There is advice available for pet owners and livestock keepers on maintaining the welfare of their animals during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on the [gov.uk website](#). If you are unwell and unable to care for your animals and there is no one to help, you should [call the Animal and Plant Health Agency \(APHA\)](#) or your local authority.

How do I deal with self-isolation and my own mental wellbeing on farm?

Self-isolation may help keep you physically well but mental wellbeing is important and a prolonged period of isolation can have a detrimental effect on mental health. Click here for further information on [self-isolation symptoms and advice](#) and [here](#) for ideas to help keep you mentally well. If you need help there are a number of [charities](#) available to offer support. If you have children spending more time at home than usual during this time, be conscious of taking sufficient safety precautions to minimise risk to all on the farm and maintain safety.

Am I classed as a key worker?

[The government has publicised its list of key workers](#) which includes those involved in food production, processing, distribution, sale and delivery as well as those essential to the provision of other key goods (for example hygienic and veterinary medicines). This is intended to address the problems that could have been caused if workers are unable to work due to closures of schools and nurseries rather than being unwell. It is important to highlight however, that if it is at all possible for children to be at home, without relying on those in at risk groups (such as grandparents, friends/family members with underlying conditions etc) then they should still be kept home even for workers in these sectors.

What happens if my staff members get stopped on their journey to or from work?

At this point, workers can travel to or from work if their work cannot be carried out from home. In recent days, we have received reports of police stopping and challenging employees or farmers about their normal course of business. To help reduce confusion, the NFU has produced an [essential journey certificate](#) for members and their employees to carry with them when travelling to/from work or between

different sites. We would also suggest that an employer provides their employees with their own letter on their company letter head with the employer's name and contact details on.

Is there a test my staff can take to see if they have got Covid-19?

There are currently no CE-marked tests available for home use and any tests that are available are being prioritised for the NHS and frontline workers. This is a fast-moving situation and the Government will be continually updating guidance on tests [here](#).

Can the company I use for pest control still come on farm?

The current [government position on travel for work purposes](#) is that this is allowed, but only where you cannot work from home. Government recognises that it is important for business to carry on, that some people cannot work from home and that certain jobs require people to travel to, from and for their work. This would apply to pest controllers coming onto farm. The farmer and the tradesperson (in this case, the pest controller) coming onto farm should [follow the government guidance](#) regarding social distancing; ensuring they are well and have no coronavirus symptoms, however mild. They should not carry out work in any household which is isolating or where an individual is being shielded.

How can I achieve social distancing when receiving deliveries/facilitating collections on/off farm?

Ensure you maintain high standards of hygiene and that facilities are available for drivers to use, including handwashing and drying facilities. Only allow essential visitors on farm and ensure they are fully aware of your protocols and respect social distancing rules.

The latest advice from the Government on social distancing in the workplace for outdoor businesses which includes farms is available [here](#). The guidance includes advice on regular hand washing and what to do if keeping a 2m distance between workers is difficult. If it is difficult to follow social distancing guidelines in full in relation to a particular activity, you should consider whether that activity needs to continue for the business to continue to operate and if so, take all the mitigating actions possible to reduce the risk of transmission between staff.

The NFU together with the BVA and BCVA have compiled a [briefing on Covid-19 and on-farm social distancing](#), to protect yourself, your family and visitors to the farm and we are encouraging members to consider any additional measures they should implement as part of their general hygiene routine. If you do not already have one you could consider creating a checklist of key areas to keep clean such as door handles and gateposts and designate key tasks to individuals to complete so you know who is doing what and each area is covered adequately.

What is the current situation regarding on farm assurance schemes and APHA inspections (including will membership of an assurance scheme be affected if I can't have an inspection)?

It is important to remember that while we face challenging and uncertain times, we must continue to meet the standards which we are proud to produce to. Now more than ever, it is critical to ensure the reputation of our industry is maintained. Therefore, while assurance schemes are suspending inspections for the health and safety of everyone, members must ensure they continue to meet the standards required.

RSPCA Assured: As of Monday 23 March 2020, routine assessments have been temporarily suspended, moving to a support-based phase. During this phase, visits will only be conducted: to certify new applicants, to investigate complaints or to check members in special measures. Over the course of this interim phase, certification for members and supply chains will continue, ensuring that the integrity and image of RSPCA Assured are maintained. Together with the certification body, a review of certificates in this interim period will continue and they will communicate directly with members whose certificates are due to expire. Further updates directly from RSPCA Assured can be [found here](#).

Red Tractor: As of 20 March 2020, Red Tractor physical, on-farm audits have temporarily been suspended, with an online portal for remote inspections currently being consulted on. It is not expected to be rolled out until Easter. This is across all schemes including the FSA and other enforcement bodies that Red Tractor have earned recognition arrangements with until further notice and also includes unannounced audits. Representatives from the national poultry board will be supporting in the practical development of remote auditing, alongside UKAS and other certification bodies. Red Tractor will



communicate to scheme members when and how inspections move to a remote audit in due course. These changes do not affect annual membership renewal of your certificate and scheme members should seek to renew the certificate as normal. For further information, visit [Red Tractor's COVID-19 Hub](#).

