

Talking Points
COVID Vaccinations for Front Line Food & Agricultural Workers
December 1, 2020

Objective

Encourage State Governors to ensure food and agricultural workers are prioritized among the initial populations targeted within any state COVID vaccination plans.

Background

- The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Food & Agricultural Sector Coordinating Council helped ensure that food and agricultural workers were included on the DHS's essential critical infrastructure list at the beginning of the pandemic.
- With vaccines expected to be approved and made available in a matter of days, this council has discussed the need for front line food and agricultural workers to be included within the initial populations given priority access to the vaccines—just behind health care professionals and elderly/immune-compromised patients.
- The DHS, USDA and FDA have collaborated with the Center for Disease Control (CDC) to develop a recommendation for prioritizing food and agricultural workers within CDC guidance released October 29, 2020.
- This federal recommendation, however, is only advisory.
- Public health decisions, including priority access to vaccinations, are controlled by state and/or local governments—which have been asked to develop and submit plans to the CDC.
- The development of these plans is likely to be well underway in most states, but depending how a state is organized, plans could be the responsibility of county and city government officials, so there could be wide variations in the prioritization of food and agricultural workers from state to state and/or between local jurisdictions.
- Many states may be relying upon the DHS's essential worker list as a part of their vaccination priority list, but there is a need to ensure that food and agricultural workers do remain at or near the top of these essential worker lists.
- A coalition of farm and agribusiness organizations has sent letters to the National Governors Association, the Trump Administration, and the Biden Transition (see attached) encouraging that food and agricultural workers be included among high priority populations.
- This request is supported by not only the CDC's recommendation, but a similar recommendation from the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine.

Request

- State agricultural organizations are encouraged to monitor the development of their state and local government plans for prioritizing vaccination access.
- Where appropriate and necessary, state organizations are encouraged to reach out to their state's Governor and/or relevant state and local agencies to encourage the inclusion of food and agricultural workers on the vaccination priority list—behind first responders, medical professionals, elderly and caretakers, along with other vulnerable individuals