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Many of our fruit and vegetable farms rely on H2A workers. They manage many farm tasks year-round, not just at harvest. I’ve spoken with Deputy Secretary Alyson Eastman from VT Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets and she has assured me that those workers will be available this year with only a slight delay, if any, for those who would be coming in the next few weeks. Officials at the USDA and Dept of Labor have identified H2a / H2B workers, and other agricultural workers in general, as “essential employees” who must be supported through this situation.

Farms that use H2A or other workers who live in communal housing especially should develop a plan for screening employees for illness and to safely quarantine them if they are symptomatic or test positive for the COVID-19 virus. This means that employers should be proactive—have digital thermometers on-hand and teach employees to use them to monitor for fever.

Develop sanitation protocols for worker housing, especially share spaces like bathrooms and kitchens. Stock your housing with essentials: disinfectants that are active against the flu virus; paper products; cough medicine; acetaminophen; etc.

Farms should also identify other operations in the area with H2A worker housing so that resources may be shared if workers need to be quarantined. Workers who stay in housing that is not in their work order need that to be amended, but it will be easier to do so if they are staying in another H2A inspected facility.