Lion Code: NSF have developed a system of working that is intended to keep members and assessors safe by delivering audits via a full livestream, real time, video audit. If your audit is due whilst we are under government social distancing measures, NSF will be contacting you to arrange the audit. This will be done by your auditor as normal. NSF will then send you a confirmation letter clearly stating how to prepare for the audit and what they will need to see. Should you have any queries or concerns please do not hesitate to contact NSF at: Agriculture@nsf.org

APHA: As of 25 March the APHA have ceased all routine on farm inspections to Egg and Poultry Meat Marketing premises until further notice. Inspections will continue where there is a major non-compliance, food fraud or welfare issues reported or where there is a need for disease investigations. APHA EMIs are planning to carry out remote audits for meat marketing but not for eggs.

I'm concerned about the strength of my internet connection or I don't have a suitable device to live stream, how will I complete this requirement of an audit?

Certification bodies will pick individual issues up on a case-by-case basis and we encourage you to discuss potential issues with your auditor at the earliest convenience when contacted to conduct an audit which may involve live streaming elements. If possible, you could test out your connection and/or device before the audit starts to try and alleviate any potential issues occurring during the audit.

I'm concerned about a reduced frequency of the postal service and whether my salmonella sample will reach the laboratory in time – what should I do?

There is some concern over salmonella testing, predominantly if we see disruption to vital infrastructure such as the postal system and/or laboratory capacity. We are feeding in members' concerns to Defra/APHA and the FSA on a weekly conference call and have been involved in creating a contingency plan which will include relevant trigger points for potential derogations. None of the trigger points have been met yet and therefore unless instructed to do anything different, salmonella testing should be carried out as normal.

Our advice is to ensure that you have sufficient consumables on farm, to consider sampling early (but be mindful of how long the test is valid for) and if possible, consider hand delivering the sample to ensure delivery or if not practical send it by recorded delivery or courier and keep in touch with the laboratory.

I may not be able to get hold of my usual supply of egg packaging, what are the legal requirements for information to be printed on an egg pack? *(The information below is provided by way of guidance only. If you are unsure about the information which should be included on egg packaging, please seek professional advice).*

Under the EU's "Food Information to Consumers" Regulations, the mandatory information that applies to fresh shell eggs includes, the name of the food, the quantity of the food, the 'use by' date, any special storage conditions and the name and address of the food business operator.

The EU's "Egg Marketing Standards" Regulations stipulate that labelling on the outer surface of packs containing Class A eggs must include, the packing centre code, the quality grading ('Class A' or 'A'), the weight grading, date of minimum durability (best before date), an indication advising consumers to keep eggs chilled after purchase and the farming method. By way of derogation to stating the weight grading, where Class A eggs of different sizes are packed together in the same pack, the minimum net weight of the eggs shall be given in grams and the indication 'Eggs of different sizes' shall appear on the outer surface of the pack. In addition to this 'The Eggs and Chicks (England) Regulations 2009' requires the producer code to be explained on or inside packs.

Please be aware that only authorised packing centres are permitted to label eggs.

I am a Lion Code producer, has the requirement for the colour of the packaging I use changed?

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the announcement by some egg packaging manufacturers that they are to reduce the range of packaging colours, a derogation to the Lion Code of Practice (V7) regarding egg packaging colour requirement was put in place on the 8 April 2020. BEIC subscribers can obtain more information from the [BEIC](#).

I am finding it difficult to obtain PPE including dust masks - what should I do?

PPE is scarce throughout the supply chain, with many vet practices and other industries being asked to divert disposable PPE to the NHS. If possible, ensure you maintain a dialogue with your usual supplier, planning ahead as to how long your current stocks are expected to last and if required seek an alternative supply. We are in dialogue with Defra regarding supplies and availability of PPE, particularly dust masks.

Is there a shortage of bedding/litter materials and what should I do about enrichment bales?

Concern is being expressed by some over bedding supplies going forward as a result of the majority of saw mills closing. We are speaking to the main suppliers to understand current stock levels and alternatives to shavings and are keeping Defra abreast of the situation.

Red Tractor have issued guidance in a [FAQ document](#) regarding enrichment bales. Maintaining dry, friable litter is key to bird health and welfare. If you can demonstrate that you have difficulties in accessing supplies of wood shavings for litter purposes, in order for you to utilise the bales that would otherwise have been used as enrichment, you will need to obtain a derogation for the bales requirement. In order to remain compliant, you must contact your certification body to request and register a derogation where needed, so that they can record and monitor the situation.

My local handy shop has closed and that's where I usually pick up spare parts, are there any alternative stores open?

If your usual store for spare parts is no longer open it is worth checking to see if they are open on an online platform which will enable you to order what you need for delivery or collection at a click and collect point. If ordering online is not an option, you may need to explore other options such as larger stores. We are aware that stores such as Jewsons and Travis Perkins are open and operating a delivery service only for essential services from selected branches.

The inability to get hold of sufficient supplies and spares is a growing concern and may lead to serious operational issues in some businesses. The lack of availability of sundry items may cause some businesses to grind to a halt and this isn't just spare parts for existing businesses but also the necessary materials to complete the building of new poultry houses. As a result, we may see new builds not being completed on time and if birds are already in rear then this will have knock on effects throughout the supply chain. It is important to make contingency plans as early on as possible if you find yourself in this situation.

I'm concerned that I may run out of something I need to carry out my day-to-day job. i.e. fuel, feed, veterinary supplies etc – what should I do?

Following ongoing dialogue with key stakeholders, the NFU is confident that there is an ample supply of fuel, feed and veterinary medicines as it stands. There are not currently any indications that supply chains in these areas are at risk of being kerbed or shortages created.

There may be items that you need that you haven't got access to, usual ranges are being streamlined or stocks are running low such as packaging, equipment, fuel or feed. Where possible act now, make a contingency plan and take stock of current levels of inputs and outputs which may be affected. Make contact with your usual supplier, establish lead times on the products you need and give plenty of notice for the items you may require. Try and keep in touch with your contact network including breed and feed reps and your packer/processor if you have one and flag any potential issues as soon as you can. As witnessed over the past few weeks, stockpiling is not helpful and does not enable everyone fair access to products they require, causing unnecessary shortages for some. By not engaging in this behaviour, the supply chain will maintain resilient and adaptable, allowing flexibility in this ongoing situation.



With the drop in food service and wholesale requirements, could poultry products destined for this market be redirected to retail and what are retailers doing to support this?

The NFU is liaising closely with the supply chain to find workable solutions to the changing shifts in demand throughout the retail, food service and wholesale sectors and ensuring we are best positioned to support farmers who may be affected by implications of a changing customer base or dealing with a change in demand at processing sites. We are working to make sure where possible processors and food service businesses can access the value chain and keep product moving. This will help stabilise the market and help us all rise to the national challenge of feeding the nation through this crisis. The NFU has been leading many of these discussions directly with businesses and government at the most senior levels on behalf of the entire farming industry. Many retailers have adapted their supply chains to re-direct volume which was otherwise destined for the food service or wholesale market. Retailers have worked with their suppliers and the NFU closely, enabling specifications to be adapted where needed and utilised tertiary brands to procure additional volume through.

We need to do all we can to make sure our products get to citizens, particularly citizens in need. Where there is a public procurement need, we want to make sure the Government knows where it can quickly get product to the vulnerable, using those supply chains most affected by the crisis. We aim to fill as many of those gaps as possible, keep our supply chains running and ensure disruption to consumers and farm businesses is minimised. It's imperative to us that we do not allow this disruption to damage our capacity in the supply chain and our ability to recover on the other side of this crisis.

What are the changes to competition law?

With the government announcement of relaxing of competition laws for retailers during these exceptional circumstances, there is greater flexibility for retailers to share and pool resources, staff and information to ensure the maintenance of supply chains. Industry co-operation is essential to protect the supply of poultry products to the consumer and a widening of the temporary rules relaxation is being proposed to enable responsible and necessary collaborative action. We have to adapt and the entire NFU has galvanised around not just supporting members directly but making sure we do all we can to minimise disruption in the market and bridge the supply and demand gaps. Further information is [available here](#).

Is there any financial support available for my business?

The Budget included a number of measures to support businesses with their response to the cost and cash flow pressures COVID-19 presents. This included expanded Business Rates Relief, a Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme for SMEs and a dedicated helpline for those who need a deferral period on their tax liabilities. The government has now made further announcements which expand on many of these budgetary announcements which include: [government backed guaranteed loans, business rates relief and small business grants](#).

I have a question that is not answered in this briefing...

Where can I get additional information on Covid-19 and feed in my concerns to the NFU?

We are sharing useful links and updates through Twitter via @NFU_Poultry and on the [poultry pages online](#). Regional NFU poultry leads can provide assistance and direct your queries and concerns as appropriate through to the NFU HQ poultry team (Gary Ford and Aimee Mahony). You can also continue to contact your NFU County Adviser for local issues.

Members concerns and key issues are being fed in by the NFU poultry team to twice weekly calls with Defra.

The Specialist Advisers at NFU CallFirst (0370 845 8458) provide free initial legal and professional advice for members and if you require more detailed independent legal advice, they can arrange a referral to one of the NFU's legal panel firms of solicitors. NFU Farmer & Grower members receive a 12.5% discount on the hourly rates of the legal panel firms for work relating to their farming businesses.